



Deconstruction needs logocentrism to exist, and vice versa. The flaw is not in deconstruction, but in our language, and our radical distinction between true and false. Our society privileges truth over falsity (and rightly so), and so, in order for deconstruction to be believed in, it must be said to be true, which immediately makes it privileged, which in turn makes it false, because there can be no privileging. This is not due to the invalidity of deconstruction, but rather to our inherent privileging of truth. Deconstruction itself is neither true nor false, presence nor absence, "but exceeds them both." If deconstruction did not deconstruct itself, it would become something "absolutely present outside a system of differences," the very sort of thing Derrida condemns as being dependent on a sort of creationist theology, something absolutely present outside the system, whose meaning and existence is self-contained and self-referential, only coming from itself. Furthermore, privileging is more complicated than a willful act on our parts, but again, also comes from flaws within the system of language itself.

Derrida's *Of Grammatology* aims to think the structural conditions of possibility which organize the coherence of metaphysical thinking. In this regard, thinking what Derrida labels writing is central. A main point in *Of Grammatology* however, is that Derrida is speaking of two different sorts of writing: that which writing is traditionally understood to be, that is, marks on a page or writing conceived in the narrower sense Derrida will say, but also, and more centrally in terms of the book's thesis, writing conceived of as the practice of positing metaphysical centers as the basis for thought's coherence.

This relationship appears in considering the contrast Derrida highlights between speech and writing. Here we speak of speech understood as the expression of the presence of the logos, and as "materialization" of the one who speaks in their authentic subjectivity. Speech, as that which the subject both speaks and hears, is in this way understood as immanently in contact with the logos as the transcendental origin of absolute meaning located in the subject. It is the logos which acts as the origin of absolute meaning, or functions as the condition of possibility for intentionality as the origin of meaning. Meaning comes about through the intention to mean on the part of the subject.

That is to say, meaning does not emerge within the diversity of the empirical situations in the world but originates transcendently in the logos. If the origin of meaning is transcendental then meaning can be absolute and meaning can only be absolute on the condition of having a transcendental origin. This is what Derrida means by saying that the transcendental origin halts the play of signifiers. Signification will not "play" in the context of absolute meaning because the place occupied by the signifier is absolute or fixed; there can be no movement.

The mistake for Derrida is in believing that speech has this immanent relationship to the logos while writing could be conceived of in contrast as simply a derivative phenomenon, alienated from immanent contact with the logos. This is significant for Derrida for two reasons: firstly that speech and writing cannot be differentiated from each other in terms of their relative proximity with the logos; one being closer to the logos than the other. But secondly, and more importantly, Derrida will argue that there is no "present" transcendental center we could ultimately demonstrate the speech would have expressed, and as such, there is no difference between speech thought of as full

speech as immanent expression of the logos, and writing conceived of as a derivative or a secondary phenomenon relatively alienated from the logos. There is no transcendental origin which acts as the point of emergence for meaning, meaning always emerges within given conditions without possessing a transcendental origin and thus cannot be absolute, and as such, the distinction between speech and writing in this sense could not be determined categorically.

We can see then the relationship between the two forms of writing. Writing conceived of as the positing of metaphysical centers or transcendental presence is at play in the speech/writing structure critiqued by Derrida as far as we posit the presence of a logos acting as the origin of meaning, with speech acting as its direct realization. The implication of this however is that writing in the narrower sense understood as a derivative expression of full speech, a secondary phenomenon relatively less proximate to the logos, owes its coherence as such, to the positing of the logos as transcendently present. That is to say, writing conceived of in the broader sense as positing metaphysical structures is the necessary condition for conceiving of writing defined as derivative. This conception of writing, that is, writing as a derivative phenomenon, is coherent only on the condition that we have already accepted the metaphysical thesis of the logos, which is what Derrida conceives of as writing in the broader sense, that practice essentially characteristic of the Western intellectual tradition, that is, the positing of transcendental essences.

Derrida is talking about the formation of transcendental values as the focal point for thinking and as the point of reference for the production of values more broadly. He isn't saying that there is no reality, only that we are unable to produce a comprehensive transcendental narrative which synthesizes it, that in producing some type of philosophical narrative, be it Hegel's phenomenology of Spirit or Heidegger's question of being, that is, as presupposing the presence of some sort of unitary spirit or being towards which they addressed the coherence of their philosophical discourse, we have not produced a final statement regarding what is. He's also not talking about when I might simply use words in everyday contexts, we often use words like "cat", "table", "chair" and they are understood. Derrida is talking about discourses that presuppose some type of transcendental metaphysical presence as the basis for their efficacy. It isn't by chance that he was a reader of Hegel or Heidegger or Husserl or a number of other philosophers which to some extent or other reflected on problems grounded in the presupposition of transcendental or metaphysical presences of diverse types.

Deconstructionism is a philosophical form by Derrida that is used through the text of speech and writing. To understand deconstructionism is to know that notions of language is overturned through this process. We know that language itself is arbitrary and the people as a collective give language meaning. An example of symbolic meaning would be red means stop and green means go. Now within most western language there seems to be binary systems: yes/no, stop/go, male/female, good/bad. Derrida through deconstruction takes these binary systems and OVERTURNS them through the dismantling process. Keep in mind though that Derrida DOES NOT replace the system with another, that would then superimpose another binary hierarchy system.

Hierarchy systems and the use of binary notions are very western ideologies. An example of this is the male/female binary system. We are just now through modern gender studies understanding the third gender system called 'inter-sexed', however this is still another compartmentalization. The indigenous however view binary systems in gender for example much differently. The indigenous view gender on a spectrum.

This book is based on both deconstruction that Derrida expands and improves here and construction which he performs after untangling the ideas of both Ferdinand de Saussure and Jean Jacques Rousseau. Derrida reveals the paradoxes existing in both writers' works and the way how they stick to binary oppositions and resting everything upon the centre or origin, which, according to Derrida does not exist at all. Later he acquits that side of binary opposition which has always been othered or, as Derrida puts it, 'leper'.

He suggests that there is no outside and inside, but there is a whole that is always in need of being broken into pieces and subject to repeated analysis. What is more surprising about the book is the fact that Derrida proposes concerning Saussure's views. He says that Saussure himself was aware that writing does not usurp but supports speech, however, as he was trying to adhere to traditional metaphysical approach, he did not betray his principles.

The science of linguistics determines language — its field of objectivity — in the last instance and in the irreducible simplicity of its essence, as the unity of the phonè, the glossa, and the logos. This determination is by rights anterior to all the eventual differentiations that could arise within the systems of terminology of the different schools (language/speech [langue/parole]; code/message; scheme/usage; linguistic/logic; phonology/phonematics/phonetics/glossematics).

And even if one wished to keep sonority on the side of the sensible and contingent signifier which would be strictly speaking impossible, since formal identities isolated within a sensible mass are already idealities that are not purely sensible), it would have to be admitted that the immediate and privileged unity which founds significance and the acts of language is the articulated unity of sound and sense within the phonic.

On a simplified level, the Derridean project works by creating moments of disruption in the patterns of thought we have been saturated in. To say that his project works in a formulaic and linear sense, would be a misrepresentation of his work and, in a sense, reify the imbedded structure and ontology that western philosophy is already steeped in. On a more concrete and conventional level, however, deconstruction works by revealing the relationship between the self and language and in turn, exposes how meaning is constructed. These moments of disruption are made available to us by examining dualisms and hierarchies, both of which are predicated on the notion of separateness. In a way, hierarchies and dualisms are something of an access point in order for one to start pushing on the boundaries of language in order to see that the lines of demarcation and \"joints of nature\" aren't as clear and distinguishable as western thought would assume.

Derrida's project is different from the philosophical projects before him (in my opinion) because it addresses the presumptive starting place that western thought is built upon, which Derrida calls the metaphysics of presence. Part of the reason for illustrating the structure of hierarchy is to show that philosophy not only privileges speech over writing and reason over passion (logocentrism), among many other hierarchical structures, but that there's an even more fundamental and insidious hierarchy within western thought which is privileging presence itself. If something is privileged than its opposite is necessarily subordinated but the problem for Derrida is that this binary creates an artificial division that infiltrates how meaning and value are assigned to language. If the foundation of western philosophical thought is unstable, then how are we able to trust the work and thought that emerges out of it? In other words, Derrida's project illuminates that the meaning assigned to words and language is not just constructed by what is, but by what isn't, thus subverting the structure of hierarchy itself. He shows that meaning is never created in a vacuum but that it's constantly being interpreted and reinterpreted by both the presence and absence of the thing in question.

One of the limitations I see of Derrida's project is also part of its genius. Because Derrida intentionally seeks to disturb text, writing, speech and language in order to show the slipperiness of meaning, it's extraordinarily easy to get lost in the language. In fact, it's ALMOST impossible to read. For a discipline like philosophy that prides itself on clarity of thought, it's easy to be critical of someone like Derrida because the writing is intentionally enigmatic. There's great value in struggling with Derrida's complex style of writing and language, that's part of what makes it so worthwhile and genius. That's why it's a shame that Derrida's project is so easily discarded because the very thing that makes it so valuable is the ambiguity.

'Postmodernists parade their relativism as a superior kind of humility — the modest acceptance that we cannot claim to have the truth. In fact, the postmodern denial of truth is the worst kind of arrogance. In denying that the natural world exists independently of our beliefs about it, postmodernists are implicitly rejecting any limit on human ambitions. By making human beliefs the final arbiter of reality, they are in effect claiming that nothing exists unless it appears in human consciousness.'

Derrida blames Rousseau for logocentrism.

The figure of Rousseau stands in for logocentrism and the entire tradition, although Derrida grounds the discussion in terms of a spacial analysis. So to conclude, Derrida ends his close reading of Rousseau with

Rousseau could not think this writing, that takes place *before* and *withinspeech*. To the extent that he belonged to metaphysics of presence he *dreamed* of the simple exteriority of death to life, evil to good, representation to presence, signifier to signified, representer to represented, mask to face, writing to speech. But all such oppositions are irreducibly rooted in that metaphysics. Using them, one can only operate by reversals, that is to say by confirmations. The supplement is none of these terms. It is especially not more a signifier than a signified, a representer than a presence, a writing than a speech. None of the terms of this series can, being comprehended within it, dominate the economy of difference or supplementary. Rousseau's *dream* consisted of making the supplement enter the metaphysics by force.

So while it's difficult for me to suss out where Derrida ends and Rousseau begins at time (because I've never read

Rousseau directly) it becomes clearer as you read the book that the figure of Grammatology is the centralized arrangement by which we create the space necessary for difference to effectively operate. Much of this text then, is Derrida's slow etching of the spatial oppositions that create a beyond of language that is inherent to language and contingent on language. Derrida's point is that this exteriority that exists beyond signification, this metaphysics of presence is constructed out of the natural philosophy of Rousseau. Rousseau seeks with this naturalization narrative to justify his reformulation of an inner sanctum within language. This creation of a dichotomous values of difference sets the stage for our cultural evaluation of everything else. Now that there exists a polarity Derrida shows us how to separate out the lines of value, with the implication to see these kinds of constructions exist as primarily artificial through Rousseau's claims of naturalism.

Derrida of course, could have been more direct in saying that Rousseau can show us how our conception of what is right and just came from a division of labor, a management that is classist and elitist by dividing up sounds and words, by creating difference to elevate those in the know of such differences and alienate those who do not fit the elevation. He does, some what at the end, but this is a long and laborious effort to encapsulate the western philosophical tradition. Derrida sees what came before as a building up of logocentrism, in order to understand that philosophy within its terms, history and our discourse that creates and limits culture is seen as a literal transaction of the becoming of the episteme through the play of difference.

What's interesting about difference is that Derrida understands it as being the key structure to the division of the poles and at the same time, less than nothing. Different from Zizek, Derrida understands this basic structure as being wholly created, not transcendently contingent on a self mediating subjectivity. This writing then, is a fiction created within itself. There is of course, the possibility under which concepts of artificial and natural become devalued. When this occurs, should we continue to understand, as Derrida seems we should like, the artificial process by which Rousseau creates an inner limit to be false? What then becomes a way to value natural over artificial? That judgement remains beyond logocentrism itself, of which Derrida has not yet given us a line (at least not in this book): "No ontology can think its operation". And in this sense, to step outside the outside is to reject the division of valuation of logocentrism, to make writing atonal and let us give up the thing-in-itself.

Derrida dedicates the second half of Grammatology to an understanding of Rousseau and his anthropological depiction of society before and after the Fall into literacy. For Rousseau, emotion invariably precedes reason. A baby cries or laughs before it learns to speak. When someone speaks, we employ our imagination to understand more fully another/another's point of view. We are more immediately touched by a human voice than we might be by the graphic image of a piece of writing. The ear makes a vibrant, emotional contact, stemming from a physical touch by sound, that the eye does not. Painting and other forms of writing are dead (removed from the place and time of creation), but the voice is attached always to a living breath. Rousseau even claims that singing and melody precede rational and measured speech, for singing rouses an empathy for another living soul in a way that plain and unadorned speech does not. For the same reason, poetry precedes prose according to Rousseau.

*Of Grammatology* established Jacques Derrida as a major figure in contemporary philosophy and introduced the operations of deconstruction (Derrida did not think of it as a method or school of thought). Included in this work are two key early Derrida essays, "The Violence of the Letter: From Levi-Strauss to Rousseau" and "From/Of the Supplement to the Source: The Theory of Writing" which, taken together, offer a deconstruction of the speech/writing dichotomy and a challenge to linguistics (and meaning) at its foundational core.

In the first essay, Derrida argues that whereas writing had been thought of as being derived from speech, which retains its primacy in the relation, Derrida shows how this assumption leads thinkers from Levi-Strauss to Rousseau aground and into aporia; this reduction to absurdity shows that something is wrong with the assumption of speech over writing.

In the second essay, Derrida develops his now infamous reading of Saussure's use of the "sign," and begins the work of developing the concept of difference that he continues in [Writing and Difference](#). It is the birth of post-structuralism, a philosophical root for postmodernism.

This new approach to knowledge Derrida initially named "grammatology," but it was deconstruction that stuck as the most recognizable name for this post-structuralist approach.

This edition offers Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's original translation as well as her truly helpful and insightful introduction to Derrida's work. The book is worth its price for this introduction alone!

Readers already interested in linguistics and writing will find this work difficult but well worth their efforts. It helps to have just read the works to which Derrida refers in his text, since he assumes the reader will know these works beforehand and doesn't hold the reader's hand. Derrida's style is famously difficult, and for some it will be cumbersome while others will revel in the poetry of his prose.

Basically, as with most of Derrida's best work, of which this is one of the more famous ones, Derrida looks at the history of writing and language and what it means. And, as with most of Derrida's work, he proceeds to deconstruct the meaning into a meaning without a meaning and without a center. Sometimes it takes Derrida a little while to make that point clearly but if you're understanding and following his exposition then you'll see all throughout how the process of writing and language contribute, for lack of a better word at the moment, to Derrida's deconstruction. At points the argument may seem scattered because first Derrida concerns himself with why grammatology, the study of writing, deserves attention at all, but without really answering that problem he moves on as if he had already given his answer. You should understand that, in a strange way, the whole book is his explaining why grammatology deserves attention, so it is intimately linked with deconstruction. We need grammatology to see how language and life can be deconstructed, and grammatology is important because we see how language and life can be deconstructed.

Derrida's */Of Grammatology/* is a meditation on absence, negation, or the subjective other as a structuring necessity, inherent within the classical metaphysics which predicates its notion of being upon transcendent presence. By following the internal contradictions within critiques of the written - that is to say, re-presentative - form of language in works by the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, and writer-philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau to their self-deconstructing logical conclusions, he argues that it is in fact the non-identity of signifier and signified which is the condition for the possibility of language - indeed of thought - itself. 'Writing' in this sense, the inscription of self-definition by deferral and differentiation from an other - for which Derrida coins the neologism 'différance' - is a pervasive fact of phenomenal reality, transcending the purely linguistic sphere to which it appertains only incidentally.

While Derrida's specific critiques, depending as they do upon the frustratingly untestable assertion that the metaphysics he addresses does in fact derive its notion of being from the phenomenological experience of self-presence, may not be entirely persuasive, the general framework he constructs is nonetheless a rigorous theory of semiotics, albeit one which seems to imply epistemological nihilism.

Deconstruction still is hard to define precisely, though I feel you come out of this book with a good intuition for it. In short, it's something that recognizes that reality is, at least in part, provisional. What does that mean? We need not take reality for granted. What "is" reason, justice, faith, fact, etc? We often do not recognize that the truthful speech (the logos) of this reality came into being because there was the potential for it. In other words, its guarantee is suspect.

Deconstruction does not destroy this logos, but realizes that it is built on a "system" that allowed for its existence in the first place (or is it that it recognizes that the logos is a system?) Where I pull away from Derrida is when the logos is relayed in an ethnocentric way. I believe that Truth (beneath and built upon the logos, as such) encompasses all people at all times, because, as Derrida highlights, all life is about relationships between "others". This paradigm is absolute.

I do not believe Derrida would say words are absolutely meaningless, but are rather useful in their ability to create images by and through memory and/or abstract provocation. Communication comes from being exposed to an other, by the desire/need to convey meaning ("groans beyond words" Romans 8:26). Of course there is the "play" of language where we can engage in text or speech in a new and unconventional way, but this is built upon our "metaphysical" comportment, which Derrida has made his project to expose it as a history. To know anything (epistemology) supposes a recognition of reality as being something that allows itself to be known. We are therefore not reality's author, but it's observer.

One break or confusion I have with Derrida is the ambiguity of whether he believes truth is created through or discovered by men. This is perhaps the postmodern conundrum. But this is where the reality of Death becomes useful for Derrida, as it is discovered and experienced absolutely. It stands as an absolute litmus test in determining a productive interpretation. Therefore a "being toward death" stabilizes us in our humble relation to others and our own existence.

The question of a speech/writing origin really doesn't matter, so long as we realize that that paradigm of

communication is provided for as it offers the images of human expression. Derrida sees that our ability to imagine is what makes us most human. Which is only allowed by our relationship to the world, the people around us, and even ourselves. Relationship confirms the otherness of the other. It needs difference: Being revealed in the action of one binary necessarily confirming the other (we would not know light without darkness). What is needed, then, to prevent the fracture of our minds (which are incredibly resilient) is to come back to the logos (John 1:1). That is why deconstruction can never be destruction, rather rendered simply as suspension and (hopefully) the appreciation/gratitude toward our Being as such.

Derrida makes a startling claim in the *Grammatology*: to focus on the apparently marginal and secondary issue of writing raises problems serious enough to overrun all the conceptual resources of the then triumphant "human sciences" (and their model of scientificity provided by structural linguistics), in addition to those of history in general and indeed philosophy itself. All these disciplines share presuppositions that a hard look at the question of writing radically unsettles.

Like other seismic events of thought, Derrida's insight is quite simple, yet in its very simplicity hard to grasp. Identities in general (of whatever kind, at whatever level) arise out of difference, but difference is not itself any identity or indeed anything at all. It is not that there are first things, and then differences and relations between them: the "things" emerge only from the differences and relations, which have an absolute priority, and that emergence is never complete. It's that insight that led to the neologism *différance*. In the beginning is *différance*, which means that there is no simple beginning or origin. And the *différance* never ends, which means that there is no simple end. Derrida's simple claim, then, is that nowhere ever is there anything simple.

For many readers at the time, the most accessible way into this thinking was Derrida's account of Saussure, and more especially his radicalization of Saussure's own insight that "language is a system of differences without positive terms." On this view of language, objects and meanings do not come first, only subsequently to be named and referred to via some conventional linguistic means. Rather, they are from the start involved in the play of difference which alone affords them any kind of identifiability and identity. Things are what they are only by bearing the *trace* of what they are not. It flows from this insight that thinking itself is always caught up in webs or weaves of traces, and that it needs to engage with those traces if it is going to be able to think at all. That engagement involves, Derrida makes clear, alongside a question of language, a question of temporality and a question of the relation to the other. For short, we can say that this means thinking proceeds essentially by *reading*. But just because of the trace-structure, reading can no longer be conceived as retrieving a content (a signified, in the structuralist jargon) from the text being read, and must be thought of quite differently. The *Grammatology* is also a meticulous ongoing "methodological" reflection on what it is doing as it reads in this different way.

By thinking and reading in this way, we are always transgressing the limits of language itself. Once signifieds and referents are identifiable only through the trace-structure, then language has neither inside nor outside: everything in general is what it is only through indefinite referrals to other "things," which themselves refer on again. Experience in general is differential, made possible by the trace that cannot itself be directly experienced. Being is trace-being. This is not a claim merely about language, however important language remains. It would be tempting to say it is an ontological claim, except that the trace, being no *thing* or object at all, cannot be held within the terms of ontology (something that has been conveniently forgotten by many more recent "realisms"), whence Derrida's later half-serious proposal of a *hauntology*.

Derrida's simple insight, with its almost unimaginably, fractally complex implications, is difficult to stay with, and, especially since his death in 2004, intellectual fashion has tended to bypass its complexity and settle back into the more familiar terms of science, ontology, and, especially, history, as though the mere passage of time could make it go away. This new, "40th anniversary edition" of the translation of Derrida's perceived *magnum opus* is, then, extremely timely in its untimeliness, and, we might hope, has a chance of shaking up our disciplinary habits all over again.