***3. Some Key Terms***

**1. Deconstruction**

Deconstruction is a strategy of critical questioning directed towards exposing unquestionable metaphysical assumptions and internal contradictions in philosophical and literary language. Deconstruction often involves a way of reading that concerns itself with decentering—with unmasking the problematic nature of all centers. Further deconstruction is a form of textual practice derived from Derrida, which aims to demonstrate the inherent insatiability of both language and meaning. It rejects the word “analysis” or “interpretation” as well as it rejects any assumption of texts.

**2. Binary Oppositions**

The binary opposition is the structuralist idea that acknowledges the human tendency to think in terms of opposition. For Saussure the binary opposition was the “means by which the units of language have value or meaning; each unit is defined against what it is not.” With this categorization, terms and concepts tend to be associated with a positive or negative. For example, Reason/Passion, Man/Woman, Inside/Outside, Presence/Absence, Speech/Writing, etc. Derrida argued that these oppositions were arbitrary and inherently unstable. The structures themselves begin to overlap and clash and ultimately these structures of the text dismantle themselves from within the text. In this sense deconstruction is regarded as a forum of anti-structuralism. Deconstruction rejects most of the assumptions of structuralism and more vehementaly “binary opposition” on the grounds that such oppositions always previlege one term over the other, that is, signified over the signifier.

**3. Differance**

Against the metaphysics of presence, deconstruction brings a (non)concept called *differance*. Derrida uses the term “difference” to describe the origin of presence and absence. Differance is indefinable, and cannot be explained by the “metaphysics of presence.” In French, the verb “deferrer” means both “to defer” and “to differ.” Thus, *difference may refer not only to the state or quality of being deferred, but to the state or quality of being different*. Differance may be the condition for that which is deferred, and may be the condition for that which is different. Differance may be the condition for difference.

Derrida explains that difference is the condition for the opposition of presence and absence.[[1]](https://newderrida.wordpress.com/2007/11/19/some-key-terms/" \l "_ftn1" \o "_ftnref1)Differance is also the “hinge” between speech and writing, and between inner meaning and outer representation. As soon as there is meaning, there is difference.[[2]](https://newderrida.wordpress.com/2007/11/19/some-key-terms/" \l "_ftn2" \o "_ftnref2)

**4. Metaphysics of presence/ Logocentricism**

According to Derrida, “logocentrism” is the attitude that *logos* (the Greek term for speech, thought, law, or reason) is the central principle of language and philosophy.[[3]](https://newderrida.wordpress.com/2007/11/19/some-key-terms/" \l "_ftn3" \o "_ftnref3) Logocentrism is the view that speech, and not writing, is central to language. Thus, “*Of Grammatology*” (a term which Derrida uses to refer to the science of writing) can liberate our ideas of writing from being subordinated to our ideas of speech. *Of Grammatology* is a method of investigating the origin of language which enables our concepts of writing to become as comprehensive as our concepts of speech.

According to logocentrist theory, says Derrida, speech is the original signifier of meaning, and the written word is derived from the spoken word. The written word is thus a representation of the spoken word. Logocentrism maintains that language originates as a process of thought which produces speech, and that speech then produces writing. Logocentrism is that characteristic of texts, theories, modes of representation and signifying systems that generates a desire for a direct, unmediated, given hold on meaning, being and knowledge.[[4]](https://newderrida.wordpress.com/2007/11/19/some-key-terms/" \l "_ftn4" \o "_ftnref4)

Derrida argues that logocentrism may be seen in the theory that a linguistic sign consists of a signifier which derives its meaning from a signified idea or concept. Logocentrism asserts the exteriority of the signifier to the signified. Writing is conceptualized as exterior to speech, and speech is conceptualized as exterior to thought. However, if writing is only a representation of speech, then writing is only a ‘signifier of a signifier.’ Thus, according to logocentrist theory, writing is merely a derivative form of language which draws its meaning from speech. The importance of speech as central to the development of language is emphasized by logocentrist theory, but the importance of writing is marginalized.[[5]](https://newderrida.wordpress.com/2007/11/19/some-key-terms/" \l "_ftn5" \o "_ftnref5)

Derrida explains that, according to logocentrist theory, speech may be a kind of presence, because the speaker is simultaneously present for the listener, but writing may be a kind of absence, because the writer is not simultaneously present for the reader. Writing may be regarded by logocentrist theory as a substitute for the simultaneous presence of writer and reader. If the reader and the writer were simultaneously present, then the writer would communicate with the reader by speaking instead of by writing. *Logocentrism thus asserts that writing is a substitute for speech and that writing is an attempt to restore the presence of speech.*

Logocentrism is described by Derrida as a “metaphysics of presence,” which is motivated by a desire for a “transcendental signified.”[[6]](https://newderrida.wordpress.com/2007/11/19/some-key-terms/" \l "_ftn6" \o "_ftnref6) A “transcendental signified” is a signified which transcends all signifiers, and is a meaning which transcends all signs. A “transcendental signified” is also a signified concept or thought which transcends any single signifier, but which is implied by all determinations of meaning.

Derrida argues that the “transcendental signified” may be deconstructed by an examination of the assumptions which underlie the “metaphysics of presence.” For example, if presence is assumed to be the essence of the signified, then the proximity of a signifier to the signified may imply that the signifier is able to reflect the presence of the signified. If presence is assumed to the essence of the signified, then the remoteness of a signifier from the signified may imply that the signifier is unable, or may only be barely able, to reflect the presence of the signified. This interplay between proximity and remoteness is also an interplay between presence and absence, and between interiority and exteriority.

**5. Trace**

The idea of difference also brings with it the idea of trace. A trace is what a sign differs/defers from. It is the absent part of the sign’s presence. In other words, We may now define trace as the sign left by the absent thing, after it has passed on the scene of its former presence. Every present, in order to know itself as present, bears the trace of an absent which defines it. It follows then that an originary present must bear an originary trace, the present trace of a past which never took place, an absolute past. In this way, Derrida believes, he achieves a position beyond absolute knowledge. According to Derrida, the trace itself does not exist because it is self-effacing. That is, in presenting itself, it becomes effaced. Because all signifiers viewed as present in Western thought will necessarily contain traces of other (absent) signifiers, the signifier can be neither wholly present nor wholly absent.

**6. Arche-writing**

The term ‘arche-writing’ is uded by Derrida to describe a form of language which cannot be conceptualized within the ‘metaphysics of presence.’ Arche-writing is an original form of language which is not derived from speech. Arche-writing is a form of language which is unhindered by the difference between speech and writing. ‘Arche-writing’ is also a condition for the play of difference between written and non-written forms of language.

Derrida contrasts the concept of “arche-writing” with the “vulgar” concept of writing. The “vulgar” concept of writing, which is proposed by the “metaphysics of presence,” is deconstructed by the concept of “arche-writing.”[[7]](https://newderrida.wordpress.com/2007/11/19/some-key-terms/" \l "_ftn7" \o "_ftnref7)

**7. Supplement**

Derrida takes this term from Rousseau, who saw a supplement as “an inessential extra added to something complete in itself.” Derrida argues that what is complete in itself cannot be added to, and so a supplement can only occur where there is an originary lack. In any binary set of terms, the second can be argued to exist in order to fill in an originary lack in the first.