“Nothing is true, everything is permitted”

Jacques Derrida, like a small child obliterating his carefully crafted Lego spaceship, had far more interest in breaking things down than in building them up. Derrida introduced the concept of “Deconstruction”, which breaks down and re-analyzes the systemic structures so carefully crafted by Saussure and Strauss. Strauss contributed the notion of binary opposites, which Derrida borrows and then adds to when discussing the unique notion of a “Center”. This center balances the system, determining how much stability or “play” the system will have. Stability allows for a more definite or “right” interpretation, while play expands the possible interpretations of any given element within a system. Deconstruction examines the relationship between stability and play, and attempts to interpret the meaning of a piece without degrading its integrity.

All language is structured around the idea of binary opposites, which occupy either extreme of a spectrum. For every force of good, loving dog, and Stephen Colbert, there exists a malicious villain, a sinister cat, and a John Stewart. The primary method of deconstructing a system is to find an element that violates or exceeds this binary opposition. For example, a talk show hosted by a comedian representing the Independent party would ruin the rivalry between Colbert and Stewart, *deconstructing* the two-sidedness of their political gibberish. Another way of deconstructing a system is to consider the number of elements that are “paired” together. While the United States and Germany are often seen as the two primary players in World War II, many other nations contributed to either side of the war effort. In this sense, one could not clearly say that it was the Socialists versus the Capitalists, or Axis versus Allies, as a country like Russia aligned themselves with the Allies, yet still helped Germany invade Poland. It cannot be equally “paired” with another country, as it’s unique military decisions defy being lumped to either side of the war. Derrida takes this opportunity to suggest that it is not so much the binary opposites that are important, but the center whose presence allows the opposites their unique qualities. The center, which supersedes the rules that would bind it to either side of the system, must produce order without ever actually existing *within* the system. Like the molten inner core of the Earth, which produces the magnetic fields necessary for compass navigation, the center allows for structure even if it doesn’t necessarily serve a purpose on its own.

Deconstruction attempts to bright to light the possible different purposes or meanings of a work, while it acknowledges that finding a “correct” answer is utterly impossible. Totalization, which refers to a complete explanation for a system, becomes impossible by definition when size and play are introduced to a system. In quantum physics there exists a bizarre phenomenon that prevents an observer from ever being able to precisely deduce the physical properties of a particle. For example, the exact position and momentum of an electron can never *both* be known; in order to understand one property, the other becomes less apparent. This Uncertainty Principle mirrors the lack of clarity that language presents, and the murkiness that deconstruction attempts to solve. Ironically, no single “answer” can exist when every piece of the system has wiggle room to “play” with.