



The Deconstructive Approach: Between Linguistic Analysis and Critical Analysis

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Abstract:

Most scholars agree that deconstruction reached a level of self-awareness in the 1970s. Returning to the term deconstruction in its Western origins, we see that the term has its roots in Greek philosophy. The term deconstruction (Déconstruction) carries an ambiguous meaning and was considered one of the most ambiguous and difficult critical terms to define in critical studies and, before that, in philosophical studies in the Western world. It is also one of the most diverse and varied terms in Arabic critical studies in terms of translation and interpretation. Most scholars agree that deconstruction reached a level of self-awareness in the 1970s.

This study will attempt, through description and analysis, to trace the most important issues raised by this reading or strategy and to explore its most important theoretical and procedural foundations in the work of its pioneer, the Algerian-born French philosopher and critic Jacques Derrida.

Keywords: text, deconstructionist approach, strategy, Jacques Derrida.

L'approche déconstructive : entre analyse linguistique et analyse critique

Résumé :

La plupart des chercheurs s'accordent à dire que la déconstruction a atteint un niveau de conscience de soi dans les années 1970. Si l'on revient à l'origine occidentale du terme « déconstruction », on constate que celui-ci trouve ses racines dans la philosophie grecque. Le terme « déconstruction » (Déconstruction) a une signification ambiguë et était considéré comme l'un des termes critiques les plus ambigus et les plus difficiles à définir dans les études critiques et, avant cela, dans les études philosophiques en Occident. C'est également l'un des termes les plus divers et les plus variés dans les études critiques arabes en termes de traduction et d'interprétation. La plupart des chercheurs s'accordent à dire que la déconstruction a atteint un niveau de conscience de soi dans les années 1970.

Cette étude tentera, à travers une description et une analyse, de retracer les questions les plus importantes soulevées par cette lecture ou stratégie et d'explorer ses fondements théoriques et procéduraux les plus importants dans l'œuvre de son pionnier, le philosophe et critique français d'origine algérienne Jacques Derrida.

Mots-clés : *texte, approche déconstructionniste, stratégie, Jacques Derrida.*



Introduction:

Post-structuralism is not a break with structuralism, but rather a development of structuralism itself, the fruit of its inherent aspects. This does not negate their separation to the extent that post-structuralism diminishes structuralism's tendencies and scientific claims. Deconstruction is a bridge between structuralism and post-structuralism, carrying two opposing meanings: on the one hand, it carries connotations of negation, rejection, and nihilism, and on the other hand, it indicates the correction of errors after exposing false claims, construction, and composition. The term deconstruction (Déconstruction) has been considered an ambiguous concept, and is considered one of the most ambiguous and difficult critical terms to define in critical studies and, before that, in philosophical studies in the Western world. It is also one of the most diverse and varied terms in Arabic critical studies in terms of transmission and translation. Most scholars agree that deconstruction reached a level of self-awareness in the 1970s.

If deconstruction overturns established meanings, scientific truths, and central propositions that are included in conventional wisdom, this study will attempt, through description and analysis, to trace the most important issues raised by this reading or strategy and to explore its most important theoretical and procedural foundations as developed by its pioneer, the Algerian-born French philosopher and critic Jacques Derrida.

1. The problem with the term “deconstruction”:

The term “deconstruction” (Déconstruction) is one of the most ambiguous and difficult terms to define in critical studies and, before that, in philosophical studies in the Western world. It is also one of the most diverse and varied terms in Arabic critical studies in terms of translation and interpretation, as it has been translated into many terms, most notably: (deconstruction and deconstructionism, dissection and dissectionism, subversion and subversionism, slippage, and non-constructionism).

The journey of this Western term into Arabic studies began with the Saudi critic Abdullah Al-Ghazami, who states in his book *Sin and Atonement: From Structuralism to Deconstruction* the reasons for his choice of the term “deconstruction” or “deconstruction of the text” as the Arabic equivalent of the foreign term, explaining: "I was confused about how to translate this term, and I did not see any Arabs using it before (to my knowledge). I thought of words such as ‘refutation’ or ‘deconstruction’, but I found that they carried negative connotations that detracted from the idea. Then I thought of using the word ‘analytical’ from the root ‘hal’, meaning ‘refutation’, but I was afraid that it would be confused with ‘حلل’ (to study in detail). Finally, I settled on the word ‘تشرحية’ (dissection) or ‘تشریح النص’ (text dissection). What is meant by this approach is to deconstruct the text in order to reconstruct it." This elevates the role of the recipient who will interact with this text.

Meanwhile, the author of *The Problematic of Terminology in New Arabic Critical Discourse* believes that the term “deconstruction” began with Sami Mahmoud in his translation of Lyotard's essay *Critique of Structuralism*, where he used the term “deconstruction” as a counterpart to



Soumission : 10/05/2025 Acceptation : 20/07/2025 Publication : 25/08/2025

the foreign term. and perhaps he is the inventor of this Arabic term, which was subsequently used extensively (by Osama al-Hajj, Mortadha, Anani, FadilThamer, Suleiman Ashrati, and other researchers, who are too numerous to mention here).

Algerian critic AbdelmalekMortad used the term deconstruction in his early critical works related to this criticism, such as the book *One Thousand and One Nights: A Semiotic Deconstruction of Hamal Baghdad* and the book *A-Y: A Semiotic Deconstruction of the Poem "Where is Layla"* by Muhammad al-Eid. and *Narrative Discourse Analysis*. He then preferred the term "subversion" or "subversiveness," which he considered the most appropriate equivalent of the aforementioned French term, stating that "the original meaning in Derrida's philosophy is subversion based on its ruins, whereas the meaning of deconstruction in Western language requires isolating parts of a device or structure from each other without damaging or harming them, such as dismantling an engine or rifle parts."

In their book *A Literary Critic's Guide: An Overview of More Than Seventy Contemporary Critical Trends and Terms*, critics Megan Al-Ruwaili and Saad Al-Bazai reject the translation of the term coined by contemporary French philosopher Jacques Derrida as "deconstruction," asserting that some Arab scholars have attempted to "to translate this term into Arabic as 'deconstruction,' but such a translation does not come close to Derrida's concept, as is the case with the term 'subversion,' although subversion is closer to Derrida's concept than deconstruction; undermining, despite its shortcomings, is not confused with René Descartes' concept and his mechanical deconstruction of concepts. In

addition, undermining does not accept what deconstructionists say: "construction after deconstruction."

After this review, we can adopt the conclusion reached by one of the scholars after tracking the translation of the Western term in the varying Arabic studies on the transfer of the term when he announced, after referring to the conventional standard, that we can observe "that the term (deconstruction or deconstruction) - despite its relatively lexical shortcomings - is more well-known and widely used, so we have no choice but to select it as the preferred term. We agree with Dr. Mahmoud Al-Rabie in (Critical Papers) when he says, "The word 'deconstruction' - as its meaning is clear in Derrida - is the most appropriate word to translate the term 'déconstruction', but given the continued use of the word in Arabic criticism, I maintain its use here so as not to add further confusion to a field in which the translation of terms is extremely turbulent."

Most scholars agree that deconstruction reached a level of self-awareness in the 1970s, "but it is usually dated to 1966, the year in which the French philosopher Jacques Derrida delivered his paper entitled *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*. The paper was later reprinted in his book *Writing and Difference* at a conference on structuralism organized by Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. This paper was marked by a clear epistemological break with the theoretical assumptions inherent in structuralism. This marked the beginning of the post-structuralist phase and its association with this philosopher and other luminaries such as Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, and others.

Returning to the term "deconstruction" in its Western origins, we see that it has its roots in Greek philosophy,



Soumission : 10/05/2025 Acceptation : 20/07/2025 Publication : 25/08/2025

"when early Greek philosophers used it in their analysis of mathematical and logical data that reveal incoherent thinking, logic that pretends to be consistent, or an ill-conceived geometric structure, or equations that contain inherent contradictions. Twenty-five centuries later, the mathematical and logical term reappeared in the form of a literary, linguistic, and philosophical theory by the contemporary French philosopher Jacques Derrida when he published his first book (*On Grammar*) in 1967, which was an extension and addition to the approach of German philosopher Martin Heidegger in his attempts to refute the idea of existence and time, as manifested in his book *Being and Time*.

2. The concept of deconstructive criticism:

Post-structuralism is not a break with structuralism, but rather a development of structuralism itself, and is the fruit of its inherent aspects. This does not negate their separation to the extent that post-structuralism diminishes structuralism's tendencies and scientific claims, since "post-structuralism mocks this tendency and ridicules its claims, but post-structuralism's mockery of structuralism is a kind of self-mockery, for the representatives of post-structuralism are structuralists who have suddenly discovered the error of their ways."

If the term "deconstruction" carries an ambiguous meaning, it is because it suggests "fragmentation, dispersion, scattering, and loss. In contrast, it is a rich term, full of intellectual connotations that go beyond the idea of demolition, dissection, and undermining. It is a second reading of discourses, texts, and intellectual systems; a

reading that can only be done by deconstructing the elements and parts of this discourse, with the aim of understanding its hidden meanings behind the symbols, then re-engineering the meanings of the text and reshaping them in a new way," investigating absent connotations and deferred meanings.

It is clear from the above that deconstruction carries two opposites: on the one hand, it carries connotations of negation, rejection, and nihilism, and on the other hand, it indicates the correction of errors after exposing false claims, construction, and composition. The positive concepts that the term carries, especially in Derrida, are clarified by the following statement: Despite these subversive characteristics, Derrida insists that his project is not linked to destruction and nihilism. Rather, he sees his subversive reading as a positive process—paradoxical as this positivity may be. Subversive reading is a dual reading that seeks to study the text—whatever it may be—first through a traditional study to establish its correct meanings, then seeks to subvert the results it reaches in a counter-reading based on the meanings implied in the text that contradict what it explicitly states.

From the above statement, it is clear to us that deconstruction overturns established meanings, scientific truths, and central propositions that are included in conventional wisdom. It "provokes conflict, questions the self and the subject, exposes social inequality, criticizes political and class hierarchy, and extracts the contradictions and differences that affect the surface layers. It is not limited to dissection, explanation, and interpretation, but works hard to restore the marginalized, the profane, the hidden,



Soumission : 10/05/2025 Acceptation : 20/07/2025 Publication : 25/08/2025

and the excluded." Deconstruction opposes idealistic philosophy and metaphysical identity.

Deconstruction reveals the hidden or unspoken, especially in philosophical and literary texts, and Derrida confirms this when he argues that "the gaps, lacunae, and dark passages in the text indicate that the existence of a 'final text' is a great illusion that has been unjustifiably ingrained in minds for successive eras, and that there is no such thing as a 'final author' or 'final meaning' for any written text, since the elements that make up the text are not fixed in meaning but are constantly shifting to the point that they are always in flux." "final author" or "final meaning" for any written text, because the elements that make up the text are not fixed in meaning, but are constantly changing to the point that their meanings reach contradictions that were not in the author's mind when he finished writing the text, whose multiple meanings only begin after the author has finished it." This multiplicity is determined by the number of readings, so that a single text is transformed into a set of texts for the totality of readers and for the individual reader, depending on the periods of reception of the text, which makes the author "merely a catalyst or instigator of disagreement about what he writes, with no authority to determine its meanings and connotations, because every recipient shares in this task."

Jacques Derrida did not describe deconstruction as a critical analytical method with fixed rules and procedural tools that constitute his analytical system, but saw it as "by its very nature unacceptable to codification, definition, or translation." When deconstruction is applied to a text, its role is not limited to revealing hidden meanings and

connotations that did not occur to the author or original creator of the text, but rather it generates a new text that in turn requires further deconstruction that can refute the meanings and connotations that have been discovered, leading to the generation of a new text that must also be deconstructed, and so on ad infinitum, thereby negating absolute truth and, more than that, negating relative values as well, because the text does not allow for it. The fact that deconstruction is neither a philosophy nor a technique with theoretical and procedural rules does not mean that Derrida did not codify it in a system of terms and concepts in his writings on it.

The fact that deconstruction is not considered a theory or methodology in the approach to philosophical and literary texts has led many philosophers and critics to emphasize this, since deconstruction “cannot be considered a methodology, especially if we emphasize its procedural significance, so it can be said that deconstruction cannot be reduced to methodological tools or to a set of transferable rules and procedures.” This has led some scholars to link deconstruction to the term “strategy,” based on the fact that the former refers to the latter, and thus deconstruction becomes a strategy in reading philosophical and literary texts, according to the author of the book *How I Read Post-Deconstruction*. “a reading that removes the word ‘truth’ from the center stage and dethrones it from its throne, which has been overthrown by the excessive praise of its admirers, philosophers and theorists.”

The same scholar points out in another book, *The Forbidden and the Unavoidable: Critique of the Thinking Self*, that the term that best describes deconstruction is a strategy of reading, and that one of its most prominent



features is that it goes beyond what the discourse explicitly says "to what it is silent about, and does not say, to what it excludes and forgets. It is an excavation of origins, an exposure of foundations, and a revelation of axioms. Hence, deconstruction constitutes a strategy for those who want to free themselves from the authority of texts, the imperialism of meaning, or the dictatorship of truth." Perhaps the purpose of linking deconstruction to strategy and distancing it from methodology and theory is to prevent attempts to contain or domesticate it.

The excerpt from the introduction to JabriSpivak's translation (on grammatology) of Derrida's book *On Grammatology* illustrates how a deconstructivist critic reads a text: "As we decode a text in the traditional manner, if we encounter a word that seems to contain an irresolvable contradiction—based on the fact that a single word sometimes seems to function in one way in the text and sometimes in another, and thus seems to be in a position where it cannot be deprived of a unified meaning – we hold on to that word; and if a metaphor seems to obscure its implications, we hold on to that metaphor and trace its adventures through the text, so that the text is on its way to dissolving as a structure of concealment, revealing its own violation and its inability to be decisive.

Deconstructive reading seeks to discover new interpretations in the horizons of the text that were not established for it, because it "undermines the text by searching within it for what it did not say explicitly and clearly (what is left unsaid), and it contradicts the clear, declared logic of the text and its apparent claims to complete logic in the text. It also searches for the point at which the

text exceeds the laws and standards it has set for itself. It is a process of exposing the text, revealing or violating all its secrets, and cutting it into pieces, reaching its foundation, which becomes clear in its weakness, relativity, and transience, thus stripping it of its sanctity and its claim to be fixed and transcendent." . It means deconstructing the codes of the text and breaking it down into its components, then creatively reassembling those parts to produce a new text that accepts deconstruction and fragmentation.

It is clear from the above that the strategy of deconstruction aims to "read Western thought comprehensively and reexamine the concepts on which it is based as metaphysical discourse (such as truth, reason, identity, presence, origin, etc.) It is a critique of Western ethnocentrism, supported by other forms of centrism such as logocentrism, phonocentrism, and phallogentrism. Derrida considered that deconstructing these forms of centrism is a deconstruction of the onto-encyclopedic principle of metaphysics and of the question (Why?), and all questions related to the onto-encyclopedic moment, which leads us to trace the most important foundations and pillars of the deconstructionist strategy.

3. Pillars and procedures of deconstructionist criticism:

Jacques Derrida insisted that deconstruction is a strategy that is not based on fixed concepts associated with it, nor on techniques that distinguish it from other critical theories. However, readers of his works can identify a set of theoretical and practical foundations, the most important of which are:



3.1. The revolution against the centrality of the logos:

Jacques Derrida called for the exclusion of the authority of the Western mind, which for many years dominated Western thought and, with it, human thought, centering it around philosophical premises and metaphysical foundations, specifically the mind and its authority and the metaphysics of presence. His writings focused on “demolishing and undermining this coherent system, which is the result of centering on the authority of reason and the metaphysics of presence, causing the restriction of freedom of thought and limiting its scope. His goal was to deconstruct this reason-centered thinking (logocentrism) and dissolve it in order to reveal its contradictions, secrets, and foundations and critique them.”

Derrida attempted to dismantle Western thought, which continued to assert its dominance and distinction from other peoples whom it despised, and sought to replace it with a decentralized, non-monolithic, and liberated way of thinking. According to the author of *Sin and Atonement*, “focusing on meaning and giving it precedence in philosophical and linguistic research.” We can transfer this meaning to literary text, to show that “there should be a revolution against the structural center of the text (i.e., the axis of the structure), and an attempt to put an end to this phenomenon, which is the domination of the concept (the signified over the signifier, and the thinking self over the subject).”

Derrida did not intend to achieve irrationality or irrationality by deconstructing the mind, but rather to liberate it from what Hegel and De Saussure had established, the former by presenting content and a set of

meanings, and the latter by dedicating his linguistic system to dualities (language/speech, presence/absence, sound/silence, etc.), The goal of undermining Western critical thought, which he had previously mentioned was based on the ideology of the Western ethnic group, was to open the doors of discussion to confirm the metaphysical contradiction of presence and the centrality of the logos, and to invalidate their claims.

3.2. Difference:

This principle or concept is one of the most prominent terms coined by Derrida for his deconstructive philosophy. The term is derived from two verbs: to postpone, to delay, and to dissolve (as in dissolving a council or meeting). and then the act of difference according to the structural linguistic concept, which is an act that involves distance, penetration, and distinction [...] By deriving this term from two actions, Derrida has opened the door to different meanings for this name, not all of which go back to the same origin and cannot be defined"; it is difficult to label the word as positive or negative.

Derrida attempted to clarify the term "difference" in his book *Speech and Phenomena*, in which he devoted a section to this term, explaining a set of terms or actions with temporal and spatial characteristics that indicate this principle. "There is *Todifer*, which is an action or source that indicates dissimilarity, contrast, and difference in form and characteristics, and *Differe*, which is a Latin word that suggests dispersion, spread, separation, and scattering. To defer indicates postponement, delay, procrastination, and obstruction. It is clear that the meaning of to differ *differe* is spatial, as dissimilarity, difference, dispersion, dissipation,



Soumission : 10/05/2025 Acceptation : 20/07/2025 Publication : 25/08/2025

and separation are properties of spatial things related to the concepts of space and area."

According to Sahabi (Guide to Literary Criticism), difference has five meanings, which can be summarized as follows: The first meaning is positive and negative movement, which has multiple meanings, including a reference to time. The second meaning refers to differentiation, opposition, and spatial distribution, which clarifies the distances between opposites. The third meaning refers to the generation of differences, as it is the source of linguistic differences and the beginning of semiotics and linguistic perception. The fourth meaning indicates the correspondence of difference with the concept of the original trace of all natural existence. The last meaning is the multiplicity of difference and its rejection of metaphysical unity.

According to Derrida, the difference and variation in the meanings of texts is what determines their meaning, thus contradicting De Saussure's assertion that "a sign has a single conventional meaning." Derrida believes that this meaning has infinite and multiple different connotations. and thus difference is a positive feature that contributes to the enrichment of language and literary or philosophical texts." Vincent Leach offers a simple definition of difference: "What is the importance of Difference? For any signifier in a language to express meaning, it must differ from other signifiers, The same applies to meaning, as every meaning in a linguistic system must differ—no matter how small the contrast—from all other meanings. Differences are essential for signs to function in language." We can therefore conclude that the connotations of difference are contradictory,

transcending the status of a word or concept to become a structure of differences.

3.3. The science of writing:

Jacques Derrida believed that the act of writing occupies a higher position than semiotics and is an integral part of linguistics. His works, especially (*de la grammatologie*)—on establishing the concept of writing and revolutionizing the concepts of speech and sound, calling for the establishment of the written absence on the ruins of the spoken presence, through the call for pure writing [...] Derrida made writing the subject of a new science that deals with the treatment of the alphabet, segmentation, reading, and writing." His aim was to kill speech by reviving writing.

Writing carries connotations of multiplicity and difference, undermining the Western metaphysical presence based on sound/speech, since "one of the most influential ways in which mental centralization arose in European philosophy is its focus on speech at the expense of writing. Logical centralization is in fact vocal centralization, and the root of this interest goes back to Plato, who expressed this truth by saying: 'It is the silent dialogue of the soul with itself.'"

Raman Salden explains three characteristics that written language possesses and speech lacks, according to Jacques Derrida: First, It is characterized by repetition, even when absent from context. The second characteristic is that it transcends its original context to become a sign in discourses other than its first discourse. The last characteristic is that it forms a space of meaning by moving to a new series of signs and by moving from one present reference to another.



3.4. Impact:

This procedural term in the system of deconstruction carries the meaning of permanence associated with absence, which is represented by the trace. The author of *The Contemporary Literary Critic's Handbook* says of it: "It includes the meaning of the inscription, the engraved sign, or the remaining trace of writing, which is an inscription with its own space."

Derrida presented the trace as an alternative to what De Saussure called the sign, "which he presents as an indescribable enigma, but which emerges from the heart of the text as a force that shapes writing, and becomes (the trace) a theoretical unit in the idea of (grammar) on which the idea is based with all its energy, and through which writing is revived [... ...] The trace is responsible for every emotion that emanates from the smallest particles of the sign, just as it is the result of the functions of relationships, as in structuralism." Writing is a manifestation of the trace, but it does not represent the trace itself. The text aims to embody the trace, even if the latter precedes the former, representing what comes before, during, and after the text.

Among Jacques Derrida's procedural terms, we can mention "iteration," which removes the boundaries between one text and another and affirms the principle of the interpenetration of texts: "Every literary text is the synthesis of a number of words, and these words precede the text in their existence, just as they are capable of moving from one text to another [...] The theory of "iteration" does not depend on the author's intention, nor does it originate from his will; rather, it is an effective and invisible aspect of the writing process, without which there would be no writing, for every

word in a text is an iteration and a quotation from a historical context to a new context."

The term diffusion or dispersion undermines the singularity, decentralization, and restriction of meaning, and Derrida associates it with the meaning of semantic multiplicity, by which he means "the fragmentation of meaning into dozens of miniature units and thus its scattering in all directions, ultimately making it impossible to grasp or capture." The term intertextuality, established by Julia Kristeva and the Yale group, enriched deconstructionist studies, as did the term "philosophy of presence and absence" and other theoretical and procedural foundations that enriched deconstructionist studies.

4. Pioneers of deconstruction in Western critical studies:

Deconstruction did not emerge as a critical methodology for approaching literary texts until the 1970s, with a group of American critics such as Paul De Man, Hillis Miller, Harold Bloom, and Geoffrey Hartmann, who formed what is known as the Yale School.

Although the study highlighted the efforts of Jacques Derrida, the pioneer of deconstructionist philosophy and deconstructionist strategy, many scholars believe that deconstructionist criticism was embraced by American critics and spread there more than anywhere else. We will attempt to review the most important views of the pioneers of deconstructionist strategy.

* Paul De Man: The most prominent views of this critic are evident in his books *Deconstruction and Criticism*, *Metaphors of Reading*, and *Blindness and Insight*, in which he calls for "penetrating the text from the perspective of focusing on the relationship between the author and the



reader and searching for the hidden or implied meaning, which can only be achieved by revealing the internal and external contradictions. What deconstructionists mean by this is that what is understood from the hidden meaning in the text may conflict with the apparent meaning," and this does not mean that it results in the corruption of interpretation and exegesis.

This critic believes that reading can be divided into two types: the first is normative reading, which is determined by the principles of right and wrong, and the second is productive or accomplished reading, which is not determined by the principles of right and wrong or correctness and incorrectness. The interpretation and understanding of the text is governed by the correct understanding of linguistic metaphors.

* Hillis Miller: This critic's most prominent views are based on the premise that "the result of questioning the centrality of the logos is nothing more than a reversal of previous hierarchies, but any assumption of this kind will fall into a clear dilemma, claiming that order is a secondary phenomenon accompanying the absence of order and that sanity is a secondary phenomenon accompanying madness, and that rational choice between alternatives that do not involve ambiguity is a secondary phenomenon accompanying ambiguity, which are the distinctive features of the centrality of logos." In doing so, he attempts to deconstruct the process of substitution involved in these oppositional binaries, thereby deconstructing Western metaphysics.

This critic tends to follow in the footsteps of Daman in his assertion that "a closed reading of literary texts always leads

to the repeated revelation of the nothingness inherent in everything that is unimpeded by anything human, However, most other deconstructionists would say that reversing the order in this way does not reveal the true relationships between opposing ideas, but merely tests/attempts to see what happens when things are violently shaken by turning them upside down."

In short, deconstruction is a strategy that represents post-structuralism, which involves deconstructing the codes of a text and breaking it down into its components, then creatively reassembling those parts to produce a new text that accepts deconstruction and fragmentation.

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Soumission : 10/05/2025 Acceptation : 20/07/2025 Publication : 25/08/2025

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Soumission : 10/05/2025 Acceptation : 20/07/2025 Publication : 25/08/2025

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