

**THE TEXT AND THE LOGOS  
LANGUAGE DEBATE IN JACQUES DERRIDA'S DECONSTRUCTION**

Dr. Rhod V. Nuncio  
De La Salle University  
Taft Avenue, Manila  
([rhodnuncio@gmail.com](mailto:rhodnuncio@gmail.com))

**INTRODUCTION**

The essay is the author's personal attempt to mis/interpret or mis/read Derrida and his works. Anyone could have this feeling that the moment one proclaims to understand Derrida, it is tantamount in saying that he/she may have indeed misunderstood him. According to Derrida, there is a fixed relation of differences of meanings ascribed within the phonemic differences of utterances. Language is the primary object of deconstruction and Derrida subverts and exposes the phonocentric foundationalism of the structuralists, particularly that of Ferdinand de Saussure's. Because of this, Derrida is oftentimes placed in the history of philosophy as part of post-structuralism. In the end, I tried to tussle my way in critiquing deconstruction. There is no promise of clarity if the paper did or fail to do it, but the contingent debacle of sustaining the language of deconstruction as it denies philosophy and other systems of thought, a place to start with, could well eat inside deconstructive approach and left fossilizing its attempt to reroute away from the metaphysics of conformity it triumphantly deconstructs. This would judge whether, as others claim, deconstruction has waned or has just started after Derrida.

Derrida confronts the issue whether 'deconstruction can lead to an adequate practice, whether critical or political...In order to advance a factual rather than a pathetic critique of the European intellectual's ethnocentric impulse, Derrida admits that he cannot ask the 'first' questions that must be answered to establish the grounds of his argument.

--Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

**THE PROJECT OF THIS PAPER**

The present milieu of philosophical discourse is centered on language. Philosophy since Plato has concerned itself with the understanding of the metaphysical framework of reality, of which philosophy questions and apprehends reason as its domain. Language is then subservient to philosophy. It is, all the more, a medium to communicate ideas through the ages. However, there is twist of fate, a reversal from this linearity of tradition, or more precisely the retaliation of language against the 'metaphysics of conformity'<sup>1</sup>.

On the one hand, it was Wittgenstein who then positioned language as a philosophical interest<sup>2</sup>—the object of scrutiny and the subject for scrutinizing philosophy

in particular and reality in general. On the other hand, the structuralists, from Saussure, Barthes to Levi-Strauss, delineated language as the reductionistic or absolutist explanation of all. It means in simple terms that everything can be reduced to language—from simple utterance, myths, laws, culture, society up to the supra-structure of relations or co-relations of all these categories as governed by linguistic patterns, rules and principles.

Because of this regimentation of reality in all of its intelligible and unintelligible aspects, Jacques Derrida employed rigorous readings of philosophical texts of Edmund Husserl<sup>3</sup>, Ferdinand de Saussure<sup>4</sup>, Immanuel Kant and other philosophers in order to critique the so-called “metaphysics of presence”.

But it is contended that language is the limit of the logos (philosophy) and the text (literature). This paper therefore attempts to define and read Derrida’s deconstructive reading from a critical perspective coming from a pragmatic and analytical view. The language debate refers to Derrida’s deconstruction that has spawned debates inside and outside philosophical circles<sup>5</sup> while the critique explores deconstruction’s possibility and tendency to go to another closure called loge-**de**-centrism.

Thus it is imperative in this paper to stipulate first the contentions of deconstruction as a framework. Then later in the last part, a critique is posed against it to see if this framework is just a solipsistic claim for detouring to metaphysical discussion. We can also pose this question after reading the side of those of who adamantly critique the method, approach or strategy of deconstruction: Do we approach the method of deconstructive reading a kind of aporia, nihilism, or skepticism that leads to the end of philosophy<sup>6</sup>?

In the end, the writer will propose a lense for seeing the debate and a reconstruction between the text and the logos (literature and philosophy) using language as a limit and a critique against the language of deconstruction.

## **THE TEXT AND THE LOGOS: A PROLOGUE**

With the German hermeneutics and the re-emergence of literary criticism to the fore of philosophizing, it is now considered that everything is a text. A text in a traditional definition is a written form. But because it is not the form which is important in the text but rather the meanings in the text, *everything* becomes a multitude of meanings and interpretations and therefore this *everything* is the *text*. A poem is a text, Plato’s *Dialogues* too, the readers, and so goes for the critics of these texts, its translations, the translators, etc. Everything therefore is textualized and then rationalized. To follow this, that which gives meaning is a *text*, even anything which is not meaningful in this sense. The absence of meaning is illusory, for this absence is meaning itself. Indeed, under the pressure of...perspectivism, all we are led with is “the text,’ and the text ‘about’ texts”<sup>7</sup> Likewise: “The self like the work, is a text that is already embedded in a context, the community of interpretation or system of signs<sup>8</sup>,”

The *logos* as reason or as philosophy is what makes the meaning ubiquitous and hermeneutically operative within a given perspective, paradigm or framework. It is language that mediates the possibility of meanings. Thus language is the kernel of both logos (reason) and text (meaning) which grasp the limit and question an imposition of a limit brought about by a criticism like deconstruction.

## THE ONSLAUGHT OF CRITIQUE AGAINST STRUCTURALISM

The emergence of positivism in the field of philosophy has tremendously shaken the metaphysical foundations of language. From this inward preoccupation to build a science of language, structuralism began to claim the ‘lens of truth’ about language and its manifestations in human nature, understanding, culture, economics, politics and so on. It considers language as the structure and supra-structure of reality. “Structuralism, in a broad sense, is the practice of studying phenomena as different as societies, minds, language, literatures and mythologies as total systems, or connected wholes—that is, structure—and in terms of their internal patterns of connections.<sup>9</sup>”

Ferdinand de Saussure in his *Course in General Linguistics*<sup>10</sup>, laid down the principles of this linguistic project. The first principle elaborates the arbitrariness of the ‘sign’. The concept of the sign is the essence of language according to Saussure. “The study of the nature of the linguistic sign helps us to understand the structure of all (even non-linguistic) signs.<sup>11</sup>” The sign is composed of two underlying concepts—the signifier and the signified. The signifier is any spoken or written element and the idea or notion produced from this element is the signified. Thus the word tree (signifier) could signify stillness or courage (signified) *metaphorically* depending on how the writer or the speaker produces the connection and meaning. For Saussure then, language is a system of signs with the signifier and the signified completing such system. The interplay of these two makes the language arbitrary. To explicate this contention is like saying that there is no natural connection between a ‘tree’ (word) and an ‘acacia’ (the reference). In other words, a word is formed correlatively depending on who is speaking, where and what is the context of the actual speech-act. Every culture has its own language, its own way of arbitrarily assigning word to mean what it is in relation to their system of representing the outside world and system of meanings<sup>12</sup>. “This is common sense; otherwise we would have difficulty in explaining the existence of different languages.<sup>13</sup>” Furthermore, a word establishes meaning through its smallest unit of sound, the *phoneme*. It means that what differentiates a ‘tree’ and ‘free’ is the sound t/f. We derive meaning by the sound of word/s when spoken and consequently by way it appears when written.

The second principle is Saussure’s *la langue* and *parole*. For him, “langue is something that is at once social—langue is the possession of the community of speakers—and constraining, *langue* is something fixed; *parole* is the realm of freedom.<sup>14</sup>” The *langue* (that is, as language) is the system where all significations rest. Parallel with this, we can say that Filipino as a language is typically the Saussurean *langue* and the outgrowth of this with its present jargon, slang, neologism, and attachment with other languages such as Spanish, English, Malay and others is where the realm of *parole* stands. Jonathan Culler has something to say about this:

A language is thus conceived as a system of differences, and this leads to the development of the distinctions on which structuralism and semiotics have relied: between a language as a system of differences (*langue*) and the speech events which the system makes possible (*parole*)...and between the two constituents of the sign, signifier and the signified.<sup>15</sup>

Saussure hence accentuates the primary strength of his project that “in the linguistic system there are only differences, without positive terms” (Saussure, 166). Here is where Derrida enters because for him this claim for linguistic differences or differentiation is problematic. He also attacks the valorization appropriated by Saussure to sound, phoneme or speech at the expense of writing. It is said that because Derrida has left a destructive imprint on Saussure’s works in particular and in structuralism in general, critics have labeled Derrida as a post-structuralist.

Derrida’s attack on Saussure’s concept of *difference*, *phonemes* and privileging of *speech* shall be discussed after a treatment of a framework used as a critique, and even far more violent as a critique. This framework—which has captivated modern thinkers and until now, has been a subject of intellectual debate among philosophers, scholars, literary theorists, teachers, students and many others—is known popularly as *deconstruction*.

## DECONSTRUCTION AND THE QUESTION OF ITS PHILOSOPHY

Let us examine now the framework of scrutiny used by Derrida. It is said that this ‘framework’ has been tacit in the mind of Derrida as deconstruction, but rather only as a notion mixed up, along with his other concepts, in the whole project of rereading and reversing tradition in philosophy, or more strongly, of subverting this tradition as philosophy. But because his framework is actually and explicitly a way of rereading, reversing & subverting anything on sight, deconstruction:

has had a remarkable career...having first appeared in several texts that Derrida published in the mid-1960s, it soon became the preferred designator for the distinct approach and concerns that his thinking apart. Derrida has confessed on several occasions that he has been somewhat surprised by the way this word came to be singled out<sup>16</sup>

This writer refers to the whole gamut of Derrida’s philosophical undertaking as a ‘radical’ framework.<sup>17</sup> Deconstruction ushers in and sometimes violently advocates reworking of a framed ‘frame’. It is also a framework because it does stand alone as/outside philosophy. Even critics would say and affirm that deconstruction too is a philosophical position in doing philosophy. Deconstruction is only a philosophical position, merely a way of seeing philosophical issues otherwise. Jonathan Culler emphasizes that deconstruction is “a strategy within philosophy and a strategy for dealing with philosophy, for the practice of deconstruction aspires to be both rigorous argument within philosophy and displacement of philosophical categories or philosophical attempts at mastery.<sup>18,</sup>”

It is in this view that one can grasp it as a position, a strategy and a practice of philosophizing. This quite ambivalent gesture is a characteristic of this framework. Yet if it is merely a position or a strategy, how come it is called as within or displaced from philosophy? Is it a preparation to philosophy or a practice prior to doing philosophy (pre-/within-/post-philosophy)? To answer, no matter where and what its position, strategy or practice is, the main point however is that it still boils down to “engaging with and re-reading” philosophy. The point however is to splice the text of philosophy to come up

with a double gesture, resisting a possibility of enclosure or a metaphysics of conformity. Philosophical texts are open to scrutiny and in doing so, a deconstructionist treats such texts as “oppositional texts.” Derrida himself made his position about this:

Therefore we must proceed using a double gesture, according to a unity that is both systematic and in and of itself divided, a double writing, that is, a writing that is in and of itself, multiple, what I called, in “*La double seance*,” a double science. On the other hand, we must traverse a phase of overturning. To do justice to this is necessity is to recognize that in a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful co-existence of a *vis-a-vis*, but rather with a violent hierarchy..To deconstruct the opposition, first of all, is to overturn the hierarchy at a given moment.<sup>19</sup>

On the one hand, as a position, “it belongs...to ‘philosophy’ in so far as it raises certain familiar questions about thought, language, identity and other longstanding themes of philosophical debate.<sup>20</sup>” On the other hand, it is displaced from philosophy<sup>21</sup> because “one way of describing this...is to say that Derrida refuses to grant philosophy the kind of privileged status it has always claimed as the sovereign dispenser of reason.<sup>22</sup>”

Deconstruction is elusive and slippery as it is, obviously because it defies (un)certainly of (im)positions in pursuing this kind of framework. It is critical and yet uncritical in its subversion<sup>23</sup>.

With these in mind, let us proceed to deconstruction as a practice. This writer shall give four points involved in the practice as elaborated from Norris’ work: (1) reversal, (2) displacement, (3) un-closure and (4) re-deconstruction<sup>24</sup>. The first two points involve the initial movement of deconstruction while the remaining others assume the endless movement of this framework.

Reversal commences upon a necessity that entails destroying the binary oppositions that become part of a metaphysical conformity. “The deconstructor begins by disclosing the hierarchically ordered, metaphysical substratum of a specific piece of discourse.<sup>25</sup>” In a philosophical discourse the apparent division and opposition had been very prevalent to pair terms like soul/body, being/non-being, mind/matter, good/bad, essence/existence and so on. All of these hierarchies according to Derrida, which in some degree were venerated as something that has reached a certain truth or value, must be consistently transformed. To quote him,

I believe that every conceptual breakthrough amount to transforming, that is, to deforming, an accredited, authorized relationship between a word and a concept, between a trope and what one had every interest to consider to be an unshiftable primary sense, a proper, literal or current usage...All of this is grouped together under the title of deconstruction.<sup>26</sup>

In this process of transforming and deforming any relationship of opposition, “the deconstructor proceeds then by reversing the hierarchy, not perversely, but by discerning a chink in the discourse which allows their reversal.<sup>27</sup>”

Derrida makes his attack or criticism by reading the philosophies of past thinkers. His approach needs the examination of what has been written before (the text). In this particular textual discourse, he looks for inconstancies, intricacies, ironies...etc. that may serve to start any attack. “Deconstruction is the critical procedure by which this supposed other is unearthed and shown to be an operative if invisible in an ongoing scheme of meaning.<sup>28</sup>” In relation with this, reversal happens within the structure or content it wants to deconstruct. It works internally and further scrutinizes the hierarchy that maintains that conformity. Derrida is adamantly against a metaphysics of conformity and presence. This is also known as logocentrism, the centering or grounding of truth as present and as transcending in discourse. But “the point is not simply to invert the values of a common place hierarchical distinction but to push the enquiry much further back and ask what presuppositions are concealed by the structural difference in question”<sup>29</sup> This is very important in the next point of deconstruction, which is displacement.

Displacement happens in order to demystify a so called return to hierarchy after a reversal of oppositions. In this sense, a deconstructor eliminates the possibility of conforming to valorize the reversed of the opposition (e.g., matter/mind after the reversal of mind/matter construct). The chain of hierarchies is therefore shattered by assuming that no equilibrium shall be forged again. In other words, displacement destroys conformity. Selden puts this by saying that:

The newly asserted hierarchy is itself displaced and is not allowed to install a new ‘truth’ or structural fixity. The rule of indeterminacy prevails. While structuralists had treated binary oppositions as stable terms in a formal structure, Derrida sees them as organized in unstable disequilibrium.<sup>30</sup>

Truth here refers to conformity or acceptance of an edifying structure of meanings and values imposed universally just like the privileging of soul over body. The rule of indeterminacy implies here the resistance to closure; otherwise a possible conformity will rise again. Because of this, there is no fixed meaning as for language that has no universal claim for structuring. Language is indeterminate, interminable and thus man cannot exhaust within and beyond the possibilities of meanings.

Following this argument, deconstruction manifests the ‘un-closure’ of discourse whether textual, cultural, political, etc. Philosophy also must remain un-closed to be able to disclose at the same time the endless possibilities of interpretation, understanding and criticism. This is resistance to closure. There is no movement from beginning to end but every point could be a beginning and an end.

Hence it can be surmised that there is no finality in deconstruction. Any attempt to reach a verdict of truth or truth-claims applying deconstruction is only a beginning, an end or whatsoever, because such claim to truth is furthered to an endless scrutiny, to an aporia of deconstruction. “Argument by deferral and complication is the characteristic of Derridean mode, ‘interminable’...haunted by infinite regress and yet insisting on the ethical imperative to proceed in no other way.<sup>31</sup>” Entering into deconstruction is like an endless labyrinth with no entrance and exit. If indeed there is, outside the labyrinth is another endless one. Here re-deconstruction persists to an infinite, interminable task, again and again.

## THE RESURGENCE OF *DIFFERENCE* OUT FROM DIFFERENCE

The four movements of deconstruction as discussed earlier are likely inherent in the attacks made by Derrida against structuralism. The destructive assault rendered here starts from the very structure of structuralism, i.e., from the point of view of Saussurean linguistic difference and differentiation. The eventual closure of signification becomes problematic when the signifier and the signified build a reference without any form of escape. The signifier must always point to the signified. There seems to be a structured meaning at hand by way of differentiation, by way of different tongues speaking it. Derrida believes that this is a closure.

A deconstructive framework deciphers these enigmatic differences in language. “In order to decipher, one must dismantle, see the things apart, reject any established relationship of word and concept.<sup>32</sup>” To get away from such closure of differences, Derrida introduces *differance*:

The difference of which Saussure speaks is itself, therefore, neither a concept nor a word among others. The same can be said, a fortiori, of differance...What is written as differance, then will be the playing movement that ‘produce’—by means of something that is not simply an activity—these differences, these effects of difference.<sup>33</sup>

This word is a signature of Derrida which eludes a fixed or definite meaning. In such a way that it produces differences, it is not its origin or its end. Differance as a term therefore displaces differentiation because by pursuing to discern it, it temporizes (its) meaning.

*Differance* is the nonfull, nonsimple, structured, and differentiating origin of differences. Thus the name origin no longer suits it... which is simultaneously spacing and temporization.<sup>34</sup>

This seemingly ambiguous term justifies its being spaced and temporized for understanding because it defies a closure that characterizes Saussure’s differences.

The differences between the two controversial words, *difference* and *differance* is, of course, one letter (a). The two are derived not from the Greek, *diapherein*, meaning to differ, but from the Latin, *differre* meaning both to differ and to defer. To differ is the more common word meaning non-identity, difference, the involvement of an interval, a distance, a spacing.<sup>35</sup>

In other words, *differance* is the difference of differences but at the same time different from this assumed differentiation. It debunks the relationship of the signifier and the signified as correlatively pointing towards a linear differentiation. For example, one tree in relation with other trees could signify forest to wilderness, wilderness to

primitivity, and so on. And countless it may seem, if translated to other languages, which by means of differing with this difference could produce a distancing from what has been established originally as the word or the term “tree” itself. The deviation then is the difference from these two different or arbitrary uses of tree and *puno*. Where then is the origin? What then is the connection? Imagine for example how an American, French, German, Japanese, and a Filipino build a signification of the word ‘apple’. In connection with this, take in mind the cultural, religious, political, and economic underpinnings in which a differentiation of this term might incur. In fact, one would be lost in this kind of displacement, deferral, and difference. “The practice of a language or of code supposing a play of forms without a determined and invariable substance, and also supposing in the practice of display a retention and pretension of differences, a spacing and temporization, a play of trace.”<sup>36</sup>

### LOGOCENTRISM OR THE METAPHYSICS OF PRESENCE

Another philosophical hierarchy that somehow constructs itself, as the longest tradition in philosophizing is what Derrida calls logocentrism.

Logocentrism is also, fundamentally, an idealism. It is the matrix of idealism. Idealism is its most direct representation, the most constantly dominant force. And the dismantling of logocentrism is simultaneously—a *fortiori*—a deconstitution of idealism or spiritualism in all its variants...Now of course, logocentrism is a wider concept than idealism, for which it serves as a kind of overflowing foundation...It constitutes a system of predicates, certain of which can always be found in the philosophies that call themselves nonidealist, that is, antiidealist. The handling of the concept of logocentrism, therefore, is delicate and sometimes troubling.<sup>37</sup>

In this context, the whole tradition of philosophical enterprise has always been obsessed to formulate the ‘truth’. What is truth? Whether a truth formulated is universal or relative, the grounding principle is to locate its presence somewhere, i.e., the foundation of knowledge. Derrida deconstructs the privileging of presence over absence; well in fact without the latter the former will stand as a bleak concept. In this perspective, he inverted and subverted the conformity between presence and absence and thus advocated its reversal. Let us examine the text, *Speech and Phenomena*:

Since its presence to intuition (presence, that is), its being before the gaze, has no essential dependence on any worldly or empirical synthesis, the restitution of its sense in the form of presence becomes a universal and unlimited possibility. But being nothing outside the world, its ideal being must be constituted, repeated, and expressed in a medium that does not impair the presence and self presence... a medium that preserves both the presence of the object... The ideality of the object, which is only its being

for a nonempirical consciousness, can be only expressed in an element the phonomenality of which does not have worldly form.<sup>38</sup>

This passage confirms the reversal of absence and presence which nonetheless takes the importance of ideal object. Theory in itself and other philosophical claims are abstracted from absence not presence. Absence constitutes the ideality and possibility of presence.<sup>39</sup> Once a theory is placed into practice, it emerges into repetition, restitution, and even transformation. “Philosophy has been a metaphysics of presence... that each of these concepts, all of which involve a notion of presence, has been treated as a centering, grounding, force or principle.<sup>40</sup>”

This initial attack on the metaphysics of presence is well summarized in one of Derrida’s writings:

... the determination through history of the meaning of being in general as presence, with all the subdeterminations that depend on this general form and organized within it their system and their historical linkage (presence of the object to sight as *eidōs*, presence as substance/essence/existence (*ousia*), temporal presence as the point (*stigma*) of the now or the instant (*nun*), self-presence of the *cogito*, consciousness, subjectivity, co-presence of the self and the other, intersubjectivity as an intentional phenomenon of the ego, etc.). Logocentrism would thus be bound up in the determination of the being of the existent as presence.<sup>41</sup>

Though this ‘displaced calculation’ of Derrida is positioned to denounce this enterprise, any attempt to explain this is indeed logocentric—always pointing to ‘explain’ and ‘foreground’ what this is all about. It is displaced because he wanted to escape logocentrism, to displace everything that points to this course. Hence, to escape an ‘attempt to explain’ the framework of Derrida is a roundabout detour to logocentrism. Derrida himself is faced with this dilemma but tries to circumvent this imminent entrapment by his ambiguity and through his obscure style of writing,

## **PHONOCENTRISM: SPEECH/WRITING HIERARCHY**

Related to logocentrism, Derrida resuscitates *writing* in its proper pedestal after it has been enslaved from a tradition known as *phonocentrism*. Earlier as discussed, Saussure’s project could be well grasped by the differences of sounds (phonemes) produced per syllables to point meanings. Thus Saussure advocated the importance of speech over writing, for through the former that his project of *la langue* and *parole* is rationalized. In Plato’s *Pharmacy*, Derrida traces the genealogy of this hierarchy by going back to what Plato said about writing: “Plato is bent on presenting writing as an occult, and therefore suspects, power. Just like painting, to which he will later compare it, and like optical illusions and techniques of mimesis in general.<sup>42</sup>”

Furthermore, writing is condemned as a distortion of, a parasite with, an allusion from, speech. In the *Phaedrus* Plato condemns writing as “bastardized form of communication; separated from the father or the 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.<sup>43</sup>

With this kind of perspective, only a deconstructive treatment (as Derrida believed) could reverse and place writing in its proper region within the linguistic tapestry. Yet, as a caution, writing is not entirely just an actual jotting down, scribbling and combining of letters and words. It is the function of writing as writing which is understood within a Derridarean framework. Because without distinguishing which is which, Derrida would fall into an equivocal fallacy. Thus for Derrida 'writing is a difference' away from the difference between writing and speech. This is what he calls as *archi-writing*. It is a

...movement of difference, irreducible *archi-synthesis*, opening at once towards temporization in one and the self-same possibility; language cannot, insofar as it is a condition of the entire linguistic system, be a part of the linguistic system or be situated as an object in its field (1967: 82).

By *archi* we mean the beginning or the origin that dilutes writing and speech into a temporized category. The passage however tells us that this writing is a condition, a part and an effect of a linguistic system. Thus it ceases simultaneously as the origin because it is displaced throughout the linguistic system. To explain this, it is wrong to conclude that speech precedes writing, for there is 'writing' happening in our thought that serves as an *archi-type* of either speech or writing and vice-versa. Thus writing is not a distorted replica of speech. In the same way, 'archi-writing' is the very condition of the possibility of language as an articulated system, and which permits us to understand the true articulation of speech and writing, referred to as the 'formulation of form.'<sup>44</sup> Let us presume therefore two examples to explicate the ambivalence between the originary and non-originary characteristics of this 'archi-writing.' An infant, for example, before learning to speak is somehow constructing his thought using words from his mother or from anybody else. But since, he could not utter a word yet he only mumbles sounds to respond, the child's mind is simulating and stimulating all these experiences of mimicking, observation, and response prior to speaking by way of writing these experiences mentally. At the age of one onwards, the mind<sup>45</sup> has written these formally to utter sensible words, such as "mama", "papa", "uh...uh". *Archi-writing* hence, using this analogy, is a pre-speech phenomenon. It is the origin of speech and subsequently of writing. Another example is when we talk or communicate with others. Either we speak or write to communicate our ideas, 'archi-writing' is amassing and assembling our thought to produce effects. Hence, it is said to be a trace, where the moment we speak the trace is erased because it is a manifestation of the mental state. Our mental state is unalienable and impenetrable, thus this 'archi-writing' is a trace of trace of no trace...

Being primordial must be thought on the basis of trace, and not the reverse. This pro-writing is at work at the origin of the sense. Sense, being temporal in nature...is never simply present; it is always already engaged in the 'movement' of the trace, that is, in order of signification.<sup>46</sup>

Thus the sentence, “you are the sunshine of my life”...could be traced mentally, which means prior to writing or speaking this, it originates from within—a mental construct. But to trace within as ‘you’ (to refer to somebody, something), ‘sunshine’ (as a metaphor for what? What does it stand for?), ‘my’ (self? feeling? experience?), and ‘life’ (myself? body? me?) could be an endless trace of signification. This metaphorical allusion is also predicated within or from complex foundations such as, but not limited to, the system of signification/interpretation, the necessity of context, the authorial intent, and a whole sense of determining effects after such “writerly allusion” or “utterance” is subjected into scrutiny. What is being hindered from these effects is the “position” and “voice” of the reader to understand with ease or with meaningful pretext an appreciation of what has been read in the first place. Deconstruction may possibly burden the reader to make initial success in “understanding the text” in the first place. And as a result, it creates another form of “hierarchy of enclosure/s” that diminishes the participation of multiple voices/responses of other readers. As a privileged reading strategy, it therefore privileges only the few.

The utterance (in speaking) or mark (writing) is but one of the traces of an endless pre-writing of traces. Reading becomes then a different spectrum in the field of deconstruction. Reading in a practical sense is understanding & consummating knowledge of the text. Furthermore, re-reading or critiquing this text using a deconstructive framework entails difficulty for readers outside the margins of deconstruction. It becomes an “endless displacement of meaning which governs language and places it forever beyond the reach of a stable, self-authenticating knowledge.”<sup>47</sup>

## PHILOSOPHY AS WRITING

This *archi-writing* has been pushed towards a radical christening—the shattering of the demarcation between philosophy and literature. “Derrida is able to thematized the end of philosophy, conceived as the theory of accuracy of representation, as an event within writing, by recognizing that its dream applies to reading and writing as well”<sup>48</sup> Derrida has something to say about the margins of philosophy in his essay *Tympan*:

Philosophy says so too: within because philosophical discourse intends to know and to master its margin, to define the line, align the page, enveloping it its volume. Without because the margin, its margin, its outside are empty, are outside: a negative about which there seems to be nothing to do, a negative effect in the text or a negative working in the service of meaning, the margin...in the dialectics of the Book.<sup>49</sup>

This compares philosophy with that of the sheets or papers of the book. Philosophy is within the book, written in all the pages. Thus the margin of philosophy, the edge of the page is its limit. Nothing can be put outside the margin, no philosophy can be written outside the page, so to speak. But to continue in doing philosophy, we need a tabula rasa, another clean sheet or blank page where we can write again. To reiterate, no philosophy exists outside the margins, outside ‘mere’ writing. Hence philosophy is appropriated as just writing and is reduced as mere literature of the *logos*

(of the philosophical enterprise). This is outrageously disturbing which hails the end of metaphysics of presence as philosophy, and vice-versa, by merely contrasting and comparing it to writing. It is disturbing because Derrida contradicts himself about what he means by writing or archi-writing. In fact, to put it this way, the end of philosophy that stands on the 'end' which is ambiguous following Derrida, is nothing more, nothing less a stance on nihilism.

### **SELF-DESTRUCT DECONSTRUCTION: THE FLAW OF THE AXE IN ITSELF**

Deconstruction is shrieking the inevitable end of philosophy, that it is this end where literature/writing relegates the tasks of philosophers. Derrida's framework is a labyrinth which signifies the finality of searching any point of entrance and exit. Deconstruction in this context destroys strategically the *logos* (philosophy) and the *text* (writings of the philosophers and others) and simultaneously annihilates the reader's context in proceeding with this framework. It only means that by reading a text (using a deconstructive reading) is tantamount to destroying the mode of reading traditionally inscribed to this reading. Thus a reading could be without understanding because in the outset, a framework such as Derrida's, is misreading all together in this attempt. Gary Madison says that: "Derrida's critique of metaphysics lands us, for all practical purposes, in a debilitating relativism, a kind of philosophical nihilism...Derrida's handling of texts is 'mutilated or castrated for it is...without the claim to knowledge or truth.'<sup>50</sup>" In fact, there's nothing new with this *differance*. If we look back, Sextus Empiricus had already laid down the specter of light for Derrida's exorcism known as deconstruction.

Skepticism is an ability...which opposes appearance to judgments in any way whatsoever, with the result that, owing to the equipollence of the objects and reasons thus opposed, we are brought firstly to state of mental suspense and next to a state of 'unperturbedness' or quietude.<sup>51</sup>

Deconstruction is an ability, a free play of play that mixes the text and the logos while underscoring its opposition to displace these two by reason and textual meaning within (or even beyond) the end of no finality. It consequently then assumes a temporization and suspension or deference in grasping the equipollence of text and the logos. Except for the last state after temporarization, deconstruction destroys quietude since it unsettles conformity and closure. Quietude may point to within the context of desconstruction as the nihilism of nihilism, i.e., the sound of the hand one clapping.. Furthermore, "unlike ordinary, run-of-the-mill critiques, it is, however a critique from, so to speak, nowhere. But because it is from nowhere, this is precisely why it is basically nihilistic."<sup>52</sup>

Going back to the end of philosophy, deconstruction does not entirely push the end but the limit of philosophy. David Wood explains this limit as: "The structure of the thought that would see a limit in the desire to overcome all limits is both complex and exemplary. Limits are always limits to some project or desire or ambition. But such projects are themselves open to scrutiny"<sup>53</sup> Deconstruction has opened itself up to scrutiny which debunks the nihilistic claim that this is a time to end philosophy. Philosophy is not merely literature because the margin as limit is philosophy. Only

philosophy can go beyond this mere reduction to ‘writing’. Philosophy is therefore not literature in this respect, as hastily generalized in a deconstructive framework, for it can reside outside the margins. ‘It (philosophy) allows and forces us to rethink the question of ends, of beginnings, of margins, of limits, thresholds—the very spaces of *philosophy*’ [Italics mine.]<sup>54</sup> The text and the logos are shattered and dissolved into one not as an endless claim of text as/in everything but of philosophy as limited in this everything. Philosophy in this everything is manifested by language alone, for silence of both the text and the logos could be well the disastrous limit, worst the ‘end’. Yet it is not the end because both pervade in reason and in meaning. Wittgenstein also echoes this: “The limits of my language are the limits of my world.”<sup>55</sup> Derrida’s framework works in reverse, the limitless language of a deconstructionist as a free-play of reading a text ushers in multiple and complex world/s of interpretation. Again, Wittgenstein says: “Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.”<sup>56</sup> Derrida is just mystifying and mythologizing our intelligence, an insult in its extreme, by his juggling of language in an immodest and violent way. His language is violence shrouded with a bewitching apparition of end...nihilism...skepticism and aporia. It is like a language game without a game or a language where anyone for that matter can join. Deconstruction is just offering us broken eyeglasses to see in a different way what is there to be seen. But because it is broken, our sight could only see a mutilated, wrecked and ruined version of reality. The more we wear this ‘kind’ of eyeglasses, the more we become deluded to believe that reality is broken, destroyed...nihilistic.

Another point is that Derrida using his framework has just given us a radical form of writing, reading and speaking. Likewise, he denies the metaphysics of presence yet in the end his project is but another metaphysics. This is what I call **LOGODECENTRISM** because the center aspired in logocentrism is destroyed. The grounding truth is decentered to sway away from conformity and presence but the ‘untruth’ and ‘de-center’ are the sprouting seeds of yet another foundation of presence. To regenerate this framework is to say that the logos and text are pulled away, displaced in all its significations, in its reasons or meanings. Hence, there is another closure of this presence in absence—the presence in pretension to accentuate absence! This is in fact indicative in his constructions of differance, archi-writing, trace and margins which are nonetheless metaphysical idealities. In this respect, deconstruction (the axe that grinds logocentrism) has failed or is prone to failure because it becomes prey to another closure. This is *logo-de-centricism* at its best!

---

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Metaphysics of conformity or logocentrism refers to a new form of idealism that Jacques Derrida is referring to in *Positions* trans. Allan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

---

<sup>2</sup> Language at this stage became a crucial subject matter for philosophers especially for analytic philosophers like Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein, among others. Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* offered this explanation: “The book deals with the problems of philosophy, and shows, I believe, that the reason why these problems are posed is that the logic of our language is misunderstood. The whole sense of the book might be summed up the following words: what can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence. Thus the aim of the book is to draw a limit to thought, or rather—not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts...It will therefore only be in **language** that the limit can be drawn, and what lies on the side of the limit will simply be nonsense.”(<http://filepedia.org/files/Ludwig%20Wittgenstein%20-%20Tractatus%20Logico-Philosophicus.pdf>), original text published in 1922.

Language then in Wittgenstein’s work in *Tractatus* becomes a metacritical tool to limit our thought to knowable propositions and facts about reality. The book’s arguments are highly debatable even Wittgenstein himself abandoned and modified some of it in his succeeding works but the sense of it all runs contrary against the claims of “metaphysics” or “ontology.”

<sup>3</sup> Derrida deconstructs Husserl’s *Logical Investigation* in his work *Speech and Phenomenon*. See J. Claude Evan’s *Strategies of Deconstruction: Derrida and the myth of the voice*. Minnesota & Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

<sup>4</sup> Saussure’s phonocentrism is critiqued in Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*, *Ibid*.

<sup>5</sup> Even Richard Rorty made a distinction of those who admired and rejected Derrida’s philosophical rigor: “In the first place, there are those who are taken by the rigor of Derrida’s arguments. Here we find such writers as Culler, Christopher Norris, Irene Harvey and Rodolphe Gasche. On the other side we find Geoffrey Hartman and above all Rorty himself.” *Ibid*, xiii.

<sup>6</sup> This is a question of tentativity. Whether deconstruction is a strategic reading or a literary cum philosophical system of analysis, the writer of this paper assumes that using such entails in the beginning a “difficulty precedes meaning” discomfort. True enough if these “difficulties” are not sorted out or not properly appreciated, mis-appropriation and displacement occur in applying deconstructive reading. This is where aporia and nihilism come into the picture. As one tries to apply it, the more mis-appropriation and displacement occur, the more it becomes difficult to assume a Derridian deconstruction (which is not actually what it intends to be), the more it becomes less precise, reliable, pragmatic as a method, a strategy and a system (which it actually wants to be to reject enclosure or a metaphysics of conformity). The next question, then: Where do we stand and where do we start in the first place?

<sup>7</sup> This claim can be traced in Nietzsche’s assumption that literature plays a statutory mark in the history and historicity of philosophy—that is, philosophy is only a part of literature inscribed and transcribed by and through writing. You can find this overarching Nietzschean view on literature in Bernd Magnus, et. al. *Nietzsche’s Case: Philosophy as/and Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 14.

<sup>8</sup> Jane Tompkins, *Reader Response Criticism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980), xxiv.

<sup>9</sup> Leonard Jackson, *The Poverty of Structuralism: Literature and Structuralist Theory* (London and New York: Longman, 1992), 20.

<sup>10</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin, (London: Duckworth, 1959).

<sup>11</sup> Raman Selden, *Practicing Theory and Reading Literature* (London: Routledge, 1989), 76.

---

<sup>12</sup> For instance, here in the Philippines the 'tree' becomes *puno* but in such no way that it refers only to acacia, pine tree, etc. Each word in this signification must be thought of as it is without any reference if this 'it is' exists or refers to reality.

<sup>13</sup> Raman Selden, 89.

<sup>14</sup> Jakson, 42.

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction* (Cornell University Press, 1982),98.

<sup>16</sup> Peggy Kamuf. Ed. *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), viii.

<sup>17</sup> It is because deconstruction is like a breezing wind signaling havoc and disaster from nowhere as it morphs into a violent storm radically destroying the foundation and the present dogmatic frame of thinking of philosophers. The most controversial and considered by some critics as Derrida's finest immanent critique and deconstructive reading is his works on Edmund Husserl's philosophy of consciousness and of Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic structuralism. See Claude Evans, 1991; and Peggy Kamuf, 1991.

<sup>18</sup> Culler, 85.

<sup>19</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Allan Bass, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 41.

<sup>20</sup> Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (London and New York: Methuen), 18.

<sup>21</sup> Later in this paper, I shall deal with this claim that philosophy is de-privileged and subverted in favor of writing and/or literature.

<sup>22</sup> Norris, 18.

<sup>23</sup> It's like looking on how to destroy or to defeat an enemy. A critical fighter finds the waterloo of the enemy's strength. Once noticed, he can proceed to a seemingly uncritical ways of eradicating the unsuspecting opponent. An engineer, in another example, would estimate the core foundation of a wrecked building before demolishing it. In this way, he can proceed to start its demolition as easily as possible by following his estimates. For a deconstructionist like Derrida, once a building or a structure has collapsed it does not end there. The attitude is to continuously destroy the 'collapsed' structures into pieces. It is an endless way of deconstruction.

<sup>24</sup> Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction and the Interest of Theory* (London: Printer Publishers), 1988.

<sup>25</sup> Selden, 89.

<sup>26</sup> Allan Montefiore, *Philosophy in France Today* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 40-41..

<sup>27</sup> Selden, 89.

<sup>28</sup> Brian Fay, *Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science* (New York: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 130.

<sup>29</sup> Norris, 1988: 215.

<sup>30</sup> Selden, 89; Cf. Derrida, *Positions*, 41-46.

<sup>31</sup> John Harwood, *The Poverty of Interpretation: Eliot to Derrida* (London: Palgrave), 164.

---

<sup>32</sup> Emerita Quito, *Philosophers of Hermeneutics* (Manila: De la Salle University Press, 1990), 105.

<sup>33</sup> Jacques Derrida 'Margins of Philosophy' *A Derrida Reader*, Ed. Kamuf Peggy (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 65.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Quito, 106.

<sup>36</sup> Quito, 67.

<sup>37</sup> Derrida, *Positions*, 51.

<sup>38</sup> Derrida, "Speech and Phenomena" in Kamuf, 1991, 19.

<sup>39</sup> Derrida says that: "It could be shown that all names related to fundamentals to principles or to the center have always designated the constant of a presence" in Kamuf, 411.

<sup>40</sup> Culler, 92-93.

<sup>41</sup> Derrida, "Writing and Differance", in Kamuf, 23.

<sup>42</sup> Derrida, "Dissemination" in Kamuf, 127.

<sup>43</sup> Culler, 100.

<sup>44</sup> Quito, 109.

<sup>45</sup> This principle of a child learning the inner grammar of language is likened to the "universal generative grammar" of Noam Chomsky in "Topics in the theory of Generative Grammar," *The Philosophy of Language*, Ed. J.R. Searle. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).

<sup>46</sup> Derrida, "Margins of Philosophy," 85.

<sup>47</sup> Norris, 1985: 29.

<sup>48</sup> Magnus, et.al, 14.

<sup>49</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Margins of Philosophy," trans. Allan Bass, 163.

<sup>50</sup> Gary Madison, "Beyond Seriousness and Frovility: A Gadamerian Response to Deconstruction" *Gadamer and Hermeneutics* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 121.

<sup>51</sup> Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* trans., R. G. Bury. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933), 4,8.

<sup>52</sup> Madison, 124.

<sup>53</sup> David Wood, *Philosophy of the Limit*. (London: Uniwin Hyman Ltd, 1990), xv.

<sup>54</sup> Wood, xvi.

<sup>55</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge & Keagan Paul, 1922).

---

<sup>56</sup> Wittgenstein, 109.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Chomsky, Noam. "Topics in the Theory of Generative Grammar," in *The Philosophy of Language*, ed. J.R. Searle. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972.
- Culler, Jonathan. *On Deconstruction*. Cornell University Press, 1982.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Margins of Philosophy," trans. Alan Bass 1982 in *A Derrida Reader*. Edited by Kamuf Peggy. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Dissemination," trans. B. Johnson 1981 in *A Derrida Reader*. Edited by Kamuf Peggy. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Of Grammatology" trans. Gayatri Spivak 1974, in *A Derrida Reader*. Edited by Kamuf Peggy. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Speech and Phenomenon" in *A Derrida Reader*. Edited by Kamuf Peggy. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1967/1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Writing and Difference" in *A Derrida Reader*. Edited by Kamuf Peggy. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1967/1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Positions*, trans. and annotated by Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
- Empiricus, Sextus. *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, trans. R. G. Bury. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933.
- Evans, J. Claude. *Strategies of Deconstruction: Derrida and the Myth of the Voice*. Minnesota & Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
- Fay, Brian. *Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science*. New York: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.
- Harwood, John. *The Poverty of Interpretation: Eliot to Derrida*. London: Palgrave.
- Jackson, Leonard. *The Poverty of Structuralism: Literature and Structuralist Theory*. London and New York: Longman, 1992.
- Madison, Gary. "Beyond Seriousness and Frivolity: A Gadamerian Response to Deconstruction" in *Gadamer and Hermeneutics*. Edited by Hugh Silverman. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Magnus, Bernd, et. al. *Nietzsche's Case: Philosophy as/and Literature*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Montefiore, Allan, ed. *Philosophy in France Today*. Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Norris, Christopher. *Deconstruction and the Interest of Theory*. London: Printer Publishers, 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*. London and New York: Methuen, 1985.
- Quito, Emerita S. *Philosophers of Hermeneutics*. Manila: De la Salle University Press, 1990.

---

Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin. London: Duckworth, 1916/1959.

Selden, Raman. *Practicing Theory and Reading Literature*. London: Routledge, 1989..

Tompkins, Jane. *Reader Response Criticism*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980.

Wittsenteins, Ludwig. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. London: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1922.  
<<http://filepedia.org/files/Ludwig%20Wittgenstein%20-%20Tractatus%20Logico-Philosophicus.pdf>>accessed on July 21, 2010.

\_\_\_\_\_ *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953.

Wood, Davis. *Philosophy of the Limit* (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd.,1990).