

SIGN AS TRACE: DERRIDEAN DECONSTRUCTION IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY SEMIOTICS

Тюкмаева Аида Маратовна

**доктор философии PhD по философским наукам, преподаватель кафедры
«философия и основы духовности» Национального Университета
Узбекистана имени Мирзо Улугбека. Узбекистан, Ташкент.**

Tyukmaeva Aida Maratovna

**Doctor of Philosophy PhD in Philosophical Sciences, Lecturer at the Department of
Philosophy and Foundations of Spirituality at the National University of Uzbekistan
named after Mirzo Ulugbek. Uzbekistan, Tashkent.**

Tyukmaeva Aida Maratovna

**Falsafa fanlari bo'yicha falsafa doktori (PhD), Mirzo Ulug'bek nomidagi O'zbekiston
Milliy Universiteti "Falsafa va ma'naviyat asoslari" kafedrası o'qituvchisi. O'zbekiston,
Toshkent.**

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Annotation. This article undertakes a critical rethinking of the category of the sign within the poststructuralist paradigm, by reviving Derrida's concept of the "trace" as the ontologically primary and simultaneously elusive foundation of semiosis. Drawing on key texts by Jacques Derrida (Grammatology, Writing and Difference, Dispersion), the author demonstrates how deconstruction radically undermines the classical semiotic model from Saussure to Peirce and Eco, revealing the sign's inherent aporia its inescapable deferred nature, differentiality, and structural incompleteness. Particular attention is paid to the intersection of Derridian thought with contemporary trends in semiotics: poststructuralist semioanalytics, digital media semiotics, actor-network theory, as well as recent studies of material and non-human semiosis. Deconstruction appears here not as a methodological device, but as an ethical-political strategy of resistance to logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence, which retains its critical edge in the era of algorithmic regimes of signification and simulative hyperrealities.

Keywords: deconstruction, trace, Jacques Derrida, semiotics, poststructuralism, différance, logocentrism, aporia, material semiotics, digital semiosis, spectrality, philosophy of difference

Contemporary semiotics is in a state of profound theoretical turbulence. Classical models of the sign, based on Saussure's binary logic of the signifier and signified, Charles Peirce's triadic structure, or Umberto Eco's code-encyclopedia approach, are increasingly revealing their inadequacy in the face of radically altered conditions of signification. In the age of digital media, algorithmic systems, artificial intelligence, and material-distributive regimes of semiosis, the traditional metaphysics of presence, which underlies most semiotic theories, is demonstrating its fundamental exhaustion.

The relevance of Derridean thought in the context of contemporary semiotics is determined by several key factors. First, the digital environment, with its hypertextuality, memetics, and generative AI models, dramatically actualizes the structure of the trace as an endless chain of deferrals and citations without an original. Second, the development of material semiotics, actor-network theories, and the non-human turn requires a conceptual apparatus capable of operating beyond anthropocentric and logocentric paradigms. Third, in the context of global simulacra and post-truth, deconstruction retains its ethico-political significance as a strategy for resisting new forms of signifying power. Classical semiotics, originating in the works of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, and later developed by Umberto Eco, relied on the fundamental assumption of the possibility of a relatively stable system of signification. Saussure's model of the

binary sign (signifier/signified) postulated the arbitrariness of the connection while simultaneously maintaining systemic differentiation. Peirce's triad (sign-object-interpretant) introduced a dynamic element, yet retained faith in the possibility of a finite, albeit infinitely deferred, interpretation.

However, even in Eco's later works, an internal tension is noticeable: the concept of "unlimited semiosis" reveals a tendency toward the elusiveness of meaning that the classical model is unable to fully conceptualize. It is here that what Jacques Derrida called the "metaphysics of presence" emerges. Deconstruction reveals that the sign is never a self-sufficient entity. It is always already divided within itself, marked by absence. Classical semiotics, striving for scientific objectivity, suppressed this initial lack. At the center of Derridian thought lies the concept of the trace, developed in "Of Grammatology," "Writing and Difference," and "Dispersion." The trace is neither presence nor absence, but the condition of the possibility of their distinction. It precedes every sign and simultaneously makes the sign fundamentally impossible in its entirety. The radical nature of this assertion should be emphasized. Derrida demonstrates that traditional hierarchies (speech/writing, presence/absence, original/copy) are based on the repression of the trace. Writing (*écriture*) is understood broadly not as a secondary representation of speech, but as a shared space of differentiality. The key concept of *différance*—a neologism combining "difference" (*différence*) and "delay" (*différer*)—describes the movement in which meaning never achieves full presence. The sign, therefore, appears not as a bearer of meaning, but as a trace of a trace: it always already cites, refers, ghostly repeats what was never fully there. Deconstruction here is not a method in the traditional sense, but a reading strategy that reveals the internal aporias of the text and the system. The transition from sign to trace entails a fundamental transformation of all semiotic theory. If classical semiotics sought to establish codes and structures, then trace semiotics emphasizes the indefinability, spectrality, and materiality of signification.

This logic manifests itself particularly clearly in the digital environment. Hypertext, memes, algorithmic recommendations, and generative AI function precisely as systems of infinite deferrals and differentiations. Every digital sign exists in a state of permanent quotation. The combination of Derridean thought with material semiotics and actor-network theory proves particularly productive. The trace allows us to conceptualize semiosis beyond human language—in technological infrastructures, biological processes, and non-human agents.

Deconstructing the sign as trace possesses significant ethical and political potential. By exposing logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence, it resists all forms of totalizing discourse. In the era of post-truth and simulacra, understanding the sign as trace allows for the preservation of space for accountability to the Other. The trace reminds us that all signification carries a debt to the absent. Rethinking the sign as trace opens the way to the development of a new, non-linear, and spectral semiotics. Such a semiotics must be capable of engaging with hybrid, distributed, and posthumanist forms of signification. Future research could focus on analyzing spectrality in digital media and AI, developing methodologies for the deconstructive analysis of material semiotics, and exploring the ethical implications of "traces" in the age of big data.

Derridean's concept of the trace represents not just one possible interpretation of the sign, but a radical rethinking of the very foundations of semiotic theory. The shift from the classical understanding of the sign as a bearer of stable meaning to its understanding as a trace—that is, as a structure of pure differentiality, deferment, and spectrality—allows semiotics to transcend its own logocentric limitations and acquire new theoretical and critical power. In the age of digital hypertexts, algorithmic systems, and generative artificial intelligence, the logic of *différance* ceases

to be a purely philosophical abstraction. It becomes the empirical reality of media and technological semiosis, where each sign exists only as a trace of preceding and subsequent traces, in an endless chain of citations and recombinations. Thus, deconstruction acquires new relevance, serving simultaneously as a diagnostic tool and a strategy for resisting new forms of the metaphysics of presence, from the total transparency of data to the simulative constructs of post-truth. Trace semiotics, being inherently open, nonlinear, and spectral, offers an ethically rich alternative to traditional models. It remains faithful to responsibility to the Other, to the absent and marginalized, while rejecting totalizing gestures of fixing meaning. In this sense, deconstruction retains its political urgency: it teaches us to read differently, write differently, and, most importantly, think differently in a context where signifying technologies increasingly penetrate the fabric of social and subjective reality. Ultimately, understanding the sign as trace allows 21st-century semiotics not only to adapt to the new technological and cultural situation but also to maintain a critical distance from it. It opens the horizon of spectral semiotics a discipline capable of addressing the spectral, distributed, and posthumanist nature of contemporary signification while remaining faithful to the fundamental Derridean imperative: never take presence for granted and always remain attentive to what is erased, deferred, and excluded within it. Derridean deconstruction does not conclude its journey in the history of philosophy and theory; on the contrary, it is only just entering its most productive phase as a necessary internal limit and the most radical possibility of contemporary semiotics.

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