

Derrida's Philosophized Literary Perspective

Of "Deconstruction": From the Subversion of "Metaphysics of Presence"
to the Creation of "Thought of Difference"

التفكيك في توجهه الأدبي المفلسف عند جاك ديريدا..
من هدم ميتافيزيقا الحضور الى بناء فكر الاختلاف

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Abstract: This article analyses how Derrida's cognitive and deconstructive act of subverting "Metaphysics of Presence" allowed him to create the concept of "Writing". It examines his motifs behind resorting to "Deconstruction" as a means that enabled him to, philosophically, establish the postmodern thought and literature. The objectives of this paper can be summarized in the following questions: What is Deconstruction? Is it a method, theory or a philosophical school? How did Derrida, using Deconstruction, manage to subvert "Metaphysics of Presence"? How can we apply Deconstruction for the study of literary and philosophical texts? Finally, why should we use it in the first place?

Key Words: Generation, Sarcasm, Virtue, Perception, Axioms.

الملخص: ما يتطلع إليه تفكيرنا في هذا البحث؛ هو رصد الحركة الفكرية التفكيكية الدريدية من "ميتافيزيقا الحضور" تجاوزا، إلى حضور "الكتابة" تأسيسا. وذلك ببيان وتحليل دوافع وأفاق لجوء دريدا إلى استراتيجية "التفكيك" للتأسيس الفلسفي لفكر وأدب ما بعد الحداثة. وهي استراتيجية تتأسس على آليتي الهدم والبناء: أولا: هدم "ميتافيزيقا الحضور" بما هي مرجع الفكر المتمركز حول ذاته والخاضع لسلطة العقل المطلقة، والمهمش لكل ما هو لا عقلي وخيالي. وثانيا: بناء "فكر الاختلاف" الشارد عن النسق الميتافيزيقي، وعن كل تمركز حول العقل، والمنفتح على الهامش اللاعقلي والتمخيل. وبين الهدم والبناء مسافة إبستمولوجية ومنهجية فاصلة بين تصور للحقيقة وطريقة للفهم خاضع ومرتب للمعنى في ثباته وخطيته المشدودة إلى ميتافيزيقا الحضور التي تجعل من الكلام والصوت أصلا لاستخلاص المعنى، وخطاب فكري مغاير ومختلف، يتأسس على "الكتابة". بديلا لميتافيزيقا الحضور. كهامش يتحرك نحو المركز ليتمركز كمرجعية للتفكير، ولتتقوم كأصل للكلام وليس العكس. الكلمات المفتاحية: توليد. تمكيم. فضيلة. صورنة. الماهيات.

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Introduction

"Deconstruction", as a reading strategy, depends on the mechanisms of subversion and creation. It embodies the postmodernist activity and perception that the truth exists in mythology, imagination, madness and literature instead of restricting its source to the rational. These postmodernist sources of the truth, Derrida labels as "Thought of Difference". The mechanisms of subversion and creation are methodologically and epistemologically different processes. Their difference lies not only in the way truth is perceived, but also in the way meaning is understood. In "Metaphysics of Presence", meaning is singular, derived from speech and sound. By way of contrast, for Derrida, it is considered a different discourse established upon "Writing" as a substitution of "Metaphysics of Presence". Derrida's objective behind using these two mechanisms, as an epistemological base, is to allow emancipate the meaning from the semantic identification. Hence, open to the multiplicity of denotations. This multiplicity becomes the structure of the text. As a result, it becomes open to the multiplicity of truth's sources and interpretations. Moreover, the meaning becomes the active agent that determines the truth, not the author or the text.

"1 of Presence" and the Necessity of its Subversion

Metaphysics had been both an ontological and epistemological totalitarian reference to the construction of any rational knowledge, which determines any existence. Metaphysics determines existence through presence, which Derrida comments on saying: "The history of metaphysics, is like the history of the West, is the determination of being as *presence*..."¹. Notably, this presence is "Metaphysics of Presence". However, what do we mean by presence in the first place?

According to Derrida, Presence is: " presence of the thing to the sight as *eidos*, presence as substance/essence/existence, temporal presence as point of the now or of the moment, the self-presence of the cogito, consciousness, subjectivity, the co-presence of the other and of the self, intersubjectivity as the intentional phenomenon of the ego, and so forth"². This presence manifests itself in ideas. Thus, it is a conscious act. The modernist system perceives consciousness as the active agent in the process of presence. According to Derrida: "The deconstruction of presence accomplishes itself through the deconstruction of consciousness..."³. Thus, Derrida's aim was to

¹ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass, Chicago University Press, 1978, p:279.

² Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Translator Preface, Translated by Gayatri Spivak, John Hopkins University Press, 1997, p: 12.

³ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p:70.

deconstruct this totalitarian, metaphysical reference. Rejecting it, deconstructing its system, Derrida established an oppositional reference, which is "Différance".

2 The Concept of Différance and the Necessity of its Foundation

According to Derrida, "Différance" has two signifiers. The first one signifies spatial difference, whereas the second one signifies periodical difference (to defer in English). The objective of "Différance" is to emphasize the importance of linguistic efficiency in the understanding and interpretation of truth. Derrida's aim behind establishing this concept is to reject restricting the truth to language. In this sense, truth does not exist in language. In fact, it transcends it, as it is embodied in the way we interpret it. Thus, the expression of truth is dependent on meaning, which is open to infinite interpretations. That is, it has no reference to rely on, no entity, and no essence. It cannot be reduced or restricted by any pre-determined linguistic construction.¹ In this respect, Derrida concludes: "The true nature of "presence" and "deferred presence" of meaning cannot be perceived unless language is completely deconstructed. What language reveals and hides is merely language itself, not any eternal source... Language can defer meaning to the future"².

"Writing" as a Creative Space for the Production of "Thought of Différance"

"Différance" adheres to the multiple sources of the truth instead of the metaphysical source. For Derrida, excluding the mind, allows new meanings to generate instead of the existence of one singular rational meaning. The space where these meanings generate, he calls "Writing".

"Writing" is not a means of expressing one single, determined meaning by external sources that the writer receives (from the logos). It is itself the source/space of creating meanings. In other words, "writing" is a type/field of creation. In this respect, Derrida says: "It is also to be incapable of making meaning absolutely precede writing: it is thus to lower meaning while simultaneously elevating inscription...Meaning must await being said or written in order to inhabit itself, and in order to become, by differing from itself, what it is: meaning"³. That is, there is no predetermined meaning by an external source. Meaning exists neither before nor after the process of writing⁴. It is the product of writing and reading. Hence, meaning is determined by interpretation. In this sense, language ceases to act as an indicator, and meaning is no longer governed by the signifier-signified rule. Language is a

¹ نجيب جورج عوض: "اللغة والمعنى في تفكيكية جاك دريدا، <https://plus.google.com> الربط: Posted 21st March 2018

² ibid. 6

³ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, Alan Bass (trans.), (London & Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 10-11

⁴ Ibid. p. 11

game, an act full of surprises¹. That is, meaning becomes undefined and multiple instead of determined and singular. It is the creation of "Writing" and not "Metaphysics of Presence". Meaning is constructed only through the deferral of the metaphysical presence. Hence, the act of writing becomes free from the authority of the metaphysical reference that adheres to the singularity of meaning and uses language to produce this already, singular, predetermined meaning. According to Derrida language is related to "writing" not the abstract thought (logos). The association of language with "writing" is what enables language to subvert the singularity of its content and source: "The association of language with writing provides this former with a subversive ability. Because, according to Derrida, writing itself is a subversive process of using letters, words and sentences' apparatus. The word "writing", according to Derrida, can be said of all means of spoken expression, be it transcription or any other means that transcends vocal apparatus"². The interaction between language and writing liberates the meaning from the metaphysical reference and its singularity. In this sense, "Writing" as the space that creates meaning and produces language, enables the meaning to use language. This latter becomes an individual creative activity, not systematic or governed by a signifier-signified rule like De Saussure argues.

Thus, meaning becomes the text and language at the same time. They cease to function as means of expressing the metaphysical truth. Furthermore, language is not universal like what Leibniz argues. In fact, it is contextual. What language signifies has no universal feature, and cannot be subjected to agreement or consensus. Thus, the writer is a creative person, uncontrolled by the presence of Metaphysics, which imposes meaning on him.

Derrida has established the concept of "Differance" to liberate meaning, language and the writer. He believes that language/meaning do not signify the essence of objects or express any entity outside language. Instead, they reveal the diversity of meanings that writing produces. In this sense, language/meaning are produced only within the text and through the deferment of meaning's presence. Thus, the writer becomes free.

Deconstruction as a Method of Criticism

The sole objective of "Deconstruction" is to liberate truth from the singular metaphysical reference. In Metaphysics of Presence, language is a tool used to express the metaphysical truth. Derrida criticises this metaphysical/transcendental truth, which he refers to as the Transcendental Signifier. He believes that this latter is extracted from reality/nature rather than being

¹ نجيب جورج عوض: "اللغة والمعنى في تفكيكية جاك دريدا"، <https://plus.google.com/p/الربط> Posted 21st March 2018

² Ibid. p. 9.

transcendental. In this sense, he notes that man reaches this meaning through processing, not reception. Thus, language is not a tool of understanding meaning. It is a reference to the truth (producing meaning). It subverts the "one signifier refers to one signified" metaphysical rule. In this context, Derrida claims that one signifier can have multiple signified signs and vice versa. Thus, language becomes the source of truth instead of metaphysics.

Significantly, to deconstruct the metaphysical reference of the truth, Derrida have established a set of principles that opposes the metaphysical categories¹. These Derridean principles are trace, difference, dissemination, grammatology and intertextuality.

1 Trace

The Derridean concept of "trace" equates the metaphysical concept of presence. In this sense, "trace" is a deconstructive meaning to the metaphysical meaning of presence: "The trace is not a presence but is rather the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself. The trace has, properly speaking, no place, for effacement belongs to the very structure of the trace.... The effacing of this early trace ... of difference is, therefore "the same" as its tracing within the text of metaphysics. This metaphysical text must have retained a mark of what is lost or put in reserve, set aside"². In other words, "trace" deconstructs the metaphysical concept of (metaphysical) trace and presence³. It has the ability to dismantle the singularity of meaning and create diversity and multiplicity of meanings through referring to the text instead of Metaphysics of Presence. In this sense, Derrida argues: "the trace follows the series of substitutions that help make up the play of difference (difference and deferral). That is why ultimately, "The (pure) trace is difference"⁴.

This, according to Derrida, is done through two movements: erasing the object and keeping it with the rest of its signs. That is, "trace" is a channel that links the sign with the previous texts and signs: "The trace is not only the disappearance of origin — within the discourse that we sustain and according to the path that we follow it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a non-origin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin. From then on, to wrench the concept of the trace from the classical scheme, which would

¹ محمد عناني: المصطلحات الأدبية الحديثة: دراسة ومعجم إنجليزي/عربي، الشركة المصرية العالمية للنشر – لوئجمان، الطبعة الثانية، سنة 1997، ص 135 – 136.

² Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena: And Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs.*, David B. Allison (trans.). Evanston: Northwestern University Press, p. 156

³ ميجان الرويلي وسعد البازعي: المرجع السابق، ص 55.

⁴ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 62

derive it from a presence or from an originary non-trace and which would make of it an empirical mark, one must indeed speak of an originary trace or arche-trace... trace is difference"¹.

Notably, the text itself is the author's trace. This trace is rich with multiple meanings and other texts. And since the truth lies in the text itself, it becomes relative, multiple and diverse. This feature is what makes the act of "writing this truth" fragmented. In other words, Derrida have established "trace" in order to dismantle the metaphysical belief of "truth is absolute".

In sum, "trace" deconstructs the metaphysical reference of "presence" to be referred to the text instead. This metaphysical presence adheres to the antecedence of the signified over the signifier as De Saussure claimed. That is, there are concepts beyond denotations². Derrida has established "Deconstruction" only to subvert this metaphysical view on the truth.

2 Différance/Deferment

Différance indicates opposition and dissimilitude. Derrida has invented this word from the French verb *différer* which has two meanings in French language. The first one is dissemblance and the second meaning signifies deferment (*remettre à un autre temps*). Taking from the first denotation its spatial signification and from the second one its periodical signification (*defer*), Derrida created a new word that did not exist in French, which is *différance* that signifies difference and deferral at the same time³. Garrison best explains this concept: "Derrida distinguishes two senses of the verb "to differ." One sense indicates the different; it "signifies non-identity" or "distinction, inequality, or discernibility"⁴. The other sense indicates deferral; "it expresses the interposition of delay, the interval of a spacing and temporalizing that puts off until 'later' what is presently denied, the possible that is presently impossible"⁵ Derrida uses the term "Différance" to designate "this sameness which is not identical"⁶.

This Derridean concept means that a meaning is generated from the difference between signifiers. Despite their differences, they all connect as each signifier is determined through its relation with other signifiers. Notably, the meaning of each signifier is not completely present (it is absent despite

¹ Francisco J. Varela and Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *Understanding Origins*, Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science, Volume 130, 1991.p 57

² محمد عناني المرجع السابق، ص 137 – 138.

³ يوسف وغلبيسي: إشكالية المصطلح في الخطاب النقدي العربي الجديد، منشورات الاختلاف، الجزائر، ط1، 2009، ص: 360

⁴ Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, p 129

⁵ Ibid.127

⁶ Jim, Garrison. John Dewey, Jacques Derrida, and the Metaphysics of Presence, p 353.

its presence). Hence, Différance is opposed to both presence and absence. In fact, it preceded them¹. In this sense, Différance is an opportunity to generate multiple meanings. It allows meanings to gather and generate. Thus, the text becomes loaded with meanings that are diverse.

Derrida argues that Différance is embodied in the field of literature because it uses the signifier from the metaphysics of presence, however, at the same time, it deconstructs it through allegories and metaphors. In this sense, literature is a deconstructive movement of the text itself. It perceives the truth within language and readers can construct this truth by themselves instead of receiving it. Literature is dependent on imagination, which Derrida perceives as one of the fundamental truth's sources: "The imagination (as a productive faculty of cognition) is a powerful agent for creating, as it were, a second nature of the material supplied to it by actual nature"².

Significantly, due to this deconstructive feature of literature, it celebrates the diversity of meaning without falling prey to the contradictions of signifiers and signified signs³.

Différance makes of literature a body of interrelated texts, open to interpretations and endless meanings. Reading these texts, interpreting their meanings is the task of the reader not the author's. This reading experience leads to the reconciliation between all the possible meanings. In this respect, Rosenblatt claims: "The poem [literature], then, must be thought of as an event in time. It is not an object or an ideal entity. It happens during a coming-together, a compenetration, of a reader and a text. The reader brings to the text his past experience and present personality. Under the magnetism of the ordered symbols of the text, he marshals his resources and crystallizes out from the stuff of memory, thought, and feeling a new order, a new experience, which he sees as the poem. This becomes part of the ongoing stream of his life experience, to be reflected on from any angle important to him as a human being"⁴.

In this sense, deconstructionists like Geoffrey Hartman believe that deconstruction in literature perceives the truth to exist in the external world, not the language the logos uses to emphasize the so-called metaphysical truth⁵.

¹ عبد الوهاب المسيري: موسوعة اليهود واليهودية والصهيونية – نموذج تفسيري جديد، دار الشروق، مصر، الطبعة الأولى، 1999، المجلد الخامس، ص 426.

² Jacques, Derrida, Writing and Difference, p 7.

³ محمد عناني المرجع السابق، ص 143 – 144.

⁴ Louise Rosenblatt, The reader, the text, and the poem: the transactional theory of the Literary World, p 12

⁵ محمد عناني المرجع السابق، ص 145 – 146

Literature managed to be emancipated from the logos' authority because of its functional and structural feature which is embodied in "imagination". Commenting on this, Grass notes that: "In lights of Deconstruction, the importance of literature lies in its ability to expand its limits through destructing the metaphysical boundaries of reality through exposing its historical nature. Great literary pieces always deconstruct their meanings whether the author is aware of that or not. Literature is the most efficient art when it comes to unveiling the linguistic process that enables man to discover and perceive his world temporarily. It is an endless perception"¹.

In sum, in order to liberate language and truth, we need to resort of Deconstruction.

3 Dissemination/Fragmentation

Metaphysics of presence adheres to unity and singularity on the basis that the meaning is singular. By way of contrast, in Deconstruction, the meaning is fragmented, disseminated, diverse and multiple. In this sense, the diversity and multiplicity of signifiers make of one text multiple texts when read. Thus, the text becomes loaded with meanings readers extract. In relation to trace, dissemination/fragmentation means that a signifier leaves only its trace as the process of understanding the meaning of that signifier is in a state of deferral. That is, dissemination/fragmentation is the trace of a specific signifier². In this context, a text is a body of signifiers, which are void of meanings as they are traces without any presence. It is the reader's task to provide meanings and implications to these signifiers: "A novel or poem or play remains merely inkspots on a paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols. The literary work exists in the live circuit set up between reader and text: the reader infuses intellectual and emotional meanings into the pattern of verbal symbols, and those symbols channel his thoughts and feelings. Out of this complex process emerges a more or less organized imaginative experience"³.

That is, the reader does not submit to the textual signification. He/she rebels against the text itself. In this sense, the meaning becomes diverse, exists in other texts produced by the reader. The reader simply subverts unity and singularity of meaning/s to establish its/their diversity and fragmentation.

According to Derrida, the fragmentation/dissemination of meaning means the excessiveness of meanings, as in the "general language"⁴, a signifier has multiple significations/signified signs. This

¹ المرجع نفسه، ص 147.

² عبد الوهاب المسيري: المرجع السابق، ص 437

³ Louise, Rosenblatt, Literature as Exploration, p25.

⁴ ميجان الرويلي (دكتور) وسعد البازعي مرجع سابق، ص 66.

fragmentation of signifiers aims to decentralise the singularity of meaning. That is, there is no centre. There are marginal meanings (these meanings are the reader's production).

4 Grammarology

Derrida calls writing, "Grammarology" which is the essence of Deconstruction. It is the space that replaces speech (sound). In this sense, it liberates meaning from the authority of presence. Grammarology is the embodiment of Derrida's revolution against speech and sound as he calls for the subversion of speech's authority. Furthermore, it liberates the author from the authority of metaphysics as it helps express the meanings produced by the reader¹. It provides the opportunity for creation; it helps produce a new language that has multiple signifiers and significations. In this sense, using Grammarology, the author can create a language of his/her own instead of *using* the metaphysical language. That is, language becomes a *grammatological* production that creates meaning instead of explaining it. In fact, writing precedes even language as this former is produced within the text². That is, each individual creates his/her own language when writing. Briefly, language itself becomes a creative space. This is the sole aim of Grammarology.

5 Intertextuality

Intertextuality's function is interrelated with Grammarology. In this regard, Radjih argues that: "The author resorts to intertextuality in order to compensate for a linguistic or intellectual deficiency in order to transfer the reader from one time to another and one place to the other, whether deliberately or not. Simply, in order to engage the reader so he/she creates a flood of meanings"³. Because the text is a written trace, each text, is founded on other writings/texts, traces⁴. Thus, intertextuality means that a text is dependent on other texts. Hence, the task of the reader is to unveil the correlations and connections between these texts in terms of meaning and structure. Roland Barthes best elucidates this notion. He argues that a text is made of interaction with other texts from different cultures and societies (meanings) which gather in one spot. This spot is not the text, but rather the reader himself/herself. That is, the meaning is determined by the reader. Thus, a text becomes fragmentations of signifiers and significations. As a result, a text subverts the logocentric thought and move from the singularity of meaning to Différance.

¹ Read Derrida's *Of Grammarology*, 1967.

² بسام قطوس: استراتيجيات القراءة، مرجع السابق، ص3

³ سامية راجح، بشير تاويرت: فلسفة النقد التفكيكي، في الكتابات النقدية المعاصرة، عالم الكتب الحديث، أريد، ط1، 2009، ص.71

⁴ المرجع نفسه، ص.69

Conclusion

"Deconstruction" is not merely a semiotic analysis. It is a critical strategy, a postmodern perspective, and a school of studying literary and philosophical texts. It relies on an epistemological process that constitutes of two methods: subversion and creation. It subverts Metaphysics of Presence, presence of meaning in the mind and its metaphysical reference. This latter adheres to essence, logocentrism, singularity of meaning, authority of sound and speech on the expense of marginalising image and writing. This centralisation of the mind and marginalisation of the irrational is what made Derrida establish "Deconstruction". His aim, like Foucault, is to shed the light on the marginal, referring to the irrational when reading texts and approaching the truth. This deconstructionist reading depends on mechanisms of: Différance, trace, fragmentation and intertextuality. They aim to subvert the singularity and metaphysical reference of meaning and its logocentric construction, only to establish multiplicity of meaning and the irrationality of its production.

The essence of "Deconstruction" is writing. This latter refers us to intertextuality and fragmentation of meaning, which allow it to be divers. Thus, the reader finds himself/herself reading interrelated, diverse, multiple meanings instead of singular, metaphysical meanings. It is based on this reading strategy and the application of its mechanisms, "Thought of Différance" emerges while the thought of unity and singularity (metaphysics of presence) is subverted.

In sum, "Deconstruction" can be perceived as both a method of reading literary and philosophical texts and as a theory. Functionally, Deconstruction equates the Reader Response theory in literature. Both of them are reader-focused instead of author-focused. If we are to contextualise Derrida's cognitive contribution, we can say that Deconstruction is similar to Foucault's concept of Madness with one difference. Foucault failed to provide us with techniques to practice Madness, whereas Derrida provided techniques to practice the art, we would call it, of Deconstruction.

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