

Deconstruction This concept is associated with the work of **Derrida** and his ‘undoing’ of the binaries of Western philosophy as well as its extension into the fields of literature (for example, De Man) and postcolonial theory (for example, **Spivak**). To deconstruct is to take apart, to undo, in order to seek out and display the assumptions of a text. In particular, deconstruction involves the dismantling of hierarchical binary conceptual oppositions such as man/woman, black/white, reality/appearance, nature/culture, reason/madness etc. that serve to guarantee the status and power of truth-claims by excluding and devaluing the ‘inferior’ part of the binary.

The purpose of deconstruction is not simply to reverse the order of binaries but to show how they are implicated in each other. Deconstruction seeks to expose the blind spots of texts, the unacknowledged assumptions upon which they operate. This includes the places where a text’s rhetorical strategies work against the logic of a text’s stated arguments. That is, deconstructionism highlights the tension between what a text means to say and what it is constrained to mean.

One of the central problems of deconstruction is that it must use the very conceptual language it seeks to undo. For example, to deconstruct Western philosophy is to use the very language of Western philosophy. To mark this tension, Derrida places his concepts ‘under erasure’. The use ‘under erasure’ of accustomed and known concepts is intended to de-stabilize the familiar, marking it as useful, necessary, inaccurate and mistaken. Thus does Derrida seek to expose the undecidability of meaning.

Links: Différance, meaning, poststructuralism, text, under erasure, writing

Reference:

Barker, C., (2004) *The SAGE Dictionary of Cultural Studies*, LONDON: SAGE Publications