



Deconstructing the Metaphysics of Sound

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Abstract:

Through this study, we attempt to explore deconstructive philosophy, which has striven to remove the Western metaphysical mask in order to reveal its contradictions and insufficiencies by adopting new mechanisms, namely the strategy of deconstruction. It is one of the most profound mechanisms precisely practiced in philosophy to re-raise a set of questions concerning metaphysical thought. Its main concerns were the deconstruction of centralities, such as the centrality of Logos and the centrality of voice, which Western philosophy had relied upon for centuries, in order for philosophy to open up to meaning and genuine inquiry. This philosophy was considered as an earthquake that struck the philosophical field because it moved all the pillars of philosophy that were believed to be central and unbreakable.

Keywords: Deconstruction; strategy; Western centrality; centrality of voice; metaphysics.

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1. INTRODUCTION

It seems that the ground from which deconstruction emerged in fact came as a stage in the dialectic of methodologies and their conflict (Abdullah & others, n.d, p. 113) ,especially since the intellectual and philosophical climate in which Derrida appeared was characterized by the spread of the linguistic model and the dominance of the structuralist approach, which is the same approach in which Derrida was nurtured, before he criticized and surpassed it in what became known as postmodern philosophy, which arose as a revolution against structuralist descriptivism.

This linguistic, literary, and philosophical movement was paved by a generation of writers and philosophers such as Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Paul Ricoeur, Roland Barthes, and others, who attempted to transcend structuralist trends and their effort to present coherent proofs in the direction of 'discourse, text, meaning,' while at the same time paving the way for what became known as the revolution of semiotics and interpretation, opening up and reviving the role of hermeneutics or the art of interpretation to broader and wider fields for envisioning the possibility of truth and celebrating probability, uncertainty, and difference, as Derrida stated: 'I try to think differently to imagine, in the traditions of philosophy from Aristotle to Hegel, the possible; one must think differently about the possibility of the possible' (Maurice, 1989, p. 17).

Jacques Derrida, this contemporary French philosopher, was born in 1930 in El Biar, Algiers, where he spent most of his childhood. He then traveled to France to continue his studies, obtaining his doctorate in 1967 and delivering numerous lectures at foreign universities. Among his most important works are: 'Speech and Phenomena,' 'Writing and Difference,' with Derrida's writings forming a comprehensive reading of Western thought from ancient Greek philosophy to the present, in terms of the characteristics upon which this thought and its various doctrines are built throughout history, such as the centrality of reason, logos, or metaphysics. Therefore, Derrida worked on removing the Western metaphysical mask to uncover its contradictions and insufficiency by adopting a new strategy: the strategy of deconstruction. He is one of the philosophers who focused precisely on reexamining a set of questions concerning metaphysical thought.

His writings are a comprehensive reading of the characteristics of Western thought in all its components and features on which he bases his philosophical project. He begins to expand into the realm of deconstruction starting from the issue of writing, which is the focus of all his concerns. He sees that it has not been given the attention it deserves since Plato, where it remained 'repressed.' Therefore, it was the starting point that drove him to attempt to establish deconstructive criticism of metaphysics, focusing his inquiries on the margin, which he wants to make a possible site for writing and an actual space for text and deconstruction.

This is an effective strategy to enable the margin to become the center that must engage with the topics of Western thought, in the sense that these texts written on the margin overlap with various forms and patterns of writing: literature, philosophy, theater, rhetoric. Therefore, it is necessary to open up to the field of literature, literary criticism, and psychoanalysis. All this is to open a new



path that differs from the prevailing approaches in previous critical directions, considering that those methods are linked to oppositions, to concepts, and to intellectual backgrounds, and are therefore metaphysical.

Therefore, he draws a special strategy for metaphysics in deconstruction, which is mainly based on interrogating it to reveal gaps and voids by penetrating it from within, layer by layer, to dismantle its structure and unravel its threads on one hand and to reweave threads for it on the other hand, and this is what makes him acknowledge the importance of margins in his view.

Based on the above, the issue that we want to raise is as follows: How did Derrida conceive the term 'deconstruction'? And in what way did the importance of this term manifest in building a philosophy that was able to bring about change in Western philosophy?

Based on the above, the issue that we want to raise is as follows: How did Derrida conceive the term 'deconstruction'? And in what way did the importance of this term manifest in building a philosophy that was able to bring about change in Western philosophy in general and in language in particular?

And in what way does Derrida's deconstructive strategy enable language to emerge from the Western metaphysical shell? And how did the strategy of deconstruction contribute to escaping the loop of phonocentrism?

Our reliance was on the historical-analytical approach, considering that it aligns with the nature of the subject we addressed in this research, because the problem that forms the core of this accomplished work was found to have roots in the history of ideas both as theory and practice. Consequently, our analysis was not complete except by relying on philosophical and critical reflection through working on the major and tangible texts that produced significant outputs for philosophical consciousness.

2. Western Centrality

Western centrality is a term prevalent in global literature and studies that asserts the civilizational superiority of the West over the civilizations of other peoples. This centrality derives its references from its Greek origins, considering it an extension of them. Greek scholars and thinkers believed that they were the source of all human achievements in science and philosophy. The belief in this centrality increased beginning in the mid-third century AD when Diogenes Laërtius declared, 'The Greeks are not only the creators of philosophy, but they are the origin of the entire human race.' These propositions were relied upon to inaugurate Western centrality since the modern era, considering that Western civilization is the offspring of Greek civilization and its references, and indeed it is the miracle of all human creativity, especially in mathematics and philosophy. 'The genius of the Greeks' (Al-Zahraa & Mahnana, 2026, p. 352) .

Mathematics was but one aspect of their genius in philosophy, as they surpassed all previous nations. Therefore, Greek civilization was the most important pillar of Western centrality, which derived from it the legitimacy to impose all concepts of Western culture on the various peoples and



ances of the world, and it became the reference to which everything was referred to (Al-Zahraa & Mahnana, 2026, p. 353).

3. Deconstruction as a philosophical strategy

Derrida's deconstruction, then, is without a center, because he refuses to recognize the fixed center (the centrality of reason), that is, the occupation of the mind and the word of the fundamental fixed center that makes them the ultimate reference for every philosophy, indeed for every truth, where all philosophies were based on reason, the word, or logos as a final foundation that guarantees philosophical truth. The absence of the center, as declared by Derrida, led to the loss of meaning, that is, to the loss of its closure, which subsequently led to the opening of the sign or meaning created by the absence of the fixed referential center. This led to the transformation of language into an infinite series (Faraj, No date, pp. 13,15) of meanings after the signifiers became ambiguous and evasive. Here lies the essence of play and the non-finality of meaning or significance, dispersion, and the impossibility of a single correct or confirmed reading. Deconstruction rejects the unity of meaning and the completeness of significance, that is, there is no fixed or complete meaning, where the continuous play of signifieds leads to the dispersion and explosion of meaning.

"Derrida" realized the difficulty of dealing with the metaphysical heritage and knows that metaphysics cannot be deconstructed or demolished except by means borrowed from metaphysics and diverted from their original purposes. This means that "Derrida" is aware of this game; he knows that the best way to expose the falseness of Western metaphysics is to address it with its own tools and then work to deconstruct it in order to reveal the contradiction upon which it is founded and to uncover the persistence of theological and metaphysical discourses that have deeply penetrated even late philosophy and intellectual works that often claimed to depart from it, in his view. (Faraj, No date, p. 12)

Deconstruction in Derrida takes the sophistic approach based on doubt in knowledge, to the extent that doubt overshadowed all issues in Derrida's work, causing the world to lose its credibility and center of focus. This led to the loss of meaning, and the interpretation of signification became an endless interpretation, suggesting the impossibility of any authoritative reference. In this way, Derrida restores value to sophistic doubt and, like the sophists, denies absolute and certain interpretations that many philosophers relied upon. This illustrates that the relationship of the deconstructive method to meaning or signification reveals the failure of structuralist philosophies in achieving meaning, determining signification, and regulating it. (Ghiwa, no date, pp. 187,188)

Derrida claims that deconstruction is neither nihilistic nor subversive, although he himself speaks of the strain on language that will lead to the death of speech and the book civilization. He defined deconstruction as attacking the inner edifice, whether formal or moral, of the basic units of philosophical thought, and even attacks the conditions of external practice, namely the historical forms of the educational system of this edifice and the social, economic, and political structures of that educational institution. Since he does not mention an alternative for all these institutions, what it aims at is subversion and destruction, even if he calls it 'deconstruction,' even if he claims it is



neither nihilistic nor subversive. (Attia, 2010, pp. 167,168)

The word 'deconstruction,' like any other word, derives its value only from its inclusion in a series of possible alternatives, in what some call, in a rather punning way, 'context.' This term has no value except in a specific context in which it replaces other words or allows other words to define it: 'writing, trace, alteration, supplementation, or margin.' (Derrida, 1988, pp. 59,62)

The most famous and simultaneously dangerous concept of Derrida remains the term deconstruction (Déconstruction) without dispute, as Derrida tells us (states) in his conversation with Al-Khatibi and with his Japanese friend, that deconstruction is nothing because it refers to nothing, and everything because it also refers to nothing. 'It is more than language,' as he defined it for the first and last time in his book entitled: 'Memoirs for Paul de Man.'

Derrida has criticized everything that refers to classical metaphysical concepts such as: being, essence, history, and man. Consequently, he incorporated them into the basic deconstructive linguistic system so that it becomes the preferred focal point in any potential research on truth or any possible exploration of history. And since no disruption can occur from the center — the interior — we must undertake two methodological procedures: 1/ Either we try to step out and deconstruct the structure around us without changing our position, and without paying the slightest attention to the original concepts and meanings, and here, due to our intense pursuit of stepping out or opening up, we might fall prey to closure. 2/ Or we change our position and move directly to reside outside, but this residence will not achieve complete separation from the interior because it possesses the elements of its own endurance, foremost being its possession of a private language; thus, we will inevitably be compelled to call upon the interior.

Deconstruction strategy is positioned within a discourse with Western metaphysical thought and its history, and it constitutes a critique of ethnocentrism supported by other centrings, which are: "the centering of Logos (reason)", "the centering of voice". (Derrida, Monolingualistic otherness, 2008, pp. 10,15,18)

Derrida, in a famous text entitled Letter to a Japanese Friend, considered that deconstruction is neither analysis nor critique. (Derrida, About the truth in philosophy, 2010, pp. 11,12)

Deconstruction as a strategic philosophy and a skill and cleverness in examining texts and subjects seeks to break the logic of metaphysical binaries: inside / outside, signifier / signified, reality / example... to establish the truth (the hesitant uncertainty) in the phrase "neither (this)...nor (that)..." . What Gilles Deleuze found in the Platonic system: the element of similarity or the illusion of being between "original" and "copy": Jacques Derrida will find the concept of "antidote", which means "neither the disease nor the medicine" in the Platonic system.

The deconstruction practiced by 'Derrida' does not at all mean 'destruction' (the idea of destruction had been used by Heidegger in deconstructing the Greek philosophical system), but it also involves the act of construction (construction in a different manner). It is rather 'deconstruction' of a fixed unit into its elements and its constitutive units to understand its structure and to monitor its function. Deconstruction requires multiplicity and dispersion by displacing centrality to distribute centers



(Al-Zein, 2002, p. 189).

Metaphysics is not an entity independent of the human self, but rather it is made by his thoughts, and leaving it does not mean erasing all these names and concepts that it produced; rather, 'we may need, as Nietzsche said, to change the style, and Nietzsche reminds us that this style should be diverse.' (Derrida, margin of philosophy, 1972, p. 163)

The goal of Derrida behind this strategy of deconstruction is to undermine these 'artificial centers' that have dominated Western cultural heritage, hidden under various masks. Initially, it appeared under the mask of 'God who dominated in the early Christian era until the eighteenth century.' During this phase, the idea of God as the center of everything prevailed, thus attributing everything to this center and withdrawing all human agency in this world. This was followed by the Enlightenment phase (from the nineteenth century to roughly the mid-twentieth century), which was known as a revolution against the previous era and an attempt to activate human freedom, placing humans instead of God and considering themselves masters of their destiny. This was followed by the phase of the centration of the unconscious when humans were considered mere stones governed by the laws of structure or the system governed by the nature of things. (Al-Zein, Displacement and Probability: Critical Essays in Western Philosophy, 2008, p. 10)

It ends with 'Derrida' starting from the emergence of his deconstructive project at the end of the 1960s, by criticizing all centralizations and highlighting their flaws through a comprehensive critique that touches on the history of Western metaphysics. His work focused on 'texts,' all the texts that 'Derrida' considers material suitable to serve as tangible evidence showing how humans themselves conspire with metaphysics, which they quickly forget they are the makers of. (Al-Zein, Displacement and Probability: Critical Essays in Western Philosophy, 2008, p. 10)

4. The Metaphysics of Sound

The centrality of sound or speech in Western philosophy reflects a metaphysics of presence rooted in Western thought from Plato to contemporary philosophy, where primacy is given to spoken language, speech in its oral form, as the presence of meaning and the elevation of sound that establishes the presence of consciousness. This auditory centrality produces a conflict between speech and writing, a conflict within the set of contradictions that constitute Western metaphysics of presence, leading to the marginalization of writing, considering it an accessory or complement (Supplement) to speech, a mechanism with a secondary function. The presence of sound is the presence of the communicative event in its oral context, the presence of the author, the speaker, and the listener, simultaneously, and by an implicit contract that guards the message against misunderstanding and misinterpretation. (Ibrahim, 1997, p. 321)

To confront the metaphysics of presence and to avoid falling into the trap of binary oppositions, Derrida will begin to destabilize its system, reveal its contradictions, and propose other alternatives represented in a series of dual-meaning terms, such as 'trace,' which at the same time refers to the erasure of something and its preservation in the remaining marks, and 'pharmakon,' which means both poison and remedy. This will turn the hierarchical system established by Western metaphysics



upside down, open up to the margins, and listen to a different thought, the thought of difference. In doing so, it will uncover the secondary backgrounds behind the self-evident truths and axioms relied upon by Western thought in constructing its systems and shaping its various institutions (Derrida, *About the truth in philosophy*, 2010, p. 12) .

Plato, in his dialogues, tried to emulate this type of sending and receiving system, assuming a duality (the sender and the receiver) that organizes the communicative act, which is usually Socrates as the sender, and a group of receivers/interlocutors who change according to the context and the need that Plato desires. Plato adhered to the method of direct dialogue, and his belief that it was the optimal method to express truth led to a treatment of the subject of writing with great suspicion. Here, Derrida seeks to replace this conception, affirming that writing reveals the estrangement of meaning, as the engraving of meaning through the sign grants it independence and freedom from its original owner, giving it significant possibilities for interpretation and exegesis. (Ibrahim, 1997, p. 322)

According to the researcher Rasool Muhammad Rasool, Derrida's concept of writing is linked to the centrality of linguistics, which dominates the human mind. The researcher cites what Jacques Derrida expressed when he said: "We use the word language for action, movement, thought, reflection, consciousness, the unconscious, experience, and emotion, but we now tend to use the word writing for all this and other things; we do not use it only for the physical movements of the recording process in alphabetical writing, pictorial writing, and symbolic writing, but we also use it for what makes writing possible, and we use it as well beyond the signified face, to the signified itself, and to everything that can generally lead to recording, whether literal or not." (Khatibi, September 2022)

Through a deconstructive analysis of Plato's dialogue 'Phaedrus,' Derrida demonstrates that the Greek philosopher considers writing similar to the *pharmakon*, and here this concept plays a crucially ambiguous and contradictory role. The word *pharmakon* means both poison and remedy, and the dual nature of writing arises from combining its immediate benefits, represented in preservation and recording, with the instability of meaning due to the absence of the act of oral speech, the lack of the living voice that secures the message in the context of communication. However, this full presence of meaning in the context of speech is nothing but an illusion, for even speech is penetrated by rhetorical images and metaphors, such as metaphor, which is not a property unique to literature. (Ibrahim, 1997, p. 322).

Writing carries the property of manifestation; sound carries essence, and between the two roots 'pheno' (from phenomenon) and 'phono' (from phoneme) there is ink, meaning, and a metaphysical logos negligence that always directs its thought toward 'eidotica.' In it, sound merges with truth, or the phoneme coincides with itself as an essential declaration of the primacy of sound as the pre-ready meaning, where there is no need to philosophize about writing. Thus, writing is a margin thrown outside the concept of truth, and thus metaphysics remains a mode of genuine philosophy—in its view, differential thinking—which corrupts any exterior from it as a trace of its ontology.



And writing is that exterior-trace which metaphysics wards off; that is why Socrates never wrote. To him, and to every metaphysical thinking that elevates the status of voice-speech, writing is a translation of the baseness of the body. (Reda, 2002)

Accordingly, there is no doubt that the critique of the phonetic foundations of Western philosophical discourse, and the highlighting of its underlying ideological functions, is a process that, according to Derrida, cannot be carried out without giving importance to the written components of thought. This is what drives him to attempt to establish a kind of radical writing (grammatology). (Ibrahim, 1997, p. 323)

This is what led Derrida to place metaphysics under deconstruction not only as a review of this philosophical heritage but primarily in order to revise its system and the possibilities of its logos, that is, in order to deconstruct itself intrinsically! This is a philosophical approach that led Derrida to attempt to recover the originality of writing and to overturn that Platonic cogito 'I speak, therefore I am,' not with the aim of replacing 'I speak' with 'I write,' but with the aim of highlighting the original relationship between them and showing what writing can accomplish when the phoneme fails.

Between voice-language and writing there is a meaning that the phoneme seeks to enshrine by reducing it, and writing seeks to rescue it from the language of 'preserving the essence for the speaker' by deferring and postponing it! (Reda, 2002)

Derrida worked on uncovering the centers of centering and critiquing the manifestations of that centering, which required him to dig into the internal structures to identify the manifestations of that centering and work on destabilizing the centered points. Centering around speech expresses itself through metaphysical systems based on the notion that time progresses uniformly from the past to the future. When Derrida examined this comprehensive field related to time, he found that centering manifests in many phenomena, among which three cases can be identified: the centering propagated by metaphysics, considering the soul as having an ideal dimension and that its embodiments occur through the temporality of the body and not through its abstract aspect; the transcendent forms generated by phenomena are fixed and eternal; and finally, that all propositions of the absolute, as a creator, possess a permanent presence (Ibrahim, 1997, pp. 323,324,325). Derrida's critical practice necessitated that he expand his critique to include the phenomenon of centering in more than one domain, even if all of them arose in light of the authority of metaphysics. And if the centering around reason resulted from the centering around speech.

This is merely one aspect of centrality; its other aspect related to the topic of centrality is the elevation of speech over writing. In these two interrelated topics, we find that 'voice' or 'speech' is the reference around which thought is centered or because of which it arises. (Ibrahim, 1997, p. 326)

Thus, the centrality of voice or speech in Western philosophy indicates the deep-rooted nature of the metaphysics of presence in Western thought from Plato to contemporary thought, where spoken language is given priority. Speech, in its oral form, as a presence of meaning and elevation of voice,



establishes the presence of consciousness, the presence of the self, a speaking subject with a phenomenological property that hears itself at the same time it speaks. Derrida states that the history of metaphysics is 'the absolute will to listen to the self.' (Derrida, *Sound and phenomenon*, 2005, p. 155)

The destabilization that Derrida tries to introduce into the heart of Western philosophical discourse touches upon its fundamental principles and the central mechanisms on which it relies, just as any rational-ideal discourse is based on a kind of centrality around the voice on one hand, and on an implicit or a priori intellectual-linguistic model that guides it and defines its frameworks and limits which it cannot exceed on the other hand. There is no doubt that he links vocal centrality and intellectual centrality in Western thought because that thought, most prominently philosophical discourse, did not arise or develop among the ancient Greeks except through the presence of spoken language that relies on the alphabetic system in writing; and because abstract metaphysical thought could only be formed to the extent that spoken language allowed it to transcend the direct material images that had been used in earlier forms of writing prior to the alphabetic system (Ibrahim, 1997, p. 323).

There is, then, a vast difference between the language of phonemes (the language of language) and the language of writing: the former works on fixing and "intoning" meaning—if the expression is acceptable—meaning it works on making it purely internal or intrinsic, appreciated only by the spirit in relation to itself at the moment when "the meaning is preserved for the speaker"! And thus, a whole philosophy aims to transcend the moment of transition to writing, while the latter works on suspension, postponement, dispersion, deconstruction, multiplication of meaning, and its display and extraction from the idolatry of thought. (Reda, 2002)

The focus on sound results in a conflict between speech and writing, a conflict within the series of contradictions constitutive of Western metaphysics of presence, which leads to the marginalization of writing, considering it an appendix or a complementary addition to speech, a mechanism with a secondary function. The presence of sound is the presence of the communicative event within its oral framework; it is the presence of the author, the speaker, and the listener at the same time. Thus, there is an implicit contract that safeguards the message from misunderstanding and misinterpretation (Derrida, *Sound and phenomenon*, 2005, p. 111).

As Greimas says, 'It is difficult to grasp a meaning of meaning,' and as Gilles Deleuze says, meaning is 'deeper than any inner world.' Deconstructive writing, in Derrida's sense, on the other hand, shows that all meaning exists in the meanings of meaning where it is external, multiple, and different. Therefore, there is no internal meaning self-sufficient within the horizon of enunciation; rather, there are meanings of meaning, and there is meaning open to otherness, multiplicity, and difference... that is, there is meaning not yet accomplished, as it is a nebula of infinite interpretations and hermeneutic readings. The phoneme is characterized by presence, stability, unity, closure, and permanence... whereas writing is characterized by event, transformation, multiplicity, openness, and processes. (Reda, 2002)



4. CONCLUSION

In the end, it can be said that the strategy of deconstruction allowed Derrida to shake the foundations of Western metaphysics and transcend all the binaries that were central in Western thought without falling into the trap of metaphysics. According to "Muhammad Shawqi Al-Zein," the text encompasses two contradictory truths: "If reading on the higher side (above the text) is based on the unity of meaning, the process of progression, or the identity of self and object, then on the lower side (below the text), it opens up to fragments of meanings, the synchronicity of actions, or the slight and unequal difference between self and object" (Al-Zein, *Displacement and Probability: Critical Essays in Western Philosophy*, 2008, p. 10). Hence, it becomes clear that the grammatology which Derrida paid special attention to opened the space for interpretation, intensification of meaning, and its liberation, in contrast to the voice for which metaphysics was prepared, which was to close meaning in itself without manifesting it. Thus, the centrality of the voice represents the dominance of spoken language.

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