

DECONSTRUCTION THEORY AND ITS BACKGROUND

Mawazo Kavula Sikirivwa

ABSTRACT: This article defines and presents the meaning and significance of “deconstruction” in modern critical theory. It reveals the overview of “deconstruction” as a theory of reading texts, and it explains the philosophical foundations of deconstructive thinking, through the Derridean critiques of Plato, Martin Heidegger and Ferdinand de Saussure. The article proposes also to expose how ‘deconstruction’ is used in various fields of study today, asserts the philosophical status of the deconstructive theory and assesses its contribution to knowledge in general.

I. INTRODUCTION: THE WORD ‘DECONSTRUCTION’

The term ‘deconstruction’ is related to the French verb ‘deconstruire,’ which in English connotes “to undo the improvement of or the development of, to take to pieces.”¹ In philosophy, however, the word ‘deconstruction’ was coined by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) in the late 1960s as a response to the idea of “destructive” analysis rendered by the German word ‘*destruktion*’ of Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), which literally means ‘destruction’ or ‘de-building.’ Thus, the word “deconstruction” is genealogically linked to Heidegger. Instead of applying Heidegger’s term of *destruktion* (destruction) to textual readings, Derrida opted for the term ‘deconstruction’. Since then, the word ‘deconstruction’ has entered the philosophical, literary, and political vocabulary, though it existed before, at least in grammatical and architectural jargon.²

1. PHILOSOPHICAL STATUS OF DECONSTRUCTION

1.1 Difficulty of Defining the Theory of Deconstruction

There are challenges in defining the theory of deconstruction, because Derrida himself who is its originator has never given an authoritative definition of it. For Jing Zhai, the problem is that deconstruction actively criticizes the very language needed to explain it. Language structure is itself a target for deconstruction to argue against. This shuts down the possibility of defining deconstruction with language. On the other hand, deconstruction refuses an essence, because in Derrida’s understanding, there is nothing that could be said to be essential to deconstruction in its differential relations with other words. Instead, deconstruction must be understood in context,³ and consequently cannot be defined unilaterally.

Moreover, Derrida does not consider deconstruction as a movement in the sense that it cannot be abstracted from some specific applications. Neither is it a method, for it is not a set of procedures or techniques to be applied to objects, not a tool that you can apply to something from the outside. In deconstruction, “we do not start from a given method or set of procedures; that is, deconstruction is not method driven research, even though no research can be non-methodological or non-theoretical because our intuitions are informed by theories and interpretative schemas.”⁴ Deconstruction is not also an act produced and controlled by a subject; nor is it an operation that is set to work on a text or an institution. Deconstruction is not also an entity, a thing; nor is it univocal or unitary, but ‘it deconstructs itself’ wherever something takes place.⁵

¹ R. Gnanasekaran, “An Introduction to Derrida, Deconstruction and Post-Structuralism,” *International Journal of English Literature and Culture* 3 (7) (July 2015): 212.

² Cf. Juliana Neuenschwander, et al., “Law, Institutions, and Interpretation in Jacques Derrida,” *Revista Direito GV* 13, no. 2 (May-August 2017): 587.

³ Cf. Jing Zhai, “Jacques Derrida and Deconstruction,” *Not Even Past* (blog), October 7, 2015, <https://notevenpast.org/jacques-derrida-and-deconstruction/>

⁴ Lasse Thomassen, “Deconstruction as Method in Political Theory,” *Austrian Journal of Political Science* 39, no. 1 (2010): 44.

⁵ Cf. Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, 2nd ed. (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 1999), 22.

Deconstruction is not even an analysis or a form of critique, in the traditional sense in which philosophy understands these terms, because for Derrida, it is not a mechanical operation. It is not a theoretical analysis in the sense of “the breaking down of a text or a structure to its original or fundamental elements... On the contrary, deconstruction is sceptical of any attempt to establish an origin or a foundation, whether these consist of a whole or of its parts.”⁶ Deconstruction is not also a *tabula rasa*, which, according to Derrida, makes it distinct from doubt or from critique. For him,

Critique always operates in view of the decision after or by means of a judgment. The authority of judgment or of the critical evaluation is not the final authority for deconstruction. Deconstruction is also a deconstruction of critique. Which does not mean that all critique or all criticism is devalued, but that one is trying to think what the authority of the critical instance signifies in history.⁷

However, it does not mean that deconstruction has absolutely nothing in common with an analysis, a critique, or a method. While Derrida distances deconstruction from these terms, he reaffirms “the necessity of returning to them, at least under erasure.” And that necessity of returning to a term under erasure means that even though a term is problematic, we must use it until it can be effectively reformulated or replaced.⁸

1.2. Derrida’s Definition of Deconstruction

Deconstruction is not to be confused with ‘deconstructionism,’ which “is the constructive attempt to talk about God from within the context of our secular relativistic postmodern culture and in a non-theological form.”⁹ Initiated by Derrida, deconstruction was inspired by what Heidegger calls the “destruction” of the philosophy’s tradition. Derrida sought to apply deconstruction to textual reading in place of Heidegger’s ‘destruction,’ which was referring “to a process of exploring the categories and concepts that tradition has imposed on a word, and the history behind them.”¹⁰ In Derrida’s view, deconstruction is neither a philosophy, nor a doctrine, nor a method, nor a discipline, but “only what happens if it happens” (*ce qui arrive si ça arrive*).

Deconstruction does not exist somewhere, pure, proper, self-identical, outside of its inscriptions in conflictual and differentiated contexts; it ‘is’ only what it does and what is done with it, there where it takes place. It is difficult today to give a univocal definition or an adequate description of this ‘taking place’.¹¹

But though it is not a philosophy, a doctrine, or a method, etc., deconstruction is variously defined by Derrida. And among his descriptions is the allusion to structure. As he explains himself, this is because when he used the word ‘deconstruction’ the first time,

...there was the dominance of structuralism: deconstruction was considered then at the same time to be a structuralist and anti-structuralist gesture. Which it was, in a certain manner. Deconstruction is not simply the decomposition of an architectural structure; it is also a question about the foundation, about the relation between foundation and what is founded; it is also a question about the closure of the structure, about a whole architecture of philosophy.¹²

Similarly, deconstruction concerns systems. But “this does not mean it brings down the system, but that it opens onto possibilities of arrangement or assembling... It is thus a reflection on the system, on the closure and opening of the system.”¹³ Also, deconstruction is “a kind of active translation that displaces somewhat the word Heidegger uses: ‘Destruktion,’ the destruction of ontology, which also does not mean the annulment, the annihilation of ontology, but an analysis of the structure of traditional ontology.”¹⁴

⁶ Thomassen, “Deconstruction as Method in Political Theory,” 43.

⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Points . . . Interviews, 1974–1994*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 112.

⁸ *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, “Deconstruction,” modified September 24, 2016, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deconstruction>

⁹ Fernando Canale, “Deconstructing Evangelical Theology?,” *Andrews University Studies* 44, no. 1 (2006): 104-105.

¹⁰ *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, “Deconstruction,” <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deconstruction>

¹¹ Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 141.

¹² Derrida, *Points*, 111-112.

¹³ *Ibid*, 112.

¹⁴ *Ibid*.

For Derrida again, there is no single deconstruction, but rather there are deconstructions in plural. Deconstruction is something heterogeneous. Each use of deconstruction cannot be subsumed under an existing definition of deconstruction. But

...deconstruction is rearticulated each time it is used; it 'is' through its particular uses, and it can always be put to new uses, so what it 'is' is never stable. We should think of deconstruction in terms of rearticulation. It is not a set of procedures or techniques to be applied, as if it were a given method applied to an object from the outside. Rather, we are dealing with a relation of rearticulation, where deconstruction as a method is not given prior to its particular uses. Or, if we were to use the term application, we would have to say that it is aporetic: on one hand, deconstruction cannot be applied because it is not given as a method prior to its applications; on the other hand, deconstruction can *only* be applied because it only exists through its particular applications, and does not exist independently of these.¹⁵

Derrida's deconstruction is also founded in the opinion that people usually express their thoughts in terms of binary oppositions, with the claim that each term of a binary opposition always affects the other. And this arises from the theory of language according to which

...the meaning of a term is determined by its position within the linguistic system, and not by any fixed property of 'meaning' that is indissociably bound to it. A 'meaning' is an effect produced by the interrelationships among the terms of a language. Consequently, neither concept in an opposition of contrast has an identity that is entirely independent of its 'opposite'.¹⁶

Thus, we can define one of the terms of an opposition by mentioning the other term, and vice versa, because each term contains what Derrida calls the *trace* of its opposite. In fact, "without a trace retaining the other as other in the same, no difference would do its work and no meaning would appear."¹⁷ For example, big and not small, masculine and not feminine, true and not false, etc. Thus, binary oppositions are dichotomies that are evaluative hierarchies. They are contrasting concepts, "each of which makes it possible for us to understand the other more fully. We are able to understand black because we understand white, noise because we know silence."¹⁸ Deconstruction implies the dismantlement of these binary oppositions. It is "an attempt to dismantle the hierarchical oppositions that govern our thinking. Dismantling does not mean destroying the oppositions, but showing that by acknowledging their mutual dependence one can create something new."¹⁹

But that is not the same as doing a mere inversion of the opposition, for an inversion would create another hierarchy, which once again must require to be overturned. For Derrida, it is not enough to expose the way oppositions work and then stop there. We must recognize that there is always within the oppositions a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms controls the other and holds the superior position. Thus, to deconstruct the opposition is first of all to overthrow the hierarchy, as "one of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand."²⁰ It is to overturn the hierarchy by bringing low what was high. For example, about the opposition and hierarchy between appearance and essence, in Platonism, essence is more valuable than appearance. But in deconstruction, this can be reversed by making appearance more valuable than essence.

Then, comes "the irruptive emergence of a new 'concept,' a concept that can no longer be, and never could be, included in the previous regime."²¹ At this stage, Derrida proposes new terms. The term favored during the first

¹⁵ Jacques Derrida, "As if I were Dead": An Interview with Jacques Derrida." Cited by Thomassen, "Deconstruction as Method in Political Theory," 51.

¹⁶ J.M. Armstrong and S.P. Paynter, "Safe Systems: Construction, Destruction, and Deconstruction," *Technical Report Series, CS-TR-830* (March 2004), <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/196e/ae1675c3f3cee7cf7e0dc3003dcb66be8c32.pdf>

¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 62.

¹⁸ Shirley F. Staton, *Deconstructive Analysis: The Yellow Wall Paper. Literary Theories in Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 142.

¹⁹ Andreas Rasche, "Organizing Derrida Organizing: Deconstruction and Organization Theory," *Philosophy and Organization Theory. Research in the Sociology of Organizations* 32 (2011): 254-255.

²⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 41.

²¹ Derrida, *Positions*, 42.

phase is uprooted from the binary logic. Therefore, all of the previous significations anchored in dualistic thinking are left behind. In fact, while at the first step Derrida focuses on that which is suppressed, at the second step he displaces the binary system by showing that it does no longer control the reader's response to the text.²² He thus creates a new concept. For instance, 'différance' in place of 'difference'. In this sense, deconstruction does not just replace one unitary meaning for another, but transforms the terms by making visible their multiple meanings. And its target is to show

...how something represented as primary, complete and original is derived, composite, and/or an effect of something else. And/or, show how something represented as completely different from something else only exists by virtue of defining itself against that something else. In other words, show how it depends on that thing. And/or show how something represented as normal is a special case.²³

1.3 Other Definitions

Generally speaking, deconstruction is a critique of the Western philosophical tradition, and is seen as a response and reaction against some important 20th century philosophical movements, among which the structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure. Derrida himself frequently asserts that deconstruction is not a method, but an activity of reading and interpreting literary texts. It is a mode of doing analysis of texts; it shakes up a "text in a way that provokes questions about the borders, the frontiers, the edges, or the limits that have been drawn to mark out its place in the history of concepts."²⁴ In this sense, deconstruction is a philosophical theoretical analysis, a critical outlook concerned with the relationship between text and meaning. It is a mode of criticism and analytical inquiry that denotes "the pursuing of the meaning of a text to the point of exposing the supposed contradictions and internal oppositions upon which it is founded."²⁵ Deconstruction is a kind of philosophical framework concerned with 'reading between the lines'; it offers an account of what is going on in a text

...by marking off its relations to other texts, its contexts, its sub-texts. It means that deconstruction accounts for how a text's explicit formulations undermine its implicit or non-explicit aspects. It brings out what the text excludes by showing what it includes. It highlights what remains indecidable and what operates as an indecidable in the text itself.²⁶

Deconstruction "is also to resituate. Once you understand the power in the text, then it is possible to resituate, and provide a way to move in some new direction."²⁷ That is, deconstruction is about finding a new perspective, one that resituates the story beyond its dualisms, or singular viewpoint, etc.

However, despite the lack of a unitary and systematic definition of deconstruction, this theory has had great influence on the humanities and social sciences,²⁸ among others. Since the 1980s it has influenced architecture, music, art and art criticism. It has also designated a range of theoretical enterprises in law, anthropology, historiography, linguistics, sociolinguistics, psychoanalysis, political theory, feminism, and so on. As Jing Zhai states, its great influence lies "in its revolutionary explanation of the world, society, and the knowledge. Derrida claimed that deconstruction was not a theory or a method, but it has been turned into a theory and a method,"²⁹ and is now used as a synonym for the expression of criticism.

²² Cf. Martin Kilduff, "Deconstructing Organizations," *The Academy of Management Review* 18, no. 1 (January 1993): 15.

²³ *Free Servers*, "Jacques Derrida," accessed September 28, 2016, <http://pomo.freeservers.com/derrida.html>

²⁴ Cf. Francis Ponge, "Derrida and Deconstruction," Accessed September 28, 2019, <https://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/elljwp/deconstruction.htm>

²⁵ *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, "Deconstruction," <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deconstruction>

²⁶ Hugh J. Silverman, ed., *Continental Philosophy II. Derrida and Deconstruction* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 4.

²⁷ David M. Boje, "Jacques Derrida –On Deconstruction–," September 3, 2001, http://business.nmsu.edu/~dboje/teaching/503/derrida_links.html

²⁸ There is the British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1938-) who is very famous today in social sciences. He is also listed as one of the most-referenced authors of books in the humanities. His ambition is both to recast social theory and to re-examine our understanding of the development and trajectory of modernity.

²⁹ Zhai, "Jacques Derrida and Deconstruction," <https://notevenpast.org/jacques-derrida-and-deconstruction/>

2. THE ASSESS OF DECONSTRUCTION'S CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE IN GENERAL

2.1 Plato's Metaphysics

2.1.1 The Platonic Ontological Structure

To understand deconstruction, it is paramount to firstly recapitulate the Platonic metaphysics, because, as R. David Keller argues, deconstruction is most precisely Derrida's critique of Plato's metaphysics,³⁰ a metaphysics that is teleological and hierarchical. For Plato, "all that *exists* is oriented towards an ultimate, eternally unchanging *telos*,"³¹ which is perfect and is in need of nothing else. This *telos* is the realm of the Forms; it is the Good, the Idea, the Sun in the Allegory of the Cave, and so on: "It is there that true being dwells, without color or shape, that cannot be touched; reason alone, the soul's pilot, can behold it, and all true knowledge is knowledge thereof."³² Thus, for Plato, the absolute embodiment of Being is unchanging.

Consequently, in Plato's understanding, the corporeal entities are just corruptions or imperfections of the incorporeal Forms. For instance, human who is sensible is the imperfect rendition of the Form 'Human', which is eternal and possesses complete Humanness. It is the same for chair, which is sensible and is imperfect rendition of the ideal Chair, which is eternal and embodies complete Chairness, etc. Thus, a bifurcation of "being" by Plato into two realms: one "sensible" and the other "eternal." And identifying what beings are by basing on binary oppositions is a proof of the logic of true identity, the principle of which is non-contradiction. To this logic, "a thing is either true or false, this or that, real or artificial, present or absent, immaterial or material, but never both at once."³³ And in this teleological structure, the two terms resulting from each dichotomy are both opposed in their meanings and arranged in an order of hierarchy that gives priority to the first term in the qualitative sense of the word. For instance, truth is taken to be superior to falsity, heaven to earth, etc.

But, "implicit in this system is a scale for determining truth-value. Beings higher in the hierarchy have a higher truth-value than beings lower down."³⁴ Thus, the worldly representations of beings are less perfect, less true than the ideal incorporeal beings. For instance, the Form of tree is truer than the corporeal renditions of trees, for it is the Form Tree that sets the ontological standard for Treeness. Similarly, a painting of a tree is ontologically lower than the physical tree itself, for the painting, which is a third-order tree, is an image of a sensible tree that itself is image of the ideal tree. For Derrida, this logic is that by which Western thought or metaphysics is set as a whole.

2.1.2 Suppression of Writing in Platonic Metaphysics

Derrida's critique of Western metaphysics is focused on the privilege that is accorded to the spoken word by Plato over the written one. In fact, Derrida pursues that there is suppression of writing in Plato's metaphysics, because to Plato, "writing is only apparently good for memory, seemingly able to help it from within, through its own motion, to know what is true. But in truth, writing is essentially bad, external to memory, productive not of science but of belief, not of truth but of appearances."³⁵ Plato considers writing as "divorced from real life and even hostile towards it. It is ambivalent and transient, since it can be read in several contradictory and changing contexts."³⁶ For that, Plato looks at the written words as inferior to words which are spoken; and this principle is still upholding much of our civilization today. Thus, in a court of law, for example, written evidence is easily outweighed by testimony that is spoken under oath.³⁷ In fact, writing "has always been considered by Western tradition as the body and matter external to the spirit, to breath, to speech, and to the logos. And the problem of soul and body is no doubt derived from the problem of writing from which it seems-conversely-to borrow its metaphors."³⁸ For Derrida, in fact, writing is not suppressed only in Plato. Rather, it is the whole Western philosophy that has traditionally been looking at speech as the immediate manifestation of thought, while

³⁰ Cf. R. David Keller, "Deconstruction: Fad or Philosophy?," *Humanitas* 14, no. 2 (2001): 59.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 60.

³² Plato, *Phaedrus*, 247c.

³³ Keller, "Deconstruction," 61.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 103.

³⁶ Peter V. Zima, *Deconstruction and Critical Theory*, trans. Rainer Emig (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), 32.

³⁷ Cf. Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman, "Derrida (2002, Zeitgeist Films) – A documentary," *Awestruck_Wanderer* (blog), June 17, 2014, <https://awestruckwanderer.wordpress.com/2014/06/17/derrida-2002-zeitgeist-films-a-documentary-by-kirby-dick-and-amy-ziering-kofman/>

³⁸ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 35.

writing, which operates in the absence of the speaker, has always been considered as artificial and derivative representation of speech:

The history of (the only) metaphysics, which has, in spite of all differences, not only from Plato to Hegel (even including Leibniz) but also, beyond these apparent limits, from the pre-Socratics to Heidegger, always assigned the origin of truth in general to the logos: the history of truth, of the truth of truth, has always been... the debasement of writing, and its repression outside “full” speech.³⁹

In Western thinking tradition, speech is seen as natural and direct communication, while writing is considered as an artificial representation of the author:

The spoken word is *given* a higher value because the speaker and listener are both present to the utterance simultaneously. There is no temporal or spatial distance between speaker, speech, and listener, since the speaker hears himself speak at the same moment the listener does. This immediacy seems to guarantee the notion that in the spoken word we know what we mean, mean what we say, say what we mean, and know what we have said.⁴⁰

In this sense, speech is in direct contact with meaning, because the word issues from a speaker as the spontaneous and nearly transparent sign of his present thought. But writing, in contrast, is divorced from the thought that may have produced it. “It characteristically functions in the absence of a speaker, gives uncertain access to a thought, and can even appear as wholly anonymous, cut off from any speaker or author.”⁴¹ That explains why Plato, in *Phaedrus*, “condemns writing as a bastardized form of communication; separated from the father or moment of origin, writing can give rise to all sorts of misunderstandings since the speaker is not there to explain to the listener what he has in mind.”⁴² Writing has the possibility of misunderstanding, especially when it is read in the absence of the speaker, who cannot always be present to explain or correct it:

A text can continue to be read after its author has disappeared or died - which is why Socrates condemns writing in the *Phaedrus*. Writing breaks with the context of communication, if by the latter one understands the intersubjective communication of conscious, co-present subjects. Writing also breaks with the limited concept of context, because the written sign always exceeds its context; for it must, by virtue of its iterability, perdure beyond the present moment of its inscription and even after the death of its author. Furthermore, a text can be quoted in other contexts, and enter into new contexts.⁴³

For that reason, Plato regarded speech or logos as having higher truth-value than writing. In other words, writing is teleologically lower-order than speech or logos. This is based on the fact that, in the perspective of Platonic metaphysics, writings are representations of spoken words, and thus are of lower value than speech. This “phonocentrism (privileging of speech or phoné)” is, in Derrida’s view, the basic assumption of Western philosophy, as V. Peter Zima puts it: “As the foundation of Western metaphysics logocentrism or phonocentrism is, according to Derrida, the domination of the spoken word (*parole* or *phoné*) which is meant to guarantee the presence of meaning (*présence du sens*).”⁴⁴ Thus, the privileging of speech over writing depends on the fact that ...the presence of a speaker makes communication more direct and accurate. Written words, which are merely copies of speech, are traditionally deemed to be inferior because they are less directly connected to the source. Speech is evidence of the presence of the speaker, but writing, which serves when the speaker is not there, points to absence.⁴⁵

However, in Derrida’s understanding, Greek philosophy is not the sole cause of this double valuation of realities. In fact, among many other texts that Derrida cites in this sense are also biblical passages that distinguish

³⁹ Ibid, 3.

⁴⁰ Derrida, *Dissemination*, viii.

⁴¹ Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 100.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, 33-34.

⁴⁴ Zima, *Deconstruction and Critical Theory*, 31.

⁴⁵ F. Staton, *Deconstructive Analysis*, 146.

...the ineffable 'writing' of God – vouchsafed to the soul through divine illumination – from the fallen, material inscriptions of worldly language. By thus creating a twofold order of writing in its 'sensible' and 'intelligible' aspects, theology seconded the Platonist belief in a 'writing of the soul' which had to be protected from the mere physicality of signs.⁴⁶

Therefore, in Christian as in Platonic tradition, "the material script is devalued in favour of a spiritual writing imprinted directly on the soul without the aid of material instruments. This 'simulated immediacy' then becomes the source of all authentic wisdom and truth."⁴⁷

2.1.3 Derrida's Opposition to Plato's Suppression of Writing

For Derrida, writing or *pharmakon*, as Plato calls it, is condemned by Plato just for mere technical reasons. It appears as an inadequate aid, because "it displays a basic weakness: the instability of meaning. It questions the immediate presence of truth that, according to Plato, can only be guaranteed by the definiteness of the spoken word."⁴⁸ Writing is "suspect because it is subject to interpretation and – by functioning in diverse contexts – evades an unequivocal definition."⁴⁹ For that, argues Derrida, "the father is always suspicious and watchful towards writing."⁵⁰

However, Derrida objects to this making of speech the privileged member of the opposition speech-writing. For him, privileging speech by treating writing as an imperfect representation of it is to forget that writing is a means of representing speech itself. And in this framework, writing is a necessity for sustained philosophical debates to take place. Though it is demeaned in Platonic thought, it is nevertheless essential to doing philosophy.⁵¹ Without written texts, for example, our modern society could not know of Plato's, Aristotle's elaborate theories, etc. For that reason, Derrida undermines the privilege of speech. And by that, he undermines the foundations of Western philosophy at large.

Writing, a mnemotechnic means, supplanting good memory, spontaneous memory, signifies forgetfulness... Forgetfulness because it is a mediation and the departure of the logos from itself. Without writing, the latter would remain in itself. Writing is the dissimulation of the natural, primary, and immediate presence of sense to the soul within the logos. Its violence befalls the soul as unconsciousness.⁵²

On his side, therefore, Derrida privileges writing over speech by claiming that writing is the precondition of language, and in that sense, of speech. To him, speech can only be brought about by the suppression of writing. And this is significant because one term of a binary opposition can only be thought of because of the other. A term can only be identified by its relationship to its opposite. For instance, the word 'inside' has meaning only because of our understanding of 'outside,' which is its opposite. "A single word does not have any meaning on its own; it can only be defined through association with other words."⁵³ And it is the same for speech and writing: "If writing is 'image' and exterior 'figuration', this 'representation' is not innocent. The outside bears with the inside a relationship that is, as usual, anything but simple exteriority. The meaning of the outside was always present within the inside... and vice versa."⁵⁴ Thus, writing was falsely constructed as a supplement to speech. For this, Derrida reverses the hierarchical relation of word and writing and claims that writing, far from being a supplement of the spoken word, is an "irreducible arche-synthesis" and "condition of all linguistic systems."⁵⁵ In this sense, not only does Derrida see the terms of speech-writing binary in a new way, but he also shows that writing comes before speech.

⁴⁶ Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction. Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 64.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Zima, *Deconstruction and Critical Theory*, 32.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Derrida, *Dissemination*, 76.

⁵¹ Cf. Keller, "Deconstruction," 69.

⁵² Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 37.

⁵³ Pam Papadelos, *Derridean Deconstruction and Feminism: Exploring Aporias in Feminist Theory and Practice* (Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Discipline of Gender, Work and Social Inquiry. Adelaide University, December 2006), 73.

⁵⁴ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 35.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 60.

But Derrida is not referring to a common sense understanding of the word 'writing.' Rather, writing, for him, is the endless displacement of meaning which both governs language and places it always beyond the reach of a stable knowledge. Writing is "the 'free play' or element of undecidability within every system of communication... Writing is the endless displacement of meaning which both governs language and places it forever beyond the reach of a stable, self-authenticating knowledge."⁵⁶ It destroys the traditional view that associates truth with self-presence. For neither the author nor the reader has privileged access to the meaning of writing, as this is always beyond our control. The meaning of writing constantly escapes, slips away, and breaks out of our grasp. It is 'undecidable', according to Derrida.

However, Derrida is not postulating a pre-eminence of writing; he is *not* trying to prove that 'writing' in its normal and restricted sense is more basic than speech. "Of course it is not a question of resorting to the same concept of writing and of simply inverting the dissymmetry that now has become problematical. It is a question, rather, of producing a new concept of writing."⁵⁷ What Derrida is showing is that "If the opposition speech/writing is not subjected to a thoroughgoing critique, it remains 'a blind prejudice', one which (in Derrida's phrase) 'is no doubt common to the accused and the prosecutor'."⁵⁸ In other words, inverting the privileging of the spoken word over writing would merely invert the presupposed metaphysics, replacing one by another.

2.2 Heidegger's Destruction of Metaphysics

2.2.1 The Forgetfulness of Being

To Heidegger, there is distortion of Western thinking since ancient time, and this is realized in the history of 'Being', different from 'beings': "The former identified with the call of an 'authentic' thinking prior to all merely conceptual knowledge, the latter as the realm of existent entities that are always already subject to conceptual categorization."⁵⁹

Examining the conventional metaphysics of Being, Heidegger observes that, in the course of history, philosophy has attended to all the beings that can be found in the world (including the world itself), but has forgotten to ask what "Being" itself is. To him, the presence of things for us has been, from ancient philosophy, not their being, but merely them being interpreted as equipment according to a particular system of meaning and purpose. For instance, when a hammer is efficiently used to knock in nails, we cease to be aware of it. Likewise, philosophy has, since ancient Greece, reduced things to their presence, which is a superficial way of understanding them, since it forgets their Being. It has neglected Being by considering it obvious rather than a worthy of question.⁶⁰ The philosophical tradition has done

...in such a way that what it 'transmits' is made so inaccessible, proximally and for the most part, that it rather becomes concealed. Tradition takes what has come down to us and delivers it over to self-evidence; it blocks our access to those primordial 'sources' from which the categories and concepts handed down to us have been in part quite genuinely drawn. Indeed it makes us forget that they have had such an origin, and makes us suppose that the necessity of going back to these sources is something which we need not even understand. Dasein has had its historicity so thoroughly uprooted by tradition that it confines its interest to the multiformity of possible types, directions, and standpoints of philosophical activity in the most exotic and alien of cultures; and by this very interest it seeks to veil the fact that it has no ground of its own to stand on.⁶¹

Actually, Heidegger's intuition about the question of Being is a historical argument, namely, the history of the forgetting of Being: In fact, Heidegger understands the commencement of the history of Western philosophy as a brief period of authentic openness to Being, during the time of the pre-Socratics, especially Anaximander, Heraclitus, and Parmenides. But this was followed, according to him, by a long period dominated by the forgetting of that initial openness. That period commenced with Plato, and has occurred in different ways throughout Western history.

⁵⁶ Norris, *Deconstruction. Theory and Practice*, 28.

⁵⁷ Derrida, *Positions*, 26.

⁵⁸ Norris, *Deconstruction. Theory and Practice*, 30-31.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 68.

⁶⁰ Cf. *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, "Deconstruction,"

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deconstruction>

⁶¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 2001), 43.

2.2.2 Heidegger's Theory of Destruction

For Heidegger, "destruction" means the transformation of philosophy by focusing on the reality of Being. This implies the transformation of philosophy by re-tracing its history. However, "this destruction does not relate itself towards the past; its criticism is aimed at 'today' and at the prevalent way of treating the history of ontology, whether it is headed towards doxography, towards intellectual history, or towards a history of problems."⁶² To Heidegger, therefore, "destruction is just as far from having the negative sense of shaking off the ontological tradition. We must, on the contrary, stake out the positive possibilities of that tradition, and this always means keeping it within limits."⁶³ That is, "to fix its boundaries." And this destruction of the history of philosophy is based on the transformation of the language and meaning of philosophy by focusing on the reality of "Being." It is not about destroying or liquidating, but dismantling or putting to one side the merely historical assertions about the history of philosophy.⁶⁴ So, destruction consists in

...putting aside or dismantling merely historical assertions of the history of philosophy and metaphysics. To destroy the traditional content of ancient ontology means to overcome metaphysics by moving beyond philosophy as realism and idealism, which are primarily epistemological, into philosophy as ontology, which involves a primordial grasp of philosophy as the disclosure or unconcealing of Being.⁶⁵

By studying being, Heidegger targets to operate a revolution from the classical philosophical paradigm. He wishes to make Being the ground from which all philosophical discourse should be conceived and formulated. In his view, Being precedes essence and existence; it is the ground of both the transcendental and the empirical.⁶⁶

2.2.3 End and Task of Philosophy for Heidegger

In Heidegger's thinking, the target of philosophy must be "the *end* of metaphysics as ancient ontology, or representational thought which presents a perfect correlation between essence and existence, concept and reality, because these are conflated in Being. Being is the ground of possibility for thinking both. Essence and existence are united in Being."⁶⁷ In this sense, the distinction between 'essentia' and 'existentia' that has held throughout the history of Western metaphysics has no foundation, since "both are united in Being. Being is the ontological ground of both and thus precedes both."⁶⁸ Therefore, metaphysics has simply sustained an illusory distinction between 'whatness' and 'thatness', or ideal and real, while these two are united in Being. To Heidegger, what makes a being a being (i.e. its 'whatness' or essence) and the way in which a being is a being (i.e. its 'thatness' or existence) are both found in the same being.

In that case, the task of philosophy, in Heidegger's view, is the destruction of metaphysics or the history of ontology. This implies taking the question of Being as a clue, then moving beyond the mere metaphysical assertions until entering into ontology, the "primordial grasp of Being." That means, the history of the forgetting of Being requires that philosophy retraces its footsteps through a productive "destruction" of the history of philosophy:

If the question of Being is to have its own history made transparent, then this hardened tradition must be loosened up, and the concealments which it has brought about must be dissolved. We understand this task as one in which by taking the question of Being as our clue, we are to destroy the traditional content of ancient ontology until we arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being.⁶⁹

⁶² Ibid, 44.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Cf. Martin Heidegger, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Jean T Wilde and William Kluback (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1956), 73.

⁶⁵ Chung Chin-Yi, "Heidegger on Destruction," *International Journal of Research (IJR)* 1, Issue 8 (September 2014): 586.

⁶⁶ Cf. Chung Chin-Yi, "The Deconstruction Theory of Derrida and Heidegger – A Study," *IRWLE* 6, no. 1 (January 2010): 7.

⁶⁷ Chin-Yi, "Heidegger on Destruction," 587.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 44.

Heidegger's project is, therefore, "to rethink philosophy by pronouncing an end or destruction of traditional metaphysics and rethink the task of thinking."⁷⁰ This destruction means "dismantling, liquidating, putting to one side the merely historical assertions about the history of philosophy."⁷¹ To Heidegger's understanding, "philosophy lost its way when it forgot the question of Being (a perception/ sense of ourselves as contingently existent, spacio-temporally located beings)."⁷² For this, the task of philosophy is to overcome the history of metaphysics, because that history has created a division between ideal and real, subject and object. And in place of metaphysics, philosophy has to be an inquiry into the being of Being.⁷³ Such is the goal of Heidegger's work, that is, working out the question of Being.

In fact, Heidegger's conviction is that, despite the interest in metaphysics throughout the history of philosophy since the time of Plato and Aristotle, the question of the 'meaning of Being', or 'the nature of Being', has been overlooked and neglected. Now, the *task* of philosophy is to think truth as "aletheia," or the disclosure of Being as truth. That is about returning "to the things themselves," by moving beyond metaphysics into ontology. With that, metaphysics or ancient ontology will enter its end. In Heidegger's thinking, metaphysics has been an illusion, but is now approaching its *end*, and in place, truth must be rethought as the unconcealment of Being, as *aletheia*. This means "the disclosure of Being... as being-in-the-world rather than a hypostasized metaphysical realm."⁷⁴ That way, Heidegger has sought to return to the things themselves, the being-in-the-world. Thus, "truth, which had been previously described as a form of concealment in Plato and Aristotle, becomes now reconfigured into *aletheia*, or unconcealing of Being."⁷⁵

2.2.4 Dasein and the Disclosure of Being

'Dasein or "being there" is Heidegger's term for human existence, and it refers to the human being who always is a *geworfene Entwurf*, a "thrown project." It implies that one always finds oneself thrown into the world at a certain time and place, already with a past that provides the basis for one's project into the future. Through Dasein, "Being is disclosed in its relation to worldhood, through the disclosure of things as ready-to-hand rather than simply present-at-hand."⁷⁶ It is disclosed through its 'everydayness' or "temporality and experience of care, or anxiety, for the future and being-towards-death."⁷⁷

'Present-at-hand' is alien to Dasein's sense of utility. It is something that Dasein does not conceive a relationship to in terms of his Being and existence. For instance, an inanimate stone, a rock, etc., which we do not conceive a relation to in terms of function and utility; these objects are merely present-at-hand. In contrast, "ready-to-hand" is how Dasein relates to the Being that surrounds himself. Ready-to-hand is "what the environment discloses itself to Dasein as being and equipment, it is separate from the present-at-hand which is not merely a concealed ready-to-hand but something which is alien to the worldhood of Dasein and his Being."⁷⁸ Ready-to-hand is how Dasein conceives its own worldhood by relating to the objects surrounding him, in terms of function and utility. In this framework, something

...present-at-hand can become ready-to-hand if Dasein decides to appropriate it as such into his worldhood, the disclosure of ready-to-hand is essentially an act of interpretation in terms of equipmentality which changes according to the needs of Dasein. An inanimate stone thus, that might seem present-at-hand for a moment, will become ready-to-hand when Dasein wishes to use it, for example, to attack someone or as construction equipment.⁷⁹

On the other hand, the fundamental nature of Being is temporality. This implies the historicity of Being, which Heidegger elaborates through the notion of facticity: "The concept of "facticity" implies that an entity 'within-the-world' has Being-in-the-world in such a way that it can understand itself as bound up in its 'destiny' with the Being of those entities which it encounters within its own world."⁸⁰ And facticity relates to the notion of

⁷⁰ Chin-Yi, "The Deconstruction Theory of Derrida and Heidegger," 1.

⁷¹ Heidegger, *What is Philosophy?*, 73.

⁷² Nancy Holland, ed., *Feminist Interpretation of Derrida* (Pennsylvania: University Press, 1997), 11.

⁷³ Cf. Chin-Yi, "Heidegger on Destruction," 587.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 592.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 596.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 592.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 595.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 594.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*.

⁸⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 82.

situated-ness of Being. This is Being which “is grounded in the world by its past and defined by its present comportment towards the future in terms of choices -its facticity.”⁸¹

2.2.5 Derrida’s Opposition to Heidegger

a) Heidegger’s Influence on Derrida

As Dominik Finkelder explains, Heidegger, in his work *Being and Time* (1927), articulates “the need for a destruction of traditional philosophical thinking by going back to the ‘initial experiences’ (*ursprüngliche Erfahrungen*) from which conceptual thought nourishes itself.”⁸² Derrida took up this vision of a philosophical destruction (questioning) of the traditional categories as foundation of his theory of deconstruction. And like Heidegger, his project of deconstruction is directed against the Western tradition of metaphysics. He agrees with Heidegger on the need for “undoing the conceptual knots and ties implicit in Western philosophy.”⁸³ Therefore, there is something common to deconstruction and Heidegger’s project of undoing the conceptual ties that are implicit in Western philosophy. However, Derrida takes his departure “at the point where Heidegger locates the source and ground of authentic thought: that is, in the moment of Being or plenitude which precedes articulate discourse.”⁸⁴ For Derrida, this represents only another case of the classic familiar metaphysical hankering after truth:

When Heidegger sets Being before all concepts, he is attempting to free language from the fallacy of a fixed origin, which is also a fixed end. But, in a certain way, he also sets up Being as what Derrida calls the “transcendental signified.” For whatever a concept might “mean,” anything that is conceived of in its being-present must lead us to the already-answered question of Being. In that sense, the sense of the final reference Being is indeed the final signified to which all signifiers refer. But Heidegger makes it clear that Being cannot be contained by, is always prior to, indeed transcends, signification.⁸⁵

Moreover, “Heidegger looks to a source of authentic truth in the unitary ground of Being. His ‘destruction’ of metaphysics is intended not, like Derrida’s, to release a multiplicity of meaning but to call thinking back to its original, long forgotten vocation.”⁸⁶ In this sense, his ontology appears as the opposition of Derrida’s Deconstruction. By this divergence, he stands as Derrida’s tactical ally and yet as his antagonist.

b) Opposition of Derrida to Heidegger

While Heidegger shows metaphysics to be mistaken, Derrida demonstrates that Heidegger himself does not manage to escape metaphysics as he sets out to do so. His destroyed metaphysics is not different and not superior to metaphysics as he envisioned. For in the process of his destruction of metaphysics and his task of moving beyond it, Heidegger repeats metaphysics and re-inscribes it in his very task of destruction. And for Derrida, the reason is that there is no language outside metaphysics and the structures that determine it. No language that is not already informed by metaphysical presuppositions can be found.

There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language – no syntax or lexicon- which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest.⁸⁷

In other words, Heidegger negates metaphysics only to repeat it. His destruction of metaphysics is “a repetition of metaphysics in every sense of the word as a negative metaphysics remains a form of metaphysics as it borrows from its ontological structure and vocabulary.”⁸⁸ For instance, Heidegger names the essence of Being as existence. This is a reversed metaphysics, which merely repeats the ontological structure of traditional metaphysics. Thus, metaphysics and Heidegger’s destruction of metaphysics are “paradoxically similar in their difference, identical in their non-identity.”⁸⁹ No difference exists between them, since they share the same

⁸¹ Chin-Yi, “Heidegger on Destruction,” 595.

⁸² Dominik Finkelder, S.J., “Post-Structuralism,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia Supplement 2012-2013. Ethics and Philosophy*, Volume 3 (Gale: Cengage Learning, 2013), 1245-1246.

⁸³ Norris, *Deconstruction. Theory and Practice*, 68.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, xvi.

⁸⁶ Norris, *Deconstruction. Theory and Practice*, 69.

⁸⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 354.

⁸⁸ Chin-Yi, “The Deconstruction Theory of Derrida and Heidegger,” 3.

⁸⁹ Chin-Yi, “Heidegger on Destruction,” 599.

ontological vocabulary. So, borrowing entirely from the structure of metaphysics that it sets out to destroy, destruction of metaphysics is still metaphysics even if only in a negative sense.

This so called overcoming of metaphysics becomes repetition of metaphysics in every sense as it designates metaphysics as something to be overcome and destroyed. It thus proceeds entirely within its terms rather than proceeding to new territory. While emphasizing in place facticity, thrown-ness and temporality as the essence of Being this radicalization of intentionality merely subverts or reverses the existing metaphysical structure and thus repeats it as an empirical rather than transcendental idealism. Far from escaping metaphysics, Heidegger thus repeats it in every sense by being bound to the language of metaphysics in designating it as something to be overcome and destroyed. As Derrida argues, a negative metaphysics remains a form of metaphysics and is no different from metaphysics because it borrows entirely from its vocabulary and ontological structure.⁹⁰

On the other hand, while Heidegger sees the task of philosophy being the destruction of metaphysics by moving into the realm of ontology (that is, the inquiry into the being of Being), Derrida opposes it by his same argument that a destroyed metaphysics remains ultimately a form of metaphysics. He does also the same in regards to the disclosure of Being, which to Heidegger, is that which implies the overcoming or destruction of metaphysics. In Derrida's view, "Every instance of the destruction of metaphysics is in fact a repetition of it as it borrows entirely from the structure of metaphysics it sets out to destroy."⁹¹ While Derrida appreciates the attempt to go beyond the structures of metaphysics, he remains with the stand that in every instance of his description, Heidegger repeats metaphysics and proceeds to re-inscribe it entirely within its language. Then, since any destruction of metaphysics cannot proceed outside the confines of language, it thus ends up by repeating the metaphysics that it seeks to destroy. No language can be found that "is not already informed by metaphysical presuppositions; therefore all destructions of metaphysics that proceed from within the confines of language repeat the metaphysics they seek to destroy."⁹²

c) *Derrida's Stand on the Hierarchical Oppositions of Metaphysics*

Derrida's enduring reference to metaphysics borrows heavily from the work of Heidegger. In fact, Heidegger insists that Western philosophy has consistently privileged that which *is*, or that which appears, and has forgotten to pay attention to the condition for that appearance. In that sense, it is presence that is privileged rather than that which allows presence to be possible or impossible. And in Heidegger's view, this attitude is developed under the broad rubric of the term 'metaphysics'. From this Heideggerian thinking, Derrida takes issue with the way in which metaphysical thoughts are founded on dynamic oppositions, such as good and evil, interior and exterior, big and small, speech and writing, true and false, life and death, etc. But his critique of metaphysics is that any kind of conceptual opposition is problematic, insofar as one pole of the opposition is classically conceived as superior, full of meaning, while the other is thought of as secondary, derivative of the former and defined in terms of a lack of presence. For Derrida, that conceptualization of metaphysics affects the whole of philosophy from Plato onwards. It creates dualistic oppositions and installs a hierarchy that privileges one term of each dichotomy over the other:

All metaphysicians, from Plato to Rousseau, Descartes to Husserl, have proceeded in this way, conceiving good to be before evil, the positive before the negative, the pure before the impure, the simple before the complex, the essential before the accidental, the imitated before the imitation, etc. And this is not just one metaphysical gesture among others, it is the metaphysical exigency, that which has been the most constant, most profound and most potent.⁹³

Thus, metaphysics installs hierarchies and orders of subordination in the various dualisms that it encounters. It always privileges one side of an opposition, and ignores or marginalizes the alternative term of that opposition. In other words, one term is dominant or prior, while the opposite term is subordinate.

Good vs. evil, being vs. nothingness, presence vs. absence, truth vs. error, identity vs. difference, mind vs. matter, man vs. woman, soul vs. body, life vs. death, nature vs. culture, speech vs. writing. These polar opposites do not, however, stand as independent and equal entities. The second term in each pair is considered the negative, corrupt, undesirable version of the first, a fall away from it. Hence, absence

⁹⁰ Ibid, 589.

⁹¹ Ibid, 585.

⁹² Chung Chin-Yi, "The Relation of Derrida's Deconstruction to Heidegger's Destruction: Some Notes (Book Review)," *SKASE Journal of Literary Studies* 1, no. 1 (June 23, 2009): 95.

⁹³ Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 93.

is the lack of presence, evil is the fall from good, error is a distortion of truth, etc. In other words, the two terms are not simply opposed in their meanings, but are arranged in a hierarchical order which gives the first term priority, in both the temporal and the qualitative sense of the word.⁹⁴

Those oppositions run in many ways the whole Western philosophical tradition, and create the basis for political hierarchy and social domination (male/female, freeman/slave, propertied/landless, citizen/immigrant, and so on), the power differentials that motivate the ambivalences that always develop among the humankind.⁹⁵ In all the binaries, one side has advantage over the other: The first part of the pair is considered as original and authentic, while the latter is assumed as secondary.

But in opposition to that Western thinking of binary oppositions, Derrida conceives a way of reading that de-center the narratives that posit the authoritative centers. In his view, “all Western thought is based on the idea of a center, an origin, a Truth, and Ideal Form, a fixed Point, an Immovable Mover, an Essence, a God, a Presence, which is usually capitalized, and guarantees all meaning.”⁹⁶ Human beings are convinced that

...there is a centering principle in which all belief and actions are grounded and that certain metaphysical ideas are to be favored over others. They want to believe that there is a presence behind language and text. Throughout history such a center has been given many names: truth, God, Platonic Form, or essence. The salient characteristic, regardless of the name, is that each is stable and ongoing. Each provides an absolute from which all knowledge proceeds.⁹⁷

In Derrida’s thought, such reasoning is that which leads to the dualistic thinking that characterizes the whole of Western civilization. It is the one that led Western metaphysics to see the world in terms of pairs of opposed meaning or binary oppositions. But to him, there is no transcendental signified or fixed/ultimate center of meaning, no ultimate reality or end to all the references, no unifying element to all things. Thus, since there is no transcendental signified or objective truth, binaries cannot be fixed or static. They are rather fluid and open to change, and thus can be reversed. Any center can, therefore, be ‘decentered’, thereby providing a new set of values and beliefs. This reversal makes it possible to see any given situation from a new perspective.⁹⁸

However, Derrida’s goal with that stand is not to overcome, to do away with or destroy metaphysics. Rather, he aims instead to put the metaphysical ‘gesture’ of Western philosophy into question. In this sense, his approach is different from Heidegger’s ‘destruction’ (*destruktion*) of metaphysics. In fact, Heidegger and all other ‘destructive discourses’ in Western thought wanted to make a total break with the metaphysical tradition; they wanted to end and to overcome metaphysics. But Derrida believes that such a total rupture is not a real possibility because if we were to leave metaphysics behind, we would have nothing to stand on and no tool to work with.⁹⁹

III. DECONSTRUCTION AND STRUCTURALISM

3.1 Definition of Structuralism

Structuralism is a science that seeks to understand the working process of systems in society, underlying the principles by which systems exist.

>>

“As an academic discipline, structuralism is primarily concerned with the study of structures – that is, how things get organized into meaningful entities – as well as the structural relationships between things. Its premise is that whatever things mean, they will always come to mean by virtue of a set of underlying principles which can be determined by close analysis. Structuralism’s understanding of the world, then, is that everything that constitutes it – us and the meanings, texts and rituals within which

⁹⁴ Derrida, *Dissemination*, viii.

⁹⁵ Cf. Nancy J. Holland, “Deconstruction,” in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*, 2012, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/deconst/>

⁹⁶ Boje, “Jacques Derrida –On Deconstruction-,” http://business.nmsu.edu/~dboje/teaching/503/derrida_links.html

⁹⁷ Staton, *Deconstructive Analysis*, 145.

⁹⁸ Cf. *Ibid*, 146.

⁹⁹ Cf. Gert J.J. Biesta, “Witnessing Deconstruction in Education. Why Quasi-Transcendentalism Matters,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 43 (3) (2009): 4.

we participate – is not the work of God, or of the mysteries of nature, but rather an effect of the principles that structure us, the meanings we inhabit and so on.”¹⁰⁰

For the structuralism, there is no outside to the structures. And structuralism is known by Continental Europeans¹⁰¹ as ‘the human sciences’, which aspire to explain and understand the cultural happenings.¹⁰²

But through the 20th century, one of the central principles of structuralism arises from the work of the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure¹⁰³ who, in a series of lectures that he gave at the University of Geneva between 1907 and 1911, taught that “language provides a foundational structure for the world around us by organizing it into tangible entities that we can, as an effect of that language, then describe and discuss.”¹⁰⁴ In this regard, the concern of Saussure was to study how language produces meaning. But previously, language was considered “simply as a system for naming an objective reality which was presumed to exist before, and outside of, language itself. Within this way of thinking, the real world is clearly already there, while language simply comes along to label it in all its specificities.”¹⁰⁵

3.2 The Structural Linguistics of Saussure

3.2.1 Saussure’s Idea of Sign, Language, and Meaning

One of the concepts important to Ferdinand de Saussure's explanation of the language system is the one of sign, which he describes as having two parts: A signifier, which is a material element such as a mark, a written or sound image, and a signified, which is the immaterial idea or meaning or content to which a signifier refers. The signified is not a thing but a mental concept, while the signifier is a sound-image. As Derrida says, “The sound-image is what is heard; not the sound heard but the being-heard of the sound.”¹⁰⁶ Being-heard belongs to an order that is dissimilar to that of the real sound in the world.

By introducing these terms (sign, signifier, signified) in linguistics, Saussure transformed the sense of what a word is. He made it no longer possible to speak of a word as a symbol that represents a thing outside it, as it was conventionally known. To him, a signifier does not refer to some object in the world but to a concept in the mind. Thus, it is language, not the world external to us, which mediates our reality; “it is language which enables the world to be constituted to us as intelligible.”¹⁰⁷ We see only what language allows us to see both outside and inside us. It is language that structures our experience. And this explains how speakers of different languages tend to have differing views of the world. They see the world through different structures.¹⁰⁸ In other words, our knowledge of the world is shaped and conditioned by the language that serves to represent it. Reality does not endow language with any meaning. Rather it is by the system of our language that we make sense of the world. It is language that articulates the sound image and the concept, linking signifier and signified, which is forming the unit of meaning and the word. Therefore,

There is no escaping from language. We are formed by language. We are created through language. We exist in the language we are born into. Language is used for stretching or distending for our various

¹⁰⁰ Simon Malpas and Paul Wake, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Critical Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 3-4.

¹⁰¹ The Continental Europeans are Auguste Comte (1798-1857) and Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), both French founding Fathers of sociology. Influenced by scientific positivism, the dominant theory at that time in the philosophy of science, they based the new subject of sociology on a model of ‘Structure-Functionalism’, in line with the reasoning ‘*Prevoir pour pouvoir*’ (To anticipate in order to be able to do something).

¹⁰² Cf. Naushad Umarsharif Shaikh, *Structuralism and Post-Structuralism. A Comparative Study* (Gujarat: Shodhganga, 2009), 240.

¹⁰³ Ferdinand de Saussure was born on 26 November 1857 and died on 22 February 1913 in Switzerland. He is widely considered one of the founders of the 20th-century linguistics and one of two major founders (together with Charles Sanders Peirce) of semiotics, which refers to the study of signs in the most general sense, whether visual or verbal.

¹⁰⁴ Malpas and Wake, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Critical Theory*, 4.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 4.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 63.

¹⁰⁷ Malpas and Wake, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Critical Theory*, 6.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Staton, *Deconstructive Analysis*, 141-142.

purposes. The way we understand the world, the way we see ourselves are governed by the language. Our experiences in the world are mediated by language.¹⁰⁹

For Saussure, in fact, language is a system of signs described synchronically (as a static set of relationships independent of any changes that take place over time) rather than diachronically (as a dynamic system which changes over time).¹¹⁰ And sign, which is composed of signifier (a sound-image, or its graphic equivalent) and signified (the concept or meaning), is its basic unit. The sign refers to other signs so that the meaning of a word is constituted by its relation to, as well as different from, a host of possible alternatives or substitutions, within a language system.¹¹¹ Thus, a sign is always related to a multitude of other meanings or other positions in the system, with meaning being the sign's position in that system: "Meaning is made possible by the relations of a word to other words within the network of structures that language is."¹¹²

3.2.2 Saussure's Thesis of Arbitrariness

Describing sign as combination of the spoken or written form (signifier) and what flashes into our mind when we hear or read it (signified), and not the unity of name and thing, Saussure breaks the bond that ties meaning to reference. He sweeps away the correspondence model between words and things and gives us a language that is connected only conventionally and arbitrarily to the world outside it. He thus introduces the thesis of arbitrariness, for which the connection between the signifier and signified is not a natural relationship but an arbitrary or conventional one: It is through convention that this connection comes about: The two (signifier and signified) are associated by an agreement on the part of speakers.¹¹³ The bond between signifier and signified is arbitrary, because there is no natural connection or resemblance between them. For instance, the word composed of the letters p-e-a-r does not look or sound naturally like a certain kind of rosaceous fruit (the pear) that grows on trees, but it functions as a signifier by producing in the mind of the English-speakers the concept (signified) of a certain kind of rosaceous fruit that grows on trees. The connection between such signifier and signified is merely due

...to a contingent historical convention. It didn't have to happen the way it did. In principle, the word 'pare', 'wint', or even 'apple' would have worked just as well in associating a word with the concept *pear*! But given that the word 'pear' has come to signify the concept *pear* in English, no one has the power to simply change it at will. In other words, the relationship between a word and a concept is arbitrary in one sense (in terms of its origin) but not in another sense (in terms of its use).¹¹⁴

However, while signs are arbitrary, the manner of their signification is differential. That is, "signs do not signify through their intrinsic plenitude (the sign 'dog' does not refer to the fully present entity of the 'dog-in-itself'). Rather, signs signify through their relative position in a chain of differences."¹¹⁵ We know one sign from another not because of meanings they inherently carry, but because of the differences among them. Thus, for Saussure, "Within the same language, all words used to express related ideas limit each other reciprocally; synonyms like French *redouter* 'dread', *craindre* 'fear', and *avoir peur* 'be afraid' have value only through their opposition."¹¹⁶ And this makes language itself arbitrary, conventional, and based on difference.

3.2.3 The Significance of Structuralism's Theory

Saussure's interest is in the structure of language and not in its use. He limits his investigation to the formal structure of language, setting aside the way that language is employed in actual speech. He brackets out of his investigation any concern with the real objects (referents) to which signs are presumably related. In his theory also, "meaning is not a private experience, but the product of a shared system of signification."¹¹⁷ Moreover,

¹⁰⁹ Dr. Sudarsan Sahoo, "A Discourse on Deconstruction," *Quest Journals. Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, Issue 8 (2014): 34.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Shaikh, *Structuralism and Post-Structuralism*, 203.

¹¹¹ Cf. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Charles Bally and Albert Reidlinger, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: The Philosophical Library, Inc., 1959), 66.

¹¹² *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, "Deconstruction," <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deconstruction>

¹¹³ Cf. Staton, *Deconstructive Analysis*, 142.

¹¹⁴ Shaikh, *Structuralism and Post-Structuralism*, 203-204.

¹¹⁵ Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, 36.

¹¹⁶ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 116.

¹¹⁷ Shaikh, *Structuralism and Post-Structuralism*, 205.

language precedes the individuals and is the medium of thought and human expression: It provides the individuals with the structure that they use to conceptualize their experiences.

On the other hand, for structuralism's theory, any text or utterance has a 'meaning'; and this is determined not by the intention of the speaker, but by the deep-structure of the language system in which it occurs. The meaning of a term, word or expression does not begin and end with the speaker's experience or intention. Rather, it presupposes the language that is found in place, prior to the speaker or individual subject. And that meaning is due to the difference of the term from all other terms in the language. Thus, in structuralism, the human subject is removed from the central position in the production of meaning.

3.3 Derrida's Critique of Structuralism

Derrida had the aim "of wrenching structuralism away from what he saw as its residual attachment to a Western metaphysics of meaning and presence."¹¹⁸ He had found that however impressive they were, structuralism's achievements were intrinsically limited by Saussure to "a reflection of the accomplished, the constituted, the *constructed*."¹¹⁹ Therefore, he wanted to free that structuralism from Saussure's phonocentric approach.

3.3.1 Structuralism's Influence on Deconstruction

Whatever its conceptual limits might be, structuralism was a necessary stage on the way to deconstruction. Derrida's writings are both a continuation and a critique of Saussure's vision of structuralism. Derrida took the ideas of structuralism "about the nature of the sign, the importance of difference and binary oppositions, and the role of language in mediating experience and extended them, sometimes in ways that contradicted the theories of the structuralists. It both built on and broke with structuralism."¹²⁰ For instance, borrowing the idea of binary opposition from structuralism, Derrida elaborates on it by noting that in every pair of binary, the first member is traditionally held by society to be superior or privileged over the other. But that privileged member defines itself by its less valued partner. For example, good and evil, speech and writing, presence and absence, etc.¹²¹ Such oppositions exist not only among abstractions, but they underlie all human acts. Leading terms are always "accorded primacy; their partners are represented as weaker or derivative. Yet the first terms depend on and derive their meaning from the second to such an extent that the secondary terms can be seen as generative of the definition of the first terms."¹²²

3.3.2 Derridean Critique of Structuralism's Idea of Sign

Apart from metaphysics, Derridean deconstruction emerged out of a critique of structuralism. In fact, structuralism insists on the radical difference between signifier and signified, with the arbitrary association of signifier and signified being the basis of its account of the sign. Derrida's deconstruction, in contrast, "demonstrates that any signified is itself a signifier and that the signifier is already a signified, so that signs cannot be authoritatively identified and isolated."¹²³ A sign is always a substitution for another sign. And this formulation does not only concern language, but "the total field (the world) is replaced by a signifying structure (signs) in the same way that one sign replaces another."¹²⁴ Thus, Derrida goes beyond the opposition signifier-signified of Saussure's structuralism. By rejecting that binary distinction, he also contests the metaphysical history with all its hierarchies and dichotomies.

Derrida underpins the history of philosophy, which conceives the world in terms of a system of oppositions proliferating without end: logos/pathos, soul/body, self/other, good/evil, culture/nature, man/woman, understanding/perception, inside/outside, memory/oblivion, speech/writing, day/night, etc.¹²⁵

¹¹⁸ Norris, *Deconstruction. Theory and Practice*, 26.

¹¹⁹ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 3.

¹²⁰ Staton, *Deconstructive Analysis*, 142.

¹²¹ Cf. Derrida, *Positions*, 43.

¹²² W. Joan Scott, "Deconstructing Equality Versus Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 1 (1988): 37.

¹²³ Shaikh, *Structuralism and Post-Structuralism*, 227.

¹²⁴ Cf. Jonathan Joseph and John Michael Roberts, eds., *Realism Discourse and Deconstruction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 207.

¹²⁵ Lucie Guillemette and Josiane Cossette, "Deconstruction and Différance," in *Signo*, ed. Louis Hebert (Quebec: Rimouski, 2015), <http://www.signosemio.com/derrida/deconstruction-and-difference.asp>

On the other hand, in Derridean thinking, any given signifier points to several different signifieds. For instance, a simple statement like “The goods are in the house” may imply various meanings. The signifier ‘goods’ can evoke different associations in the speaker’s mind and in that of the listener or reader. It can imply various things: clothes, tools, food, fruits, etc. And each of these signifieds in turn is a signifier because it leads to other associations, other signifieds. This means that a signifier has no single signified as the structuralists assume, but it leads to a chain of signifiers. Therefore, contrary to structuralists’ principles, meaning for deconstruction slips away, suggesting many meanings, not a single, fixed one.¹²⁶ In this way, deconstruction challenges a fundamental assumption of Western thought by denying the human ability to represent reality in any objectively true fashion. However, this does not mean that deconstruction is relativism, destruction or demolition. It is instead “a way of releasing and responding, of listening and opening up, of being responsible not only to the dominant voices of the great masters, but also to other voices that speak more gently, more discreetly, more mildly.”¹²⁷ It does not also imply that deconstruction is to throw meaning to the four winds, but to insist upon a more chastened sense of everything that calls itself universal or necessary, transcendental or ontological, philosophical or scientific. It is not even to jettison these ideas, but to re-describe them.¹²⁸

3.3.3 Derridean Critique of Structuralism’s Idea of Meaning

Among its various aspects, Derridean deconstruction is concerned with the structure of texts. It finds structuralism’s interpretations of texts too static and unchanging, with posit fixed meanings. And opposing that, deconstruction declares meaning essentially undecidable. For deconstruction, what a text means and why it

...cannot be determined because it is not possible to systematically find the grammar of a text. Instead, one can find many meanings in a single text, all of them possible and all of them replaceable by others. Instead of looking for structure, then, deconstruction looks for those places where texts contradict, and thereby deconstruct, themselves. Instead of showing how the conventions of a text work it shows how they falter. The result is that a literary work can no longer have one unifying meaning that an authority (critic or author) can enunciate: Instead, meaning is accepted to be the outgrowth of various signifying systems within the text that may even produce contradictory meanings.¹²⁹

In this perspective, conceiving that the meaning of a text can be mastered and bounded is an unreasoning prejudice. “Considered as a network of cross-referring signs, a text always has the potential to mean something other than what the author intended and perhaps even to contain a denial of what the author was trying to say.”¹³⁰ Therefore, contrary to structuralism that sees the truth as being ‘behind’ or ‘within’ the text of the author, deconstruction stresses the interaction of reader and text. It also challenges the idea of a frozen structure and advances the notion that there is no structure or centre, no univocal meaning. In this way, the notion of a direct relationship between signifier and signified is abolished. Instead, we have infinite shifts in meaning relayed from one signifier to another: “The signifier (the form of a sign) does not refer to a definite signified (the content of a sign), but produces other signifiers instead.”¹³¹ The meaning of a word emanates always from that word’s difference from and deference to different other words:

Words have meaning only because of contrast-effects with other words. 'Red' means what it does only by contrast with 'blue', 'green', etc. 'Being' also means nothing except by contrast, not only with 'beings' but with 'Nature', 'God', 'Humanity', and indeed every other word in the language.¹³²

Thus, every meaning is always dispersed along a chain of signifiers. And this makes Derrida hold that the presence of meaning cannot be achieved. Rather, it develops in a continually open context of reference and thus is always subject to a change. Therefore, texts or discourses in his view never just mean what we think they mean at first, for other meanings are always hidden in them.

¹²⁶ Cf. Staton, *Deconstructive Analysis*, 143-144.

¹²⁷ John D. Caputo, ed., *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 57.

¹²⁸ Cf. Ibid, 183-184.

¹²⁹ Staton, *Deconstructive Analysis*, 143.

¹³⁰ Armstrong and Paynter, “Safe Systems: Construction, Destruction, and Deconstruction,” <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/196e/ae1675c3f3cee7cf7e0dc3003dcb66be8c32.pdf>

¹³¹ Guillemette and Cossette, “Deconstruction and Différance,” <http://www.signosemio.com/derrida/deconstruction-and-difference.asp>

¹³² Richard Rorty, “Deconstructionist Theory,” *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, Volume 8. *From Formalism to Poststructuralism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), <https://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/derrida/rorty.html>

3.3.4 Structuralism and the Deconstruction's Language Play

There is a marked distinction between structuralism and deconstruction. In structuralism, language is “non-referential.” It does not refer to objective reality, not to things in the world, but only to mental concepts of things. But in deconstruction, language consists of the ongoing play of signifiers that never come to rest. The human thinking is always in flux, always subject to changing signifiers that move from one to another. We recognize a word by its differences from other words: A word has always traces of those that it is not.¹³³

Thus, our mind does not contain stable and unchanging concepts, but a continually changing play of signifiers. And these signifiers which seem to be stable are not stable in reality. Every signifier produces other signifiers in a never ending deferral or postponement of meaning: “The characteristics of language are its play of signifiers which continually defer meaning. Any meaning that a word seems to have is the result of the differences by which we distinguish one signifier from the other.”¹³⁴ That is a play of language. And with it, deconstruction is considered as a school of thought that posits that words have no meaning, but “traces”¹³⁵ of meaning, with ‘trace’ being “the différance which opens appearance [l'apparaître] and signification.”¹³⁶ Trace is the illusory effect of meaning that is left in a signifier by other signifiers, while it is not so. In fact, the meaning of a word continually disappears, leaving us with only the memory, or trace, of what that meaning once was.

To explicate this philosophy, we can refer to the following metaphor as Jamie McDonald does: If I say the word “pen,” then you think of the object we use for writing. But if I throw the pen at someone, then the word “pen” begins to lose the benign meaning of a writing apparatus with ink; thus its original understanding undergoes erasure to leave only a trace. Instead the word “pen” becomes associated with a weapon, a projectile, a means of expressing anger, etc. If the pen strikes someone, then that word “pen” to that person will mean something painful, impetus for striking back and so on. These meanings constantly grow and change because the human mind is always interpreting and reinterpreting. Because of this, deconstruction concludes that “words do not have fixed meanings”¹³⁷

In that sense, language “is always inscribed in a network of relays and differential ‘traces’ which can never be grasped by the individual speaker.”¹³⁸ It does not consist of a mere union of a signifier and a signified, but of a chain of signifiers. And meaning is ‘dispersed along the whole chain of signifiers’: A signifier refers to a chain of signifiers in the mind. And this, in turn, evokes a chain of signifiers in the mind of the person who hears. Thus, language is fluid:

Language is flexible. The speakers can improvise and stretch it to suit newer ways of thinking about the world and ourselves. A new concept is emerged by Derrida for the flexibility of the language. It is bricolage. Bricolage is the process of assembling something from the material at hand. In Derridean usage, it refers to the act of borrowing concepts from different sources, and redesigning them to suit one's needs.¹³⁹

And Derrida demonstrates this activity by putting words under erasure, which consists in writing them first, and then crossing them out. This is “the device of placing words *sous rature* or ‘under erasure’, signified by crossing them through in the text and thus warning the reader not to accept them at philosophic face value.”¹⁴⁰ For Derrida, the marks of erasure acknowledge both the inadequacy of the terms employed and the fact that thinking cannot simply manage without them.

¹³³ Cf. Staton, *Deconstructive Analysis*, 144.

¹³⁴ Sahoo, “A Discourse on Deconstruction,” 33.

¹³⁵ The word “trace” is used by Derrida in an effort to indicate the meaning that is simultaneously present and disappearing.

¹³⁶ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 65.

¹³⁷ Cf. Jamie McDonald, “Political Correctness: Deconstruction and Literature,” in *Political Correctness: A Short History of an Ideology*, ed. William S. Linds (Washington, D.C.: Free Congress Foundation, 2004),

<https://www.google.com/search?q=jamie+McDonald.+political+correctness:+deconstruction+and+literature&ei=g5QMWqvmLKbBgAaE6JuwBw&start=0&sa=N&biw=1029&bih=456>

¹³⁸ Norris, *Deconstruction. Theory and Practice*, 28.

¹³⁹ Sahoo, “A Discourse on Deconstruction,” 34.

¹⁴⁰ Norris, *Deconstruction. Theory and Practice*, 68.

3.4 Saussure and the Derridean Metaphysics of Presence

3.4.1 Derrida's Notion of Metaphysics of Presence

The desire to represent the real in language (predominantly speech) is what Derrida refers to as 'metaphysics of presence'. Under his idea of "metaphysics of presence or of conscious subjectivity,"¹⁴¹ Derrida refers to various ideas that are traditionally subscribed to by Western civilization and Western philosophy since Plato, and are based "on the assumption that conscious, integrated selves are at the center of human activity."¹⁴² Among those ideas, he names our beliefs in logocentrism,¹⁴³ phonocentrism,¹⁴⁴ binary oppositions, and our acceptance of a transcendental signified as ultimate source of all knowledge. The idea of a metaphysics of presence suggests that everything has a fixed meaning. "Each identity is thought to denote a presence that is always there; a presence that is full of meaning and represents an undeconstructible origin."¹⁴⁵

3.4.2 Derrida and the Metaphysics of Presence in Saussure

Saussure studied how language produces meaning and understood language as a system of signs that express ideas. But Derrida finds that Saussure, in his attempt to create a science of language, devalued the place of the written word. Like other traditional thinkers, he denigrated the written word, valorizing speech as some type of pure conduit of meaning. His conception of the sign is exemplary of the practice of the metaphysics of presence, because while insisting on the relationship between signifier and signified, "his theory relies on the understanding that the signifier (psychic sound) has a natural relationship to the signified."¹⁴⁶ And in this Saussurean logic, Derrida identifies two contradictions: the privileging of speech over writing, and the supposed natural order between the phonic sound and meaning:

The feelings of the mind, expressing things naturally, constitute a sort of universal language which can then efface itself. It is the stage of transparency... In every case, the voice is closest to the signified, whether it is determined strictly as sense (thought or lived) or more loosely as thing. All signifiers, and first and foremost the written signifier, are derivative with regard to what would wed the voice indissolubly to the mind or to the thought of the signified sense, indeed to the thing itself (whether it is done in the Aristotelian manner that we have just indicated or in the manner of medieval theology, determining the res as a thing created from its eidos, from its sense thought in the logos or in the infinite understanding of God). The written signifier is always technical and representative. It has no constitutive meaning. This derivation is the very origin of the notion of the "signifier." The notion of the sign always implies within itself the distinction between signifier and signified, even if, as Saussure argues, they are distinguished simply as the two faces of one and the same leaf. This notion remains therefore within the heritage of that logocentrism which is also a phonocentrism: absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning.¹⁴⁷

The relative priority of *spoken* as opposed to *written* language is a dualism that Derrida locates at the heart of Western philosophic tradition. He turns the same argument on Saussure in whose work he finds that writing is treated as a "derivative or secondary form of linguistic notation, always dependent on the primary reality of speech and the sense of a speaker's 'presence' behind his words."¹⁴⁸ For this, he accuses the Saussurean linguistics of "continuing the metaphysical tradition and of privileging the spoken word that guarantees the presence of meaning and the transcendental signified, i.e. the Platonic idea."¹⁴⁹ For Derrida, sign and meaning are always unstable, open to reinterpretation and possible reconfiguration. The meaning of any sign is always far greater than its explicit meaning on any one occasion. In that way, Derrida avoids closing off the possible interpretive frameworks in which texts and concepts might function. For him, the relationship that is found in structuralism between signifier and signified does not exist at all. For example,

¹⁴¹ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 68.

¹⁴² Staton, *Deconstructive Analysis*, 146.

¹⁴³ Logocentrism is from the Greek word *Logos*, which means speech, logic, reason, the Word of God, this is the belief in the self-presentation of meaning. It is the belief in an absolute or foundation that grounds the linguistic system and fixes the meaning of a spoken or written utterance.

¹⁴⁴ Phonocentrism is the belief that speech is privileged over writing.

¹⁴⁵ Rasche, "Organizing Derrida Organizing," 255.

¹⁴⁶ Papadelos, *Derridean Deconstruction and Feminism*, 63.

¹⁴⁷ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 11-12.

¹⁴⁸ Norris, *Deconstruction. Theory and Practice*, 26.

¹⁴⁹ Zima, *Deconstruction and Critical Theory*, 44.

When reading the word 'water', we might think of water drops, a lake, the chemical symbol H₂O, and so on. We don't necessarily think of a set image of water, a universal mental representation of it. And then, each concept (signifier) to which "water" might refer can trigger another signifier. This infinite chain from signifier to signifier results in a never-ending game and opens the text, displaces it, sets it in motion.¹⁵⁰

That is to say, there is no fixed structure in a text or its interpretation. The relationship between signifier and signified, and the relationship between text and interpretation is floating. This means a work is not to be thought about in isolation. "The meaning of any given text will be derived from its interrelatedness with other texts, in an ongoing process that gives it a series of possible meanings and readings"¹⁵¹ Thus, in Derrida's view, a text can uphold many possibilities at the same time.

IV. DERRIDA'S WAY OF DOING DECONSTRUCTION

4.1 What Is Deconstructing a Text for Derrida?

Derrida's deconstruction is always 'deconstruction of a text'. And to deconstruct a text is not to destroy it, but to rearticulate it. It is about examining its internal logic in search for hidden and alternative meanings. It consists in digging out things the text doesn't know it's saying, but also "ways in which it fails to make the points it seems to be trying to make."¹⁵² To Derrida, an author always means more than and something different from that he indicates through his writing. Therefore, "the textuality of a text cannot be locked into one single interpretation. A text always has cracks and fissures by which it is unavoidably exposed to the outside; it is open to another reader, to ever changing interpretations."¹⁵³ And this is so because an author cannot master all the meanings or associations that do function in his text or in the act of reading it.

4.2 Derridean Double Reading

Derrida's thinking is always thinking about a text. And from that, flows the corollary that deconstruction is engaged in reading texts. The process of deconstruction is always opened through reading. But what distinguishes it as a textual practice is double reading: "You first go through a text in a traditional manner, pointing out where it seems to have determinate meanings."¹⁵⁴ This is done in the guise of a commentary, which is a repetition. In fact, a genuine reading

...is not possible without a moment of commentary, without a scholarly competence in reading, understanding, and writing, without a knowledge of texts in their original languages (for example, Rousseau's or Derrida's French), without knowing the corpus of an author as a whole, without knowing the multiple contexts - political, literary, philosophical, historical, and so forth - which determine a given text or are determined by that text.¹⁵⁵

Then, the second reading concerns the alterities¹⁵⁶ within the text: This is about looking "for alternative meanings and use them to negate any specific one. Discovery of contradictory or incompatible meanings results in the deconstruction of a text."¹⁵⁷ And this reading occupies the space between the writer's intentions and the

¹⁵⁰ Guillemette and Cossette, "Deconstruction and Différance," <http://www.signosemio.com/derrida/deconstruction-and-difference.asp>

¹⁵¹ Staton, *Deconstructive Analysis*, 144-145.

¹⁵² Mitchell Stephens, "Deconstructing Jacques Derrida: The Most Reviled Professor in the World Defends His Diabolically Difficult Theory," *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, July 21, 1991, <http://www.nyu.edu/classes/stephens/Jacques%20Derrida%20-%20LAT%20page.htm>

¹⁵³ Marcel Cobussen, "Deconstruction in Music. The Jacques Derrida-Gerd Zacher Encounter," *Thinking Sounds* (2002): 2.

¹⁵⁴ Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, 24.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ The word "alterity" is not yet in every English dictionary. But there is a word that appears to provide its root: *alter*. According to Francis Ponge, the word *alter* comes from the Middle French, *alterer*, and from Medieval Latin *alterare*, which itself passed over from the Latin *alter*, meaning *other* (of two) as in the phrase "this one and the other one." Thus 'alterity' is the condition of otherness, difference, or change. However, it doesn't only mean *other*, as when one says "this burger is nicer than the other one." For this would imply a contrast between two actual discrete entities. Rather it designates the conditions upon which different discrete entities can be compared and contrasted. And in this sense, alterity can also be considered as the "always-not-yet-determined sense of a text." See Ponge, "Derrida and Deconstruction," <https://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/elljwp/deconstruction.htm>

¹⁵⁷ Staton, *Deconstructive Analysis*, 148.

text, between what the writer commands and what he fails to command. In other words, while the first moment of reading is about the

...reconstruction of the dominant interpretation of a text, its intended meaning (vouloir-dire) in the guise of a commentary, then the second moment of reading... is the destabilization of the stability of the dominant interpretation. It is the movement of traversing the text which enables the reading to obtain a position of alterity or exteriority... The second moment brings the text into contradiction with itself, opening its intended meaning, its vouloir-dire, onto an alterity which goes against what the text wants to say or mean (ce que le texte veut dire).¹⁵⁸

Thus, contrary to the traditional critical reading that attempts to establish a meaning for a text, deconstruction comes to show that what a text or discourse claims to be saying and what it is really saying are different. It tries to undermine the work's implied claim of having coherence, unity, and meaning and shows that it does not represent the truth of its subject.¹⁵⁹

However, Derridean double reading should not be taken as a deconstructive technique, but just an encouragement to further reading.

Deconstruction does not exist somewhere, pure, proper, self-identical, outside of its inscriptions in conflictual and differentiated contexts; it "is" only what it does and what is done with it, there where it takes place. It is difficult today to give a univocal definition or an adequate description of this "taking place." This absence of univocal definitions is not "obscurantist," it respectfully pays homage to a new, very new Aufklärung.¹⁶⁰

In fact, in Derrida's view, deconstruction is not reducible to a set of techniques or mechanical series of operations to be applied. In a deconstructive process, a reader does not simply apply a group of given pre-formulated ideas, but engages in or undertakes a very close reading of the "words of the text in the context of taken-for-granted assumptions."¹⁶¹ He opens the text by following its contours and showing the pattern of conflicting relationships in it.

4.3 Derrida's Later Understanding of Deconstruction

In the first instance, deconstruction was considered by Derrida as a philosophical theory directed towards the re-reading of philosophical writings. But with time, the accent of his writings shifted. Around the middle of the 1980s, his deconstructive thought became increasingly fascinated by ethical, political and social questions. The main track that he followed was no longer

...the sheer textuality of the texts, the threads leading back to the cocoon of materiality, which is stripped of the orthodoxy of reading from which the sense emerges. Through the self-references of writing, the focus is on the alien-ness of that which and on the Other who gets entangled in the text: whether it be the forms of creative art or the urgency of the political or the appeal of ethics.¹⁶²

Thus, in his 2001 interview with Giovanna Borradori about the event of September 11, 2001 in USA, Derrida defines a "philosopher" or "philosopher-deconstructor", as he prefers to call him, as "someone who analyzes and then draws the practical and effective consequences of the relationship between our philosophical heritage and the structure of the still dominant juridico-political system."¹⁶³ In this sense, for Derrida, deconstruction is not a quasi-nihilistic abdication before the politico-judicial questions, but responsibility in face of the philosophical tradition and the juridical political concerns of our time.

V. USE OF DECONSTRUCTION TODAY

5.1 Aims and Object of Deconstruction for Derrida

5.1.1 Aims of Deconstruction

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 26-27.

¹⁵⁹ Staton, *Deconstructive Analysis*, 147.

¹⁶⁰ Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 141.

¹⁶¹ Cf. Kilduff, "Deconstructing Organizations," 16.

¹⁶² Petra Gehring, "Force and 'Mystical Foundation' of Law: How Jacques Derrida Addresses Legal Discourse," *German Law Journal* 6, no. 1 (2005): 152.

¹⁶³ Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror. Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 106.

For Derrida, the deconstructive reading “must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of the language that he uses.”¹⁶⁴ Deconstruction aims also to explore what a text has neglected and show that what is excluded is necessarily implied in the categories that the text includes. For example, for the concept ‘normal’ to make any sense one can show that ‘normal’ as a concept includes the existence of the ‘abnormal’.¹⁶⁵ Deconstruction may also point at opening up a text or discourse to debates concerning the limits of that text or discourse and the relationship between its explicit and hidden textual levels. Deconstruction may even open debate to aspects that were ignored or suppressed, and tracing the limitations or self-contradictions that mark the text (discourse). This is for example about showing that “the marginal, hidden text contradicts or undermines the explicit text, or that the authors replicate at one level what they condemn at another level.”¹⁶⁶

Another aim of deconstruction is to take what has heretofore seemed marginal and make it central. Elements customarily considered to be of minor interest can become the focus of interest. The comment that ordinarily receives little attention may be brought to the center to see what new understandings surface, or a minor character may be scrutinized as critical to what happens in the plot.¹⁶⁷

5.1.2 The Object of Deconstruction for Derrida

According to Derrida, the object of deconstruction is the text: “There is nothing outside of the text [there is no outside-text; il n’y a pas de hors texte].”¹⁶⁸ However, Derrida’s aphorism or statement is often criticized as a move to deny the existence of the real world, which is actually a misunderstanding, to our view, because for Derrida, the word ‘text’ is not limited to writings:

The concept of text I propose is limited neither to the graphic, nor to the book, nor even to discourse, and even less to the semantic, representational, symbolic, ideal, or ideological sphere. What I call “text” implies all the structures called “real,” “economic,” “historical,” socio-institutional, in short: all possible referents. Another way of recalling once again that “there is nothing outside the text.” That does not mean that all referents are suspended, denied, or enclosed in a book, as people have claimed, or have been naive enough to believe and to have accused me of believing. But it does mean that every referent, all reality has the structure of a differential trace, and that one cannot refer to this “real” except in an interpretive experience. The latter neither yields meaning nor assumes it except in a movement of differential referring. That’s all.¹⁶⁹

And Derrida reminds us that this thinking does not “amount to a relativism, with everything that is sometimes associated with it (scepticism, empiricism, even nihilism). First of all because, ... relativism, like all its derivatives, remains a philosophical position in contradiction with itself.”¹⁷⁰

However, in his attempt to elaborate widely the meaning of his statement, ‘there is nothing outside of the text’, Derrida changes the word text to context: “The phrase which for some has become a sort of slogan, in general so badly understood, of deconstruction (‘there is nothing outside the text’ [il n’y a pas de hors-texte]), means nothing else: there is nothing outside context.”¹⁷¹ In other words, ‘everything exists within a context’: “No meaning can be determined out of context,”¹⁷² says Derrida. And ‘context’, for him, implies “the entire ‘real-history-of-the-world’.”¹⁷³ This means the concept of text embraces and does not exclude the world, reality, and history:

The text is not the book, it is not confined in a volume itself confined to the library. It does not suspend reference-to history, to the world, to reality, to being, and especially not to the other, since to say of history, of the world, of reality, that they always appear in an experience, hence in a movement of

¹⁶⁴ Derrida, *Dissemination*, xv.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Kilduff, “Deconstructing Organizations,” 15.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 16.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. F. Staton, *Deconstructive Analysis*, 150.

¹⁶⁸ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 158.

¹⁶⁹ Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 148.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 137.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 136.

¹⁷² Jacques Derrida, “Living On: Border Lines,” in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom, et al. (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 81.

¹⁷³ Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 136.

interpretation which contextualizes them according to a network of differences and hence of referral to the other, is surely to recall that alterity (difference) is irreducible.¹⁷⁴

In other words, the term 'text' is being glossed over by Derrida as "the whole real-history-of-the-world," it "does not only refer to texts in the usual sense of written words. Instead it refers to any meaningful totality, and this includes practices, institutions and structures, whether philosophical, economic or otherwise."¹⁷⁵ This means that everything can be deconstructed, as Ms. Smith reports Derrida explaining it: "I often describe deconstruction as something which happens. It's not purely linguistic, involving text or books. You can deconstruct gestures, choreography. That's why I enlarged the concept of text."¹⁷⁶ And so, everything can be some form of text (spoken, written, or enacted); it can give rise to inscription in the general sense.

5.2 Deconstruction in Various Disciplines Today

Currently, the notion of deconstruction¹⁷⁷ is disseminated by a broad range of disciplines as varied and disparate as art, literature, criticism, law, ethics, music, history, theology, politics, architecture and even fashion, and so on. The philosophy of deconstruction criticizes also "the governing principles of western society, including hierarchical system, binary oppositions and postmodern attitudes and by challenging these views has changed the aesthetic perspectives in the fields of architecture, art, painting and even music and has created styles in every field."¹⁷⁸ It has also opened up spaces of critical thought to a wide variety of cultures and practices, informing a wide range of human rights movements, etc. Activists of feminism, gay rights, and third-world causes have embraced deconstruction, enlisting it to reveal all of the undisclosed prejudices in works by Plato, Aristotle, even the 'great' authors of the modern and contemporary world.

5.2.1 Deconstruction in Literature and Music

Cultural critics in literature have discovered in the deconstruction's school of thought a method of attack on the traditional interpretations of literary works. They use deconstructionist thinking to remove the traditional meaning from the literary works and replace it with a new one. For instance, with what is known in literary circles as "cultural criticism", literature is now being led from the point of view of woman, gay, the radical minority, etc. Since "everything is text," the cultural critics do not also hesitate to apply the deconstruction's theories to music, movies, and anything they encounter.

And about music, many musicologists apply deconstructive thinking for assigning new interpretations to historical musical compositions. As Marcel Cobussen argues, "The thoughts or self-expression of a composer never completely correspond with the score he ultimately writes down or the resulting sounding notes. The musical language is never a transparent representation of his thoughts; it escapes his control to a certain degree."¹⁷⁹ Musical language is always open to the other person beyond its composer's experience of living. That's why music appears different in different context each time.

5.2.2 Deconstruction and Art

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 137.

¹⁷⁵ Thomassen, "Deconstruction as Method in Political Theory," 43.

¹⁷⁶ John Rawlings, "Jacques Derrida," *Stanford Presidential Lectures in the Humanities and Arts*, 1999, <https://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/derrida/>

¹⁷⁷ The first movements of deconstruction were developed in America, where they were established through the literary criticism of strategies for interpreting literary texts. Particularly, deconstruction is associated there with the Yale University where some of its better-known advocates have been found. It is also there where the earliest version of deconstruction took place with Gayatri Spivak's translation of Derrida's *De la grammatologie*. For this, deconstruction is sometimes referred to as "the Yale school of criticism." As a current of thought, however, deconstruction met wide institutional acceptance during the 1970s and 1980s, when in the United States, 'critical theory' became widespread in literary studies, in the form of Marxist, feminist, African American and other critical movements. It became widespread as well in legal studies, especially through the Critical Legal Studies movements, the movements that were concerned with the demands of subaltern groups such as women, ethnical minorities, and so on (Cf. Neuenschwander, et al., "Law, Institutions, and Interpretation in Jacques Derrida," 587.)

¹⁷⁸ Manochehr Tamizi, et al., "The Emergence of Deconstruction, from Philosophy to Architecture," *Specialty Journal of Architecture and Construction* 2 (3) (2016): 19.

¹⁷⁹ Marcel Cobussen, "Deconstruction in Music," 7.

In Derrida's view, meaning happens in the shifting space between sender and receiver, author and reader, artist and viewer. It neither pre-exists the act of its inscription, nor is it static. Rather, it changes, and develops.¹⁸⁰ The nature of signification is radically multiple. In this logic, to read art

...as if it were simply about its own systems of representation, its own *langue*, its own differential structure, its own intermingling of presence and absence, is to deny art its basic fecundity. Art is never simply 'about' its own form..., it is also potentially 'about' what can be experienced -anything that can be experienced.¹⁸¹

Art works and sets itself to work in many contexts. It implies various meanings to various viewers and to different times.

5.2.3 Feminism and Deconstruction

a) *Understanding Feminism*

Feminism is, as Nellickappilly states, "a form of resistance against all forms of patriarchal domination in all aspects of life."¹⁸² But positively defined, feminism is a movement that aims at establishing more justice and equality in human societies, which are made of several forms of hierarchies. Its aim is to put an end to the various forms of sexist oppression among the humankind.

Historically, most human societies considered women as subordinate to men. And many religious traditions have provided theological justifications to this subordination and discrimination. Philosophical traditions were also directly or indirectly promoting male domination. Many thinkers like Aristotle considered women as inferior to men. Feminism as an intellectual, ideological and political movement was aware of this historical context and tries to posit counterarguments by proposing theoretical frameworks that support gender justice and equality.¹⁸³

It raises very important questions concerning equality and justice in human societies, which mostly follow traditionally the social order. Thus, the implications of feminism currently are strongly social and political. Many feminist movements are not anti-male, but consider the question of gender equality as being primary. They envisage creating gender justice and ensuring equal rights for the humankind, based on the idea of the equality of the sexes.¹⁸⁴

b) *Use of Deconstruction in Feminism*

Once initiated, deconstruction was adopted by several feminist theorists as a way of making clearer the deep male bias embedded in Western intellectual tradition. Applying deconstructive procedures to the dominant gender structures, feminists have shown that dichotomies such as male/female or masculine/feminine are part of the male-dominated social order.¹⁸⁵ Thus, to break up the binary opposition of male over female implies to open up all the *other* places that this binary scheme closes off.

'Male' and 'female' are fixed containers, prisons, trapping men no less than women within one place, one role, closing off the possibility of 'innumerable' genders, not just two. That is why 'feminism,' while constituting a strategically necessary moment of 'reversal,' a salutary overturning that purges the system of its present masculinist hegemony, must give way to 'displacement, which is a more radical 'gender bender' in which the whole masculine/feminine schema is skewed.¹⁸⁶

And to attain that, deconstruction, as "logic of supplementarity," has become very useful; it has been "a way of reading women's space (place) in the current social order from a new perspective."¹⁸⁷ Feminists have adopted and developed it "to advance understandings of the significance of embodiment, the politics of the everyday,

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Matthew Biro, "Art Criticism and Deconstruction: Rosalind Krauss and Jacques Derrida," *Art Criticism* (1990): 42.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 42-43.

¹⁸² Dr. Sreekumar Nellickappilly, "Deconstruction, Feminism and Discourse Theory," *Aspects of Western Philosophy* (2002): 4.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 4-5.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Ibid, 5.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Zima, *Deconstruction and Critical Theory*, 194.

¹⁸⁶ Caputo, ed., *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 104-105.

¹⁸⁷ Papadelos, *Derridean Deconstruction and Feminism*, 170.

ways of being in the world with others, and challenging constructions of national identity, to name but a few.”¹⁸⁸ For instance, deconstruction has been crucial for a formulation of feminisms of sexual difference. It has been “a methodology for destabilising dichotomous oppositions, for decentering masculinity in relation to an ‘othered’ femininity, decentering heterosexuality in relation to an ‘othered’ homosexuality and decentering natural, normalised gender in relation to an ‘othered’ artificiality.”¹⁸⁹ Feminists are also “utilizing insights from deconstruction to represent women as political ‘subjects’ that challenge previous fixed notions of ‘the political’ and ‘the subject’.”¹⁹⁰ And at this level, the profound political intervention of feminism has not been “simply to enact a radical politics but to redefine the very nature of what is deemed political –to take politics down from its male incarnation as a change-seeking interest in what is not nearest at hand, and to bring it into the daily historical texture of the relations between the sexes.”¹⁹¹

On the other hand, while feminism is struggling to move outside of male symbolic representation, it is also struggling for equal pay and childcare facilities. And in these matters, deconstruction has been of big help as well. Finally,

The effects of a deconstructive analysis as regards the issues of gender cover a wide range. For deconstruction wants to let ‘straight’ men get in touch with their feminine side, and ‘straight’ women with their masculine side, and, hence, to bend up these rectilinear orthodoxies a little. But it is also happy to see men get in touch with men, and women with women, gay and lesbian ‘rights’ (which also means ‘straight’).¹⁹²

5.2.4 Deconstruction in Architecture

Deconstruction has also had a significant impact on the way of designing and interpreting meaning in the field of architecture; and it is even now considered as integral part of the theory and experiment history of architecture. As Manochehr Tamizi says,

Twenty years after the first publication of Jacques Derrida's philosophical books, his ideas were considered by architects and architectural critics and for a decade from the late 1980s to the late 1990s was followed with indescribable enthusiasm in the world of architecture. Deconstruction now can be considered an integral part of the theory and experiment history of architecture.¹⁹³

Precisely, the milestone in the formal acceptance of deconstruction in architecture took place in 1988. That year, Philip Johnson and Mark Weigel held an exhibition named deconstructive architecture. That exhibition started from the gathering of architects and critics in London's Tate Gallery and later with the publication of the Journal of architectural design (AD), and that subsequently formed the deconstructive architecture exhibition at New Arts Museum in New York. In that exhibition, various architects had different approaches toward the fundamentals of architecture. Basing on the ideas of Jacques Derrida, they considered that a building is not an independent statement, but it gains importance only in relation to its surrounding areas. And since a building makes sense because of its relationship and differences with other buildings, it cannot therefore be experienced independent of the location that gives it form and identity. It ignores the boundaries between the spaces and enters into dialogue with its surroundings and in another structure other than what it was displayed itself. In that way started a new architectural understanding and analysis, consistent with a philosophical development based on the deconstructive thinking and critics. From this deconstruction theory, the center of an architectural structure is considered not holding components in one place. And this is not merely an attempt to eliminate the center, but to replace it with another component of the structure.¹⁹⁴

5.2.5 Deconstruction in Religion

Today, deconstruction is also considered as “a blessing for religion, its positive salvation, keeping it open to constant reinvention, encouraging religion to reread ancient texts in new ways, to reinvent ancient traditions in

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Penelope Deutscher, *Yielding Gender: Feminism, Deconstruction and the History of Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 42.

¹⁹⁰ Papadelos, *Derridean Deconstruction and Feminism*, 91.

¹⁹¹ Johnson Barbara, *A World of Difference* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 31.

¹⁹² Caputo, ed., *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 105.

¹⁹³ Tamizi, et al., “The Emergence of Deconstruction, from Philosophy to Architecture,” 16.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Ibid.

new contexts.”¹⁹⁵ Deconstruction has reinvented religion by leading it not to see things only from fanaticism and triumphalism. It is helping religion examining

...its conscience, counseling and chastening religion about its tendency to confuse its faith with knowledge, which results in the dangerous and absolutizing triumphalism of religion, which is what spills blood. Religion is most dangerous when it conceives itself as a higher knowledge granted a chosen few, a chosen people of God: that is a formula for war. As if God favors Jews over Arabs, or prefers Christians to Jews, or Protestants to Catholics, thereby drawing God into the game of whose theological ox deserves goring. As if God took the side of one people against another, or granted special privileges to one people that are denied to others-to ‘the other’.¹⁹⁶

The religion that emerges with deconstruction is instead good news for everybody without distinction, the oppressed and the marginalized as well as everybody else.

5.2.6 Target of Deconstructive Thinking Today

Originally conceived to challenge fundamental assumptions of Western metaphysical tradition, deconstruction was not considered by its founder (Derrida) as a theory unified by any set of consistent rules or procedures. In contrast, deconstruction is nowadays presented variously as a philosophical position, a political or intellectual strategy, and a mode of reading. It has become a way of criticizing political and social institutions, etc. Today, “deconstruction asserts that, texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices do not have unambiguously definite meanings, as they do not have very strict and rigid boundaries.”¹⁹⁷

Its movement has now constantly been to follow up the given determinations of institutions, legal systems, culture, etc. not in order to destroy them or to cancel them, but to open debate to complexities and issues that are ignored or suppressed in them. Its target is

...to show that things -texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices of whatever size and sort you need- do not have definable meanings and determinable missions, that they are always more than any mission would impose, that they exceed the boundaries they currently occupy.¹⁹⁸

Deconstruction has become a way of giving things a new twist, or a new bent. It is looking to opening and loosening things up, essentially to be “anti-essential and highly unconventional, not to let its eyes wax over at the thought of either unchanging essences or ageless traditions, but rather to advocate an inventionalistic incoming, to stay constantly on the lookout for something unforeseeable, something new.”¹⁹⁹

With deconstruction, all the structures and institutions can be taken down to their foundations, and then be put together in some new way, being reconstructed and restored. In this logic, deconstruction is not to destroy the systems or structures. Rather, it implies reconstituting things according to the conditions (previously hidden) within their institutions. Rather than simply destroying, deconstruction attempts to understand how an ‘ensemble’ or structure was once constituted and then it reconstructs it to this end more authentically. As the word deconstruction does not only bear the prefix ‘de,’ indicating separation, but also its opposite ‘con,’ indicating union, “every gesture of deconstruction, as it brings apart some discourse or structure, must also at the same time bring it together in some new configuration.”²⁰⁰ In that way, deconstruction is not the closing down of one institution or discourse in order to set up another in its place. But, it is the persistent opening up of institutions and discourses to their own more authentic alterity.

6. CONCLUSION

In this article we have not dealt with deconstruction in detail. But we have exposed its basis and explained how it has expanded beyond the framework of Western philosophy, in the sense that it is now set to work in diverse fields. While Derrida’s readings were mostly focused on literary and philosophical texts, other authors have extended deconstruction to different issues. Deconstructive thinking has offered a way of examining everything in the world as a textual production, a kind of writing. The implications of a deconstructive reading are no

¹⁹⁵ J Caputo, ed., *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 159.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 159-160.

¹⁹⁷ Nellickappilly, “Deconstruction, Feminism and Discourse Theory,” 2.

¹⁹⁸ Caputo, ed., *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 31-32.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 42.

²⁰⁰ Neuenschwander, et al., “Law, Institutions, and Interpretation in Jacques Derrida,” 591.

longer “limited to the language of the text itself but can be extended to the political and social context in which the text is placed.”²⁰¹ Derrida himself entered into this logic in the late 1980s when he overtly turned his deconstruction towards the political and ethical witnessed in his talk of 1989, “Force of Law: The Mystical Foundations of Authority.” Here, his “deconstruction became obsessed with questions of ethical responsibility, the meaning of friendship and the complex relationship with the other,”²⁰² for instance, God or a beloved person. Nowadays, deconstruction is being applied to various subjects without need for recourse to Derrida’s work. It is no longer reduced to the status of a literary device but has become a commonly used term, which has taken on a life of its own, independent of Derrida.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Armstrong, J.M. and Paynter, S.P. “Safe Systems: Construction, Destruction, and Deconstruction.” *Technical Report Series, CS-TR-830* (March 2004).
<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/196e/ae1675c3f3cee7cf7e0dc3003dcb66be8c32.pdf>
- [2]. Barbara, Johnson. *A World of Difference*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press. 1987.
- [3]. Biesta, J.J. Gert. “Witnessing Deconstruction in Education. Why Quasi-Transcendentalism Matters.” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 43 (3) (2009): 391-404.
- [4]. Biro, Matthew. “Art Criticism and Deconstruction: Rosalind Krauss and Jacques Derrida.” *Art Criticism* (1990): 33-47.
- [5]. Boje, M. David. “Jacques Derrida –On Deconstruction-.” September 3, 2001.
http://business.nmsu.edu/~dboje/teaching/503/derrida_links.html
- [6]. Borradori, Giovanna. *Philosophy in a Time of Terror. Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press. 2003.
- [7]. Canale, Fernando. “Deconstructing Evangelical Theology?” *Andrews University Studies* 44, no. 1 (2006): 95-130.
- [8]. Caputo, D. John, ed. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*. New York: Fordham University Press. 2000.
- [9]. Chin-Yi, Chung. “Heidegger on Destruction.” *International Journal of Research (IJR)* 1, Issue 8 (September 2014): 585-600.
- [10]. _____. “The Deconstruction Theory of Derrida and Heidegger – A Study.” *IRWLE* 6, no. 1 (January 2010): 1-13.
- [11]. _____. “The Relation of Derrida’s Deconstruction to Heidegger’s Destruction: Some Notes (Book Review).” *SKASE Journal of Literary Studies* 1, no. 1 (June 23, 2009): 92-105.
- [12]. Cobussen, Marcel. “Deconstruction in Music. The Jacques Derrida-Gerd Zacher Encounter.” *Thinking Sounds* (2002): 1-10.
- [13]. Critchley, Simon. *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, 2nd ed. Edinburg: Edinburg University Press. 1999.
- [14]. Culler, Jonathan. *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. New York: Cornell University Press. 1985.
- [15]. Derrida, Jacques. *Dissemination*. Translated by Barbara Johnson. London: The University of Chicago Press. 1981.
- [16]. _____. *Limited Inc*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. 1988.
- [17]. _____. “Living On: Border Lines.” In *Deconstruction and Criticism*, edited by Harold Bloom, et al., 75-176. London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979.
- [18]. _____. *Of Grammatology*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spirat. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press. 1997.
- [19]. _____. *Points . . . Interviews, 1974–1994*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 1995.
- [20]. _____. *Positions*. Translated by Alan Bass. London: The University of Chicago Press. 1981.
- [21]. _____. *Writing and Difference*. London and New York: Routledge. 2005.
- [22]. De Saussure, Ferdinand. *Course in General Linguistics*. Edited by Charles Bally and Albert Reidlinger, and Translated by Wade Baskin. New York: The Philosophical Library, Inc. 1959.
- [23]. Deutscher, Penelope. *Yielding Gender: Feminism, Deconstruction and the History of Philosophy*. London and New York: Routledge. 2002.
- [24]. Dick, Kirby and Kofman, Ziering Amy. “Derrida (2002, Zeitgeist Films) – A documentary.” *Awestruck_Wanderer* (blog). June 17, 2014.

²⁰¹ Kilduff, “Deconstructing Organizations,” 15.

²⁰² Costas Douzinas, “Violence, Justice, Deconstruction,” *German Law Journal* 06, no. 01 (2005): 171.

- <https://awestruckwanderer.wordpress.com/2014/06/17/derrida-2002-zeitgeist-films-a-documentary-by-kirby-dick-and-amy-ziering-kofman/>
- [25]. Douzinas, Costas. "Violence, Justice, Deconstruction." *German Law Journal* 06, no. 01 (2005): 171-178.
- [26]. Finkelder, Dominik Sj. "Post-Structuralism." In *New Catholic Encyclopedia Supplement 2012-2013. Ethics and Philosophy*, Volume 3, 1245-1248. Gale: Cengage Learning, 2013.
- [27]. *Free Servers*. "Jacques Derrida." Accessed September 28, 2016. <http://pomo.freeservers.com/derrida.html>
- [28]. Gehring, Petra. "Force and 'Mystical Foundation' of Law: How Jacques Derrida Addresses Legal Discourse." *German Law Journal* 6, no. 1 (2005): 151-169.
- [29]. Gnanasekaran, R. "An Introduction to Derrida, Deconstruction and Post-Structuralism." *International Journal of English Literature and Culture* 3 (7) (July 2015): 211-214.
- [30]. Guillemette, Lucie and Cossette, Josiane. "Deconstruction and Différance." In *Signo*, edited by Louis Hebert. Quebec: Rimouski, 2015. <http://www.signosemio.com/derrida/deconstruction-and-differance.asp>
- [31]. Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell. 2001.
- [32]. _____. *What is Philosophy?* Translated by Jean T Wilde and William Kluback. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield. 1956.
- [33]. Holland, Nancy, ed. *Feminist Interpretation of Derrida*. Pennsylvania: University Press. 1997.
- [34]. Holland, J. Nancy. "Deconstruction." In *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*. 2012. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/deconst/>
- [35]. Joseph, Jonathan and Roberts, John Michael, eds. *Realism Discourse and Deconstruction*. London and New York: Routledge. 2004.
- [36]. Keller, R. David. "Deconstruction: Fad or Philosophy?" *Humanitas* 14, no. 2 (2001): 58-75.
- [37]. Kilduff, Martin. "Deconstructing Organizations." *The Academy of Management Review* 18, no. 1 (January 1993): 13-31.
- [38]. Malpas, Simon and Wake, Paul, eds. *The Routledge Companion to Critical Theory*. London and New York: Routledge. 2006.
- [39]. Mcdonald, Jamie. "Political Correctness: Deconstruction and Literature." In *Political Correctness: A Short History of an Ideology*, edited by William S. Linds. Washington, D.C.: Free Congress Foundation, 2004. <https://www.google.com/search?q=jamie+mcdonald.+political+correctness:+deconstruction+and+literature&ei=g5QMWqvmLKbBgAaE6JuwBw&start=0&sa=N&biw=1029&bih=456>
- [40]. Nellickappilly, Sreekumar Dr. "Deconstruction, Feminism and Discourse Theory." *Aspects of Western Philosophy* (2002): 1-11.
- [41]. Neuenschwander, Julian, et al. "Law, Institutions, and Interpretation in Jacques Derrida." *Revista Direito GV* 13, no. 2 (May-August 2017): 586-607.
- [42]. Norris, Christopher. *Deconstruction. Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed. London and New York: Routledge. 2004.
- [43]. Papadelos, Pam. *Derridean Deconstruction and Feminism: Exploring Aporias in Feminist Theory and Practice*. Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Discipline of Gender, Work and Social Inquiry. Adelaide University, December 2006.
- [44]. Plato. *The Collected Dialogues of Plato. Including the Letters*. Edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns. New York: Pantheon Books. 1964.
- [45]. Ponge, Francis. "Derrida and Deconstruction." Accessed September 28, 2019. <https://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/elljwp/deconstruction.htm>
- [46]. Rasche, Andreas. "Organizing Derrida Organizing: Deconstruction and Organization Theory." *Philosophy and Organization Theory. Research in the Sociology of Organizations* 32 (2011): 251-280.
- [47]. Rawlings, John. "Jacques Derrida." *Stanford Presidential Lectures in the Humanities and Arts*, 1999. <https://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/derrida/>
- [48]. Rorty, Richard. "Deconstructionist Theory." In *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, Volume 8. *From Formalism to Poststructuralism*, edited by Roman Selden. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. <https://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/derrida/rorty.html>
- [49]. Sahoo, Sudarsan Dr. "A Discourse on Deconstruction." *Quest Journals. Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, Issue 8 (2014): 33-35.
- [50]. Scott, W. Joan. "Deconstructing Equality Versus Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism." *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 1 (1988): 32-50.

- [51]. Shaikh, Naushad Umarsharif. *Structuralism and Post-Structuralism. A Comparative Study*. Gujarat: Shodhganga. 2009.
- [52]. Silverman, J. Hugh, ed. *Continental Philosophy II. Derrida and Deconstruction*. New York and London: Routledge. 2004.
- [53]. Staton, F. Shirley. *Deconstructive Analysis. Literary Theories in Praxis*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 1987.
- [54]. Stephens, Mitchell. "Deconstructing Jacques Derrida: The Most Reviled Professor in the World Defends His Diabolically Difficult Theory." *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, July 21, 1991. <http://www.nyu.edu/classes/stephens/Jacques%20Derrida%20-%20LAT%20page.htm>
- [55]. Tamizi, Manochehr, et al. "The Emergence of Deconstruction, from Philosophy to Architecture." *Specialty Journal of Architecture and Construction* 2 (3) (2016): 13-20.
- [56]. Thomassen, Lasse. "Deconstruction as Method in Political Theory." *Austrian Journal of Political Science* 39, no. 1 (2010): 41-53.
- [57]. *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, "Deconstruction." Modified September 24, 2016. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deconstruction>
- [58]. Zhai, Jing. "Jacques Derrida and Deconstruction." *Not Even Past* (blog). October 7, 2015. <https://notevenpast.org/jacques-derrida-and-deconstruction/>
- [59]. Zima, V. Peter. *Deconstruction and Critical Theory*. Translated by Rainer Emig. London and New York: Continuum. 2002.