A critical analysis of Jacques Derrida's notion of 'There is nothing outside the text'

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Abstract— *The following paper presents a critical examination of Jacques Derrida's intriguing assertion, "There is nothing outside the text," set against the wider backdrop of the schools of Poststructuralism and Deconstruction. Taking into account Derrida's significant works of criticism, alongside critiques from notable figures like Frank Kermode and Stanley Fish, this study explores the profound implications of Derrida's assertions with regards to language, meaning, and reality. Additionally, the study places Derrida's ideas alongside those of significant earlier thinkers, such as Edmund Husserl's phenomenology and Ferdinand de Saussure's structural linguistics, emphasizing how Derrida questions the conventional boundaries between language and the reality it aims to depict. Through an exploration of key ideas like différance, trace, and textuality, the paper illustrates how Derrida deconstructs conventional epistemological structures, uncovering their underlying political aspects. In the end, the research suggests that Derrida's transformative view of text and context reveals the fabricated essence of truth and reality, shedding light on the political motivations inherent in every act of interpretation.*

Keywords— *Derrida, Deconstruction, Poststructuralism, Textuality, Différance, Anti-realism*

'Be alert to these invisible quotation marks, even within a word'

(Derrida, 1979)[1]

'Derrida's work, as we will see, is about "[putting] into practice a vigilant but . . . general *use* of quotation marks." Exploring the sense that "it is no longer possible to *use* seriously the words of tradition", his work is concerned with "destabiliz[ing] . . . the opposition between discourse *with* and discourse *without* quotation marks", in other words with destabilizing "philosophy in its entirety" and "theory in its entirety" as well'.[2]

In the beginning of his essay entitled '*Endings, continued*',[3] the contemporary critic Frank Kermode acknowledges the 'astonishing intellectual feat' of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*.[4] He then moves on to claim that Derrida's 'virtuosity is such that one sometimes feels genuinely embarrassed at claiming membership not only of the same profession but even of the same species'.[5] Speaking with regards to Derrida's deconstructionist arguments, Kermode later admits that 'a continual attention to the operations of *différance* may not be humanly supportable, and even if this is the way things

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[1] Bloom, Prof Harold, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, Geoffrey H. Hartman, and J. Hillis Miller. 2004. *Deconstruction and Criticism* (Continuum International Publishing Group)

[2] Royle, Nicholas. 2009. *In Memory of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press)

[3] Kermode, Frank. 1989. 'Endings, Continued', in *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*, eds Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (New York: Columbia University Press)

[4] Derrida, Jacques. 2016. *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press)

[5] Kermode, Frank. 1989. 'Endings, Continued', in *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*, eds Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (New York: Columbia University Press)

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really are, most of us may still have to behave as if they were otherwise'.[6] The concept of différance, central to Derrida's philosophy, refers to the dual process of differentiation and deferral of meaning, emphasizing that meanings are always unstable, never fully present, and perpetually delayed in language. Note that in symptomizing the psychoanalytic notion of Disavowal,[7] Kermode demonstrates how most scholars reacted to Derrida's philosophy at the beginning, inwardly whispering that 'I know that what Derrida is describing is true, but I am going to carry on trying to live my life as if it is not'.[8]

As the result of the complexity of his interests, and the allusive, controversial, and paradoxical intellectual style he had developed, Derrida has always refused to be limited within a systematic, coherent account. In fact, in honoring the poststructuralist tradition, he employs a plethora of strategies to nullify the traditional western philosophical habit of attaining a secure grasp on meaning, knowledge, and truth. Therefore, despite the fame and ubiquity of the phrase 'nothing outside the text',[9] one should do well to bear in mind that it is not Derrida's style to enunciate his arguments in clear, consistent language or to provide a coherently structured strategy to substantiate his iconoclastic reconceptualizations. This paper argues that Derrida's dictum 'there is nothing outside the text' is often misunderstood, and that a proper understanding reveals not only a linguistic and interpretive claim but a profoundly ontological and political one; specifically, many critics interpret 'il n'y a pas de hors-texte' as implying radical solipsism or linguistic idealism. This article dispels that myth by clarifying Derrida's true intent and linking it explicitly to his deconstruction of Western metaphysics. The analysis positions Derrida against thinkers like Fish and Sokal to show how Derrida's stance is unequivocally more radical—essentially anti-realist—than even many postmodernists acknowledge.

Nothing outside the text

Generally speaking, the claim 'There is nothing outside the text', originally 'il n'y a pas de hors-texte', brings into question respected semiotic conventions that are established in civic institutions.[10] It is crucial to emphasize that while he never subscribed to linguistic idealism,[11] in Derrida's arguments, 'text', 'context', and 'textuality' are not referrals to the traditional syntactic process; rather, they constitute a wide and comprehensive notion covering the structures and procedures responsible for devising and interpreting semiotic and semantic signs and manifestations. A formidable text, Derrida believes, is one that manages to portray the 'incomprehensibly elliptical', and is capable of 'inducing meaning without being exhausted by meaning'.[12]

Derrida asserts that nothing is extra-textual, and that 'The text is not the book; it is not confined in a volume to the library. It does not suspend reference – to history, to the world, to reality, to being, and especially not to the other'.[13] He then proceeds to point out that 'To say of history, of the world, or reality, that they always appear in an experience, hence in a movement of interpretation',[14] effectively urging the populace to wake up to the realization that all the stated accounts of the world and its history, the essence of reality, and everything else there is, are at the very best, mere interpretations. However, it is important to clarify that Derrida does not deny the existence of reality itself. Rather, he asserts that our access to reality is always mediated through textual interpretation and context; meaning that it is influenced by interpretive mediation.

Having clarified Derrida's intended meaning, it's important to address critics who downplay how radical this notion really is. Such a declamation wouldn't be the cause of much controversy, since even scientific and metaphysical realists acknowledge the schism and the incompatibility present between a subject matter, and the socially constructed activities of theorizing and interpreting it. However, whereas Stanley Fish attempts to reconcile poststructuralism with a form of realism, this

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[6] Kermode, Frank. 1989. 'Endings, Continued', in *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*, eds Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (New York: Columbia University Press)

[7] Freud, Sigmund. 1991. *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (Harlow, England: Penguin Books)

[8] Royle, Nicholas. 2009. *In Memory of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press)

[9] Derrida, Jacques. 2016. *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press)

[10] Derrida, Jacques. 2016. *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press)

[11] Dilman, Ilham. 2016. *Wittgenstein's Copernican Revolution: The Question of Linguistic Idealism*, 2002nd edn (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan) <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230599017>

[12] Wood, David (ed.). 1992. Derrida: A Critical Reader (London, England: Blackwell)

[13] Derrida. 1988. *Limited Inc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press)

[14] Derrida. 1988. *Limited Inc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press)

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analysis argues that Derrida's position is significantly more radical, explicitly challenging the possibility of a single definitive reality free from interpretative contexts. Furthermore, Derrida's claims aren't challenging the credibility of traditional hermeneutic principles alone, since his arguments, in effect, have political implications as well, as he notes that 'There is always something political in the very project of attempting to fix the contexts of utterances'.[15] The question can be raised, not whether a politics is implied (it always is), but which politics 'is implied in such a practice of contextualization'.[16] This means that Derrida is in effect, attempting to unveil various unscrupulous political interest groups at work, that have been so strategically shaping the interpretive procedures undertaken in any socio-institutional framework throughout the ages.

The Postmodernist, the Deconstructionist

Over time, some have come to maintain that provided a chance to be properly scrutinized, poststructuralists wouldn't emerge as blatantly radical, but reasonably limited to the two aforementioned hermeneutical and political claims. For example, when Alan Sokal protested that 'There *is* a real world; its properties are *not* merely social constructions; facts and evidence *do* matter. What sane person would contend otherwise?',[17] he attempted to imply that poststructuralists have no outrageously radical ontology; to which Stanley Fish retorted, 'It is not the world or its properties, but the vocabularies in whose terms we know them that are socially constructed'.[18] This response by Fish reflects an attempt to moderate Derrida's more radical insights into something more palatable for traditional realism. It can therefore be argued that Fish, with all the eloquence he could muster, has opted to argue for a propitious compatibility, or at the very least a lack of direct conflict, between Poststructuralism and Deconstruction on one hand, and social constructivism and Realism on the other. However, Jonathan Culler's influential commentary clarifies Derrida's genuine radicalism, emphasizing that Derrida's work explicitly destabilizes the idea of an external, stable reality.[19] Fish's interpretation thus neglects the depth of Derrida's challenge to traditional realism, as Deconstruction argues that truth, as humans perceive it, is inherently mediated and shaped by interpretive structures and contexts, rather than existing as a single transcendent reality.

Structuralism introduced the comforting notion of objective all-encompassing structures, supposedly independent from any consciousness or arbitrary will.[20] Poststructuralism on the other hand, is a way of reconceptualizing truth and reality, asserting that knowledge and truth are mostly fabricated notions designed to be collectively accepted in a society, in order to enhance the power and prominence of a certain class within that society known as the 'elites'.[21] Furthermore, according to Foucault's assertion that 'we must not imagine the world turns towards us a legible face which we would only have to decipher',[22] which is a distinctly Foucauldian stance emphasizing how power shapes knowledge, not only does human mind subconsciously alter and reinterpret any given truth, but it arbitrarily proceeds to fill in the gaps to make it more convincing as well. Unlike Derrida's specific linguistic critique, Foucault emphasizes power's role in shaping truth narratives. This leads to the notion that truth is mostly produced, and not discovered. Compare these notions with that of social constructivism, which as tangible proof of its incontrovertible incompatibility with poststructuralism, highlights intersubjectivity, social construction of norms and perceptions, and the reliability of social structures and institutions.[23]

Therefore, much to the chagrin of Fish and his sympathizers, it is crystal clear that Derrida, or any poststructuralist for that matter, wouldn't be content by mere hermeneutical and political claims, rather, they were simply laying the groundwork for their ultimate argument. This ultimate argument, ontological in nature, questions not the existence of reality itself, but the possibility of accessing a single, definitive reality free from interpretative mediation. Poststructuralists are known for

[15] Derrida. 1988. *Limited Inc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press)

[16] Derrida. 1988. *Limited Inc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press)

[17] Sokal, Alan. 1996. "A Physicist Experiments with Cultural Studies," *In Lingua Franca: The Review of Academic Life*, pp. 62–64

[18] Fish, Stanley. 1996. "Professor Sokal's Bad Joke," *The New York Times*

[19] Culler, Jonathan. 1983. *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press)

[20] Culler, Jonathan. 1983. *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press)

[21] Belsey, Catherine. 2002. *Poststructuralism: A Very Short Introduction: A Very Short Introduction* (London, England: Oxford University Press)

[22] Connolly, William E. 1985. "Taylor, Foucault, and Otherness," *Political Theory*, 13.3: 365–76 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/191237>

[23] Pfadenhauer, Michaela, and Hubert Knoblauch (eds.). 2018. *Social Constructivism as Paradigm?: The Legacy of the Social Construction of Reality* (London, England: Routledge)

philosophical blasphemy and disregarding the notion of an objective higher truth; and according to William Alston, realists hold that 'much of reality is what it is independently of our cognitive relations thereto'.[24] Alston then proceeds to state that anti-realism can be defined as a commitment to 'the view that whatever there is, is constituted, at least in part, by our cognitive relations thereto, by the ways we conceptualize it or construe it, by the language we use to talk about it or the conceptual scheme(s) we use to think of it'.[25] Thus, Derrida can be positioned within an anti-realist tradition, yet one that explicitly rejects naïve linguistic idealism (the notion that language alone directly creates physical reality). Instead, Derrida emphasizes how our interpretations inevitably shape our perception of reality, rather than reality itself being wholly linguistic.

Here, it can be argued that what Fish missed, or at the very least refused to face, was his subtle belief in structuralism, cemented at his very core. He couldn't really imagine how afar Derrida, or Poststructuralism as a whole, would opt to proceed simply because he envisioned every philosophical movement that breaks away from the monolithic structures of the past as finite, and somehow placed and contained within some kind of a superstructure that can never be violated. In a sense, the likes of Fish, and even many Postmodernists and Poststructuralists, still had some traces of structuralism within, and were unable to truly move beyond, and to correctly understand Derrida.

A prominent member of the said anti-realist camp would be Derrida, as he claims that 'there has never been anything but writing'. Here, Derrida's notion of "writing" must be understood broadly; it refers not merely to textual inscriptions but to all forms of symbolic representation and interpretation through which meaning emerges. The full quote is worth mentioning as well, as he asserts:

> 'Yet if reading must not be content with doubling the text, it cannot legitimately transgress the text toward something other than it, toward a referent (a reality that is metaphysical, historical, psycho-biographical, etc.) or toward a signified outside the text whose content could take place, could have

taken place outside of language, that is to say, in the sense that we give here to that word, outside of writing in general. That is why the methodological considerations that we risk applying here to an example are closely dependent on general propositions that we have elaborated above; as regards the absence of the referent or the transcendental signified. There is nothing outside of the text [there is no outside-text; il n'y a pas de hors-texte]. And that is neither because Jean-Jacques' life, or the existence of Mamma or Therese themselves, is not of prime interest to us, nor because we have access to their so-called "real" existence only in the text and we have neither any means of altering this, nor any right to neglect this limitation. ... In what one calls the real life of these existences of "flesh and bone," beyond and behind what one believes can be circumscribed as Rousseau's text, there has never been anything but writing; there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the "real" supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement, etc. And thus to infinity, for we have read, in the text, that the absolute present, Nature, that which words like "real mother" name, have always escaped, have never existed'.[26]

Note that for Derrida, writing refers to general human communicative practices and not just words on a paper, and so this phrase is crucial in illuminating Derrida's perspective on the relationship between language and the world, as it makes us realize that his arguments regarding this relationship are premised upon a

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[24] Alston, William P. 2019. "6. What Metaphysical Realism Is Not," in *Realism and Antirealism*, ed. by William P. Alston (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), pp. 97–116

[25] Alston, William P. 2019. "6. What Metaphysical Realism Is Not," in *Realism and Antirealism*, ed. by William P. Alston (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), pp. 97–116

[26] Derrida, Jacques. 2016. *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press)

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combination of a deconstructed structuralism and a deconstructed phenomenology.[27] In other words, Derrida asserts that the so-called "real" is always mediated by symbolic structures, traces, and contexts, not that reality itself is nonexistent. This passage confirms that Derrida rejects the idea of direct, unmediated reference to reality, reinforcing the anti-realist interpretation of his work. When Derrida uses that phrase, in order to further illuminate his notion of fabricated truth, he demonstrates that the social practice of debating the identity of specific individuals such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau or Therese, has a direct influence on how their identities are shaped and defined. Thus, as he further delineates this point by stating that 'The thing itself is a sign',[28] he means to convey that language itself, at least in part, constitutes and defines entities, and has a direct role in shaping reality. A reality, that according to realists and structuralists, was supposed to be subjective, and absolute.[29] Yet this reality, contrary to realist assumptions of an absolute external existence, remains always contextually determined and interpretively mediated.

Bear in mind that Derrida's radical ideas did not emerge in a vacuum; he could never argue for such concepts had he not been inspired by Freud in the first place. Freud's revelations about the fabric of reality were first manifested in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess in 1897, when stated that 'there are no indications of reality in the unconscious, so that one cannot distinguish between truth and fiction that has been cathected with affect'.[30] Having in mind the inability of the unconscious in distinguishing the truth, Derrida would later on employ this Freudian hypothesis to formulate his own philosophy. One might object here that Derrida overstates the primacy of interpretation; however, by drawing on Freud and Nietzsche, Derrida would counter that the unconscious structures of interpretation underpinning human cognition confirm the inescapable presence of interpretive mediation. Besides, to fully appreciate how Derrida arrived

at 'no outside text', we should next consider how he positions himself against earlier thinkers like Husserl, Saussure, and Lévi-Strauss.

Paving the way

As mentioned at the start of this paper, Derrida's philosophy does not adhere to the traditional systematic and structured principles of argumentation. Therefore, the most reasonable solution would be to situate his views in relation to his precursors, especially phenomenologists like Edmund Husserl and structuralists like Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Lévi-Strauss, and then distinguish his views from them.

With regards to the phenomenological arguments that make Derrida's work come to light, long before Derrida, Edmund Husserl attempted to separate and disengage the discursive element of human experience form the systematic and coherent 'stratum' which stabilizes constant discourse and meaning.[31] Similarly, Ferdinand de Saussure's influential structuralist model defined language through arbitrary relations of signs independent from material reference.[32] According to Derrida, however, these endeavors were misguided, since they invalidated the vital connection between one's experience, and one's perception of what is to be recognized as credible truth.[33] Additionally, Derrida challenges Husserl's distinction between symbols and objects, and argues for a powerful connection between the mental image of an entity and how it is referred to, and the external physical existence of it.[34] He does that, by introducing the notion of 'trace', as something influential even when not present, and as the representation of the distinction between the tangible object and the linguistic/symbolic representation of that object.[35] Therefore 'trace', in Derridean terms, refers to the presence of an absence—meaning that any sign or symbol carries within it echoes of meanings it excludes or defers, always dependent on other traces for meaning. Accordingly, by employing the notion of 'trace', he moves to present as

[27] Derrida, Jacques. 2016. *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press)

[28] Derrida. 1988. *Limited Inc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press)

[29] Culler, Jonathan. 1983. *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press)

[30] Royle, Nicholas. 2009. *In Memory of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press)

[31] Husserl, Edmund. 2015. *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (London, England: Routledge)

[32] Saussure, Ferdinand de. 1990. *General Course in Linguistics*, 2nd edn, trans. by W. Baskin (London, England: Peter Owen)

[33] Derrida, Jacques. 1982. *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press)

[34] Derrida asserts that 'The unheard difference between the appearing and the appearance [*l'apparaissant et l'apparaître*] (between the "world" and "lived experience") is the condition of all other differences, of all other traces, and *it is already a trace.* ... *The trace is the différance* which opens appearance [*l'apparaître*] and signification'.

[35] Derrida, Jacques. 2016. *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press)

interactive what Husserl wanted to keep distinct, and proceeds to assert that the referent of the symbol does not occur independently from the symbol itself, and that the object and the signal cannot have an independent existence. This paper maintains that instead of Husserl, Derrida's ideology would be much more compatible and definable when interpreted in the light of the arguments proposed by Heidegger, and the intimate relationship between language and being that he introduced in his works.[36]

As poststructuralism was beginning to emerge from structuralism, anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss declared the culture/nature dichotomy to be ultimately indefensible.[37] He then proceeded to contribute to the entanglement of sign and object, stating that his idea was, as Derrida quotes, 'to transcend the opposition between the sensible and the intelligible by operating from the outset at the level of signs'.[38]

In addition to Lévi-Strauss, Ferdinand de Saussure delivered an analytical framework that would motivate some of the most important intellectual movements in the twentieth century. Saussure refused to define language as a simple labeling design, and rejected the perfunctory notion of language being 'a list of terms corresponding to a list of things'.[39] His argument is premised upon three concepts, including the sign as signifier and also the signified, the arbitrariness of the relation between signifier and signified, and the role that differentiation from other signs plays in defining each sign. He presents and defines each of these concepts in such a manner that would meticulously disengage the linguistic system form the world of objects and entities. He explains that the signifier, being a mental impression of how a word sounds like, and signified, a rough universal concept, are both mental entities, and aren't really engaged with the material world, or the myriad linguistic systems used within it. Claiming that 'The initial assignment of names to things, establish[ed] a contract between concepts and sound patterns',[40] Saussure speculates the association between signifier and signified to have been established by some sort of primordial assignment based on concepts and sound patterns, effectively denying the role of language in the creation of what language refers to. Nevertheless, note

that regardless of Saussure's efforts to separate language and sign from physical entities, his conception of language as a sociopsychological structure remains influential, hindering the works of structuralists and even poststructuralists in resolving and deciphering language's relation to that which is beyond the sociopsychological realm.

Moving back to Derrida, we now realize why he warned us about structuralism as a monolithic system designed to ensure the enslavement of the mind, and the isolation of anyone who 'dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes the order of the sign'.[41] Derrida believes in absolute limitless freedom, and as Peggy Kamuf notes, he always 'works to abolish the distance between what he is writing *about* . . . and what his writing is *doing*'.[42] Thus, as a countermeasure to what he saw as the authoritarian structuralism, Derrida employs two of Saussure's principles in his poststructuralist semantics, the arbitrariness of the signifier/signified relationship, and the differential nature of the sign, and then proceeds to alter them.

Regarding the signified entity, he rejects the statement that there can be a distinction maintained between the concept that represents an entity, and the entity it represents. He applies the same argument concerning the signifier as well, as he denies the existent of a constant distinction between the psychological impression of an entity (a sound, word or a mark), and its written or pronounced form. [43]

Furthermore, he refutes Saussure's assertion that the signifier and the signified, being a mental impression and a conceptual object respectively, are nonlinguistic and disengaged from the physical realm. In doing so, he introduces a perpetual cycle of linguistic functions, stretching indefinitely. What Derrida wants to convey is that an entity, whether physical or abstract, can only be intelligible and specifiable in linguistic terms. Yet, importantly, Derrida does not imply that entities have no existence beyond language; instead, he stresses our unavoidable reliance on interpretive contexts to perceive and communicate these entities. These linguistic terms

[36] Rorty, Richard. 1991. *Richard Rorty: Philosophical Papers Set 4 Paperbacks Essays on Heidegger and Others: Volume 2* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press)

[37] Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1992. *The Raw and the Cooked: Introduction to a Science of Mythology* (Harlow, England: Penguin Books)

[38] Derrida, Jacques. 1978. *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press)

[39] Saussure, Ferdinand de. 1990. *General Course in Linguistics*, 2nd edn, trans. by W. Baskin (London, England: Peter Owen)

[40] Saussure, Ferdinand de. 1990. *General Course in Linguistics*, 2nd edn, trans. by W. Baskin (London, England: Peter Owen)

[41] Derrida, Jacques. 1978. *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press)

[42] Kamuf, Peggy. 1991. *The Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, ed. by Peggy Kamuf (New York, NY: Columbia University Press)

[43] Derrida, Jacques. 1978. *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press)

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would then shape reality when used within the context of the physical world. Moreover, the linguistic terms are in turn specified and described by other linguistic terms, continuing this trend perpetually. In asserting his logic in direct contrast with structuralists, and Saussure specifically, Derrida argued that any sign's signified is a signifier in its own right, standing in relation to another signified, and so on indefinitely.[44] Note that when Derrida reevaluates Saussure's principles of arbitrariness and meaning, what was considered semantic for Saussure, is now considered an argument that is both semantic and ontological, and as a consequence of his disruptive arguments against Saussure, Derrida came to reject and nullify his signifier/signified relation, and his idea of passive signifiers.

Derrida's announcement of 'there is nothing outside the text' and his arguments supporting and clarifying it, are all predicated upon his departure from the western philosophical traditions of the past. Among these norms and traditions, Derrida held a singular contempt for the propensity of western philosophers to continuously appeal to metaphysical notions, in order to achieve some sort of dependability and determinacy in language. These notions, including God, divine revelations, human nature, history and every other metaphysical notion of that ilk, have far less significance in Derrida's philosophical arguments, as in his model of linguistic structure, there is no established center, or a transcendental signified.[45] The lack of a center, as it came to be the case when Poststructuralism evolved from the Structuralist model, effectively means that the meaning of any sign is to be considered elusive, as what every sign indicates, is only determined by its differentiation from other signs.[46] And here lies the heart of the Deconstruction process that Derrida tried so hard to implement.

> The first step for me, in the approach to what I proposed to call deconstruction, was a putting into question of the authority of linguistics, of logocentrism. And this, accordingly, was a protest against the 'linguistic turn', which, under the name of structuralism, was already well on its way . . . Deconstruction was inscribed in the 'linguistic turn', when it was in fact a protest against linguistics![47]

The point of deconstruction is to clarify the manner in which a specific term is prioritized and empathized in a text, while the binary conceptual opposite of the said term is excluded as a result. Subsequently, the Deconstructionist methodology proceeds to demonstrate the necessity of the excluded term for the intelligibility and operability of the prioritized one, practically asserting that the excluded term will always be present in the prioritized one, even in its absence. This process, symptomatic of the notion of 'trace' that was mentioned earlier, reaches the conclusion that a given sign can never be identical with itself, since it is simultaneously defined by what it is and what it is not.[48] Derrida explains about this notion of differentiation, and the lack of self-identity it entails, saying that 'Identity is not the self-identity of a thing, this glass, for instance, this microphone, but implies a difference within identity. That is, the identity of a culture is a way of being different from itself; a culture is different from itself; language is different from itself; the person is different from itself. ... Identity is a self-differentiating identity, an identity different from itself, having an opening or gap within itself'.[49]

'There is nothing outside the text', as Derrida noted, had 'for some become a slogan, in general so badly misunderstood, of deconstruction'.[50] Therefore, the recurrent theme of misinterpretation returns prominently here; and in order to illuminate his claim a bit more, he later suggested alternative formulations, such as 'there is nothing outside context', or even 'there is nothing but context'.[51] Nevertheless, the phrase, along with the breathtakingly revolutionary notion it represents, has been subject to constant misinterpretation and misconception, leading Derrida to chafe at the suggestions that he does not believe in the world beyond words. Derrida stipulated that the phrase suggests 'that one cannot refer to 'real' except in

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[44] Derrida, Jacques. 1978. *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press)

[45] Derrida, Jacques. 2016. *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press)

[46] For example, the concept of hotness is only conceivable to someone who has a concept of coldness. Otherwise, the individual would be unable to distinguish between hot and cold.

[47] Derrida. in conversation with Maurizio Ferraris and Giorgio Vattimo, in Derrida and Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, trans. Giacomo Donis (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2001). Pp. 3–92.

[48] Derrida, Jacques. 1978. *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press)

[49] Caputo, John D. (ed.). 1996. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (Fordham University Press)

[50] Derrida. 1988. *Limited Inc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press)

[51] Derrida. 1988. *Limited Inc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press)

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an interpretive experience',[52] meaning that the context of a text is of utmost importance, since it makes sense of things. In short, Derrida does not deny reality itself; rather, he underscores that reality can only ever be accessed and understood through interpretative structures and contexts. Context, he argued, turns the shapeless clouds of reality into clay, and places it within the reach of our minds, so that it be shaped and molded by our individual interpretations.

Ultimately, as far as philosophers go, and as far as the righteously blasphemous minds of the 20th century go, there is no shortage of genius minds with cogent disruptive theories. Therefore, one would be entitled to wonder what it is that makes Derrida's 'nothing outside the text' and the subsequent deconstructionist assertions so significant in the annals of philosophy. This paper has argued that Derrida's dictum 'there is nothing outside the text' is frequently misread as advocating radical solipsism or linguistic idealism. Instead, by placing Derrida in dialogue with structuralist, phenomenological, and realist traditions, as well as contemporary critics such as Fish and Sokal, this analysis demonstrated that Derrida's claim is far more nuanced and substantial. The appeal of Derrida's arguments isn't solely the consequence of his persuasive reasoning or the cathartic pleasure of his ontology and semiology, rather, it has to do with the political enlightenment that his assertions entail. What has always tainted the honor of metaphysics and the kind of undisputable notions of reality it ensues, is the propensity of its pioneers to develop oppressive political agendas. This policy is ultimately followed by the practice of suppression and censorship, since different political ideologies will inevitably come to announce the supremacy of their version of essential identity and metaphysical reality. Thus, Derrida's contribution lies precisely in exposing how these seemingly neutral metaphysical claims about absolute reality and objective truth are, in fact, politically constructed and institutionally enforced, as Jonathan Culler also emphasizes in his examination of Derrida's legacy. Metaphorically speaking, Derrida toppled not a literal monarchy, but a conceptual one— exposing the political structures hidden behind seemingly neutral assertions about truth and reality, and thus liberating the philosophical discourse itself. And while some might critique Derrida for overstating the interpretive nature of reality, his insights compel us to recognize the political stakes inherent in all philosophical claims to truth, ensuring his ongoing relevance to contemporary philosophical and critical discourse.

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