



Since deconstruction lacks a fixed definition, grasping its characteristics is an essential way to help understand the concept. On one side, deconstruction begins from a refusal of the authority or determining power of every "is," or simply from a refusal of authority in general. This helps explain the deconstructive meaning for the milk bottle. Painting the milk bottle red is revolutionary in the sense that it demonstrates the non-essentialness of what a milk bottle "is." On the other side, Derrida also writes, "Deconstruction takes place. It is an event that does not await the deliberation, consciousness, or organization of a subject, or even of modernity." If things are deconstructible, they are deconstructible already — as things. This means the deconstruction has already been there even before Derrida created the theory of deconstruction.

Another potential route to understanding deconstruction is to figure out what it is not, which has been summarized at length by Derrida himself. First, deconstruction is not reducible to an attitude of nonconformity, oppositionality, or principled resistance. All of these actions imply the risk of unconsciously reproducing the original structure. Lucy writes, "If I wear nail polish, I won't have deconstructed my sexuality. If I vote conservative in protest at the failures of the parliamentary left, I won't have deconstructed politics." In addition, deconstruction is not a form of critique. It is not a method or a theory. It is not a discourse or an operation. It's not that deconstruction prefers or chooses to deconstruct a thing. In other words, it is impossible to apply deconstruction, for deconstruction has already been there.

The most mysterious part of deconstruction is why it has such great influence on humanities and social sciences, but itself is not a method or a theory. Since the 1980s deconstruction has designated a range of theoretical enterprises in law, anthropology, historiography, linguistics, sociolinguistics, psychoanalysis, political theory, feminism, and LGBT studies. It even influences architecture, music, art and art criticism. The great influence of deconstruction may lie 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. At the root of this method is Derrida's concept of the reciprocity of signs.

Derrida states, "From the moment that there is meaning there are nothing but signs. We think only in signs." Any given concept is constituted in terms of its reciprocal delimitation. And it is a violent hierarchy that we are dealing with in a classical philosophical opposition. One of the two terms always governs the other, for example, speech over writing. The first task of deconstruction is to find and overturn these oppositions inside a text or a corpus of texts. Deconstruction also marks their difference and the eternal interplay between the concepts in opposition.

These specific tasks allow deconstruction the possibility of constantly contributing post-structuralism and postmodern philosophy without an obvious definition. When we are talking about deconstruction, it is certainly much more complicated than painting milk bottles red. But Derrida started the journey for a lot of academic fields to find the deconstructive meanings even in minor actions like painting the milk bottle red.

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 practice of writing will be one fundamentally associated with the West in Derrida's understanding. A difficult point of the book is that the two conceptions of writing, the more traditionally understood form, and writing as the positing of metaphysical centers will become interrelated in the development of the argument and often be in play at the same time.

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.

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. For Derrida we cannot produce a completely adequate metaphysical representation, which must necessarily be transcendental or an abstraction of what it aims to represent and hence can never be fully immanent. Reality, in so far as we address ourselves to reality through some type of transcendental discourse, always escapes in some way. The question is one of the epistemological finitude of our metaphysical schemes, and not about whether there is anything out there or not.

Yes Derrida tends to be a bit verbose and redundant. However once you get past the syntax you will find a philosophy that is deep and inherent in our postmodern society. Sometimes I say to myself while reading this, "why can you just use plain clarification like Ferdinand De Saussure?!" Derrida tends to explain the explanations with more confusion.

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. It is like you can't help biting into the forbidden fruit knowing that you commit a sin. This is called 'deconstruction' that most traditional philosophers were afraid to utter before Derrida.

Derrida says thought is "the blank part of a text...[meaning] nothing" (92). Presumably it functions as an empty set. But this is just not how thought and language work. Language, albeit not-yet-verbal, is what makes thought possible. Now if what he means by this is thought can never be a "transcendental signified," fine. But I don't think he means that.

"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. With regard to this unity, writing would always be derivative, accidental, particular, exterior, doubling the signifier: phonetic. "Sign of a sign," said Aristotle, Rousseau, and Hegel.

Yet, the intention that institutes general linguistics, is a science remains in this respect within a contradiction. Its declared purpose indeed confirms, saying what goes without saying, the subordination of grammatology, the historico-metaphysical reduction of writing to the rank of an instrument enslaved to a full and originally spoken language. But another gesture (not another statement of purpose, for here what does not go without saying is done without being said, written without being uttered) liberates the future of a general grammatology of which linguistics-phonology would be only a dependent and circumscribed area. Let us follow this tension between gesture and statement in Saussure."

Derrida has been more forthcoming with negative ([apophatic](#)) than with positive descriptions of deconstruction. When asked by [Toshihiko Izutsu](#) some preliminary considerations on how to translate "deconstruction" in Japanese, in order to at least prevent using a Japanese term contrary to deconstruction's actual meaning, Derrida began his response by saying that such a question amounts to "what deconstruction is not, or rather *ought* not to be" [\[27\]:1](#)

Derrida states that deconstruction is not an analysis, a critique, or a method [\[27\]:3](#) in the traditional sense that philosophy understands these terms. In these negative descriptions of deconstruction, Derrida is seeking to "multiply the cautionary indicators and put aside all the traditional philosophical concepts" [\[27\]:3](#) This does not mean that deconstruction has absolutely nothing in common with an analysis, a critique, or a method, because while Derrida distances deconstruction from these terms, he reaffirms "the necessity of returning to them, at least under erasure" [\[27\]:3](#) Derrida's necessity of returning to a term [under erasure](#) means that even though these terms are

problematic we must use them until they can be effectively reformulated or replaced. The relevance of the tradition of negative theology to Derrida's preference for negative descriptions of deconstruction is the notion that a positive description of deconstruction would over-determine the idea of deconstruction and would close off the openness that Derrida wishes to preserve for deconstruction. If Derrida were to positively define deconstruction—as, for example, a critique—then this would make the concept of critique immune to itself being deconstructed. Some new philosophy beyond deconstruction would then be required in order to encompass the notion of critique.

He gestures toward a world outside the bounds of philosophical discourse, in which it would be embedded but not isolated, but the text remains entrenched within the philosophy he critiques.

The intense, careful concern with philosophy's inadequacy just feels like the sterile mirror of its fantasy of adequacy. Derrida doesn't really look beyond the philosophical domain he dwells within, he just highlights all its shortcomings.

Margins organizes itself in large part around the idea of the metaphorical consistency of metaphysical thinking as a repetition of physics; metaphysics metaphorically uses physics to give itself consistency, or a consistently present body. While metaphysics might understand itself as based in and dealing with concepts or to be occurring only at the level of ideas, in actuality, it is constantly deploying physical metaphors to guarantee the continuity of its presence. Presence would be a metaphorically continuous body which would constitute the consistency of truth conceived of as metaphysically certain. At the same moment metaphysics presents itself as being nothing but an ideal and conceptual proposition. Metaphysics appears to be practiced purely at the level of concepts and ideas, however in using metaphors in the constitution of its sense, it actually and covertly relies on a fabricated, metaphorically physical continuity or presence. This presence underwrites the continuity of the truth of its ideas. Because of this Derrida argues philosophy has always based itself in an exclusion of the metaphorical, as a way of thinking not compatible with concepts. Metaphors are the other of concepts, metaphysical thinking, and metaphysical ideality cannot be seen to be implicated with them. In Derrida's reading however, it constantly is, as it is the concept's location in metaphysical space, which allows one concept to be intelligible from another. That is, in the last instance it isn't the internal coherence of the idea or concept which distinguishes it from other concepts or ideas but rather just the metaphoric, corporal continuity which it is secretly presumed to possess. In this sense, metaphysics is "white mythology", the mythology practiced by the white man, as that culture which understood as eminently 'rational' and defined by the absence of mythology in its thought. All of Derrida's thought takes place in a kind of 'reprojected space', or he derives the sense of his ideas in terms of a conceptual space where the events which define the pre-understood coherence of metaphysics would be taking place. This space is like the unconscious of metaphysics, but thinking this space and its objects as a type of insubstantial model is the basis for the practice of deconstruction. So while there is the conceptual level of metaphysics in which for instance nature and culture, or even concept and metaphor itself, conducts themselves as a series of opposed tropes or concepts, there is a 'hidden', sublimated conceptual background which metaphysics both disavows but uses. For Derrida then thinking the problem of metaphysics involves thinking this relationship between a consciously represented conceptual level and a disavowed, unconscious, substantial metaphor.