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Chapter 1 : Derrida and Deconstruction - PDF Free Download

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Deconstruction does intuitively sound like a form of destruction, of taking apart, perhaps, of undoing some construction. Many people have agreed that some deconstruction thought of in this way was necessary. The totalitarian projects of western metaphysics, the ethical, aesthetic, epistemological projects of post-enlightenment science, the imperialism of European countries as they carved out their empires throughout the colonised world, the great patriarchal domination over women--all of these structures and institutions, people agree, need to be taken down to their foundations in order to expose their contradictory logic. But now, the argument goes, we need some reconstruction. We need to put things together again in some new, more democratic, order. However this consoling sense of reconstruction is anathema to any rigorous sense of deconstruction. That which cannot be presented for conception or perception takes its determination from things like the future now and from the radical alterity of the other which in its permanent absent presence guarantees the particularity of all of us finite particulars. No law could be set up to take that into its consideration--that is the very condition of the law. But this is not simply with the aim of destroying the systems or ensembles in question. Rather, deconstruction implies reconstituting them according to the conditions previously hidden or made mysterious of their institution. In giving an account of his use of the word deconstruction Derrida gives the following explanation: It names the conditions according to which it is possible for events to occur and for institutions to be established. Deconstruction is never the closing down of one institution in order to set up another in its place. Rather it points to the persistent and inevitable opening up of institutions to their own alterity, towards which they might perhaps be forced to adapt. Deconstruction names the conditions upon which it is possible for things to change. If there is a strategy, or a method to deconstructionism then it would involve opening boundaries up to an alterity--almost literally making a negative space--that welcomes the surprise of future events. It makes or allows things to happen. What kind of term can replace the recourse to metaphysical concepts? Can you have theory, or even thought, without concepts? Alterity and Writing Alterity is still quite a trendy word in critical discourse but not one that is always well understood. The reason for this is not because it is particularly difficult to understand--it is not a complex concept in the theoretical sense--it is just that it is supposed to designate a structural condition that cannot in itself be made present. Alterity designates nothing real or actual. But as a condition we could not do without it. The Oxford English Dictionary records the following: But there is a more common word that seems to provide its root: When I take on an alias I assume a different identity. Thus alterity, which takes all of the above into consideration as well, we note, as the possibility of these permutations in etymological passage, is the condition of otherness, difference, or change. Words like this usually designate conditions that can only be grasped in terms of the effects they describe and are supposed to make possible. So we know that texts are translatable because we have translations and can speak in more than one language. We also know that pure or simple or literal translation is strictly impossible. Translatability is implicated in that impossibility because a pure or literal translation would be literally the same in the sense of being identical. So translation implies as a basic condition of possibility a certain notion of altered-ness--the translation will be different or in some way changed from its pre-translation form. Rather it designates the conditions upon which different discrete entities can be compared and contrasted at all. One of the basic conditions of a text of any kind is, then, that it can be translated into different languages languages that its author, for instance, may not know. The fact is, of course, that texts usually have both a sense and can be attributed with a referent even a fictional one. But this is only because of their essential alterity--leaving those possibilities open. Repetition and Writing Unlike Saussure, Derrida focuses on this sense of alterity in its relation to repetition. In Derrida the senses of alterity and repeatability are combined to form the notion of iterability. Iterum likewise in Latin, which generally

composes the central moment in analogical constructions also means altered. It signifies the combination of a repetition which implies sameness and difference which implies alteration. A repetition is an altered version of that which it repeats. Another one of the main conditions for our basic sense of writing is that it be composed of repeatable marks. A written mark must always be identifiable as such. Sometimes cloud formations or rock formations look as if they are composed of repeatable marks. The same, rather obviously—yet the implications of this are profound—must be the case for that which the marks signify as sense, signified, referent or whatever, as and when a mark actually does signify something definite. That definite meaning—a definition de-fining or making temporarily finite is provisional and, again rather obviously, made possible only by the fact that the mark of its meaning be repeatable. The consequence is that the meaning, as a repetition of whatever minimal sense it always has, is in fact a usually slight but potentially quite extreme alteration of what it means in other repetitions, other incarnations. So deconstruction would not concern simply all the different interpretations that clever readers can manipulate by critical reading, but—perhaps more than that—it concerns the minimal ideality of signs and texts—that which makes more or less repeatable meanings possible. The name he gives for that possibility is iterability. A minimal ideality ensures that a text for instance maintains a singularity that contests any attempt to subsume it as an example.

Exemplification So the non-present, non-absent space of possibility cannot ever be made present as such—otherwise nothing would happen. But deconstruction is often considered as a kind of strategy or a number of strategies occurring among many domains and dimensions for outlining such a space. At this stage we can turn to the issue of exemplification. There are two ways in which a text can exemplify deconstruction. Both cases may be understood if we shift our focus to the level of address. Standard simplified Communication Model: Rather the level of address is a major component of the message. A message can be regarded both at the level of statement it says something and at the level of enunciation someone addresses someone else. Most messages have both sense they mean something and a plane of reference they refer to some specific thing. At the level of address or enunciation a text can be analysed in its self-referential aspects, as referring to itself. Some texts do this in obvious ways. I borrow the following example from mainstream cinema, which can display the more complex patterns of philosophical texts in a graphic way borrowed also from my book on Critical Theory. The cinema release *Mrs Doubtfire* is a typical instance of self-conscious auto-referentiality. The story is, at the level of its statement, a sentimental tale of a father Robin Williams who would do anything to carry on seeing his three children after having been estranged from them after divorce. He is eventually found out in his *Mrs. Doubtfire* guise while attempting to play both roles housekeeper at one table and aspiring TV actor at another during a restaurant farce. So he loses access to the children but gains a job as a TV presenter in his *Mrs Doubtfire* role. Needless to say he eventually returns to the kids in the role of their father as a full time carer. The cinema rhetoric is fairly dancing all this time and issues of cross-dressing, gender and sexuality, the roles of mothers and fathers etc. It comes together at the level of enunciation, the level of address. The lingering shots of the entertainment world, his gay brother and friend who labour to produce his *Doubtfire* persona, the quickfire wit of Williams in all his personae, all serve to draw attention to the fact that this is about show business and thus the address is at all times an appeal to the audience on behalf of the product itself, that is, entertainment. The *Doubtfire* character 1 succeeds where husband and wife failed to produce fulfilled children who improve steadily at school, and 2 his programme is responsibly educational as well as being entertaining. These dramatic presentations draw attention to the responsible yet entertaining role of the media in relation to its spectators the children. It is a message that builds in an evaluation of itself. It also, in grounding the absent real as the father beneath the disguise, appeals to a transcendental concept of truth but only in so far as it is contained in the form of the product, that is, theatrical entertaining fiction. The false persona and the real father are one and the same thing, a responsible and entertaining parent. In this sense we should be able to see that the text attempts to legislate, in its own way, over its own conditions of production and reception. In this case a message attempts to legislate over its own conditions. In the second kind we would witness a message that is responsible to its own conditions the alterity of origins and

addressees. Any example from Derrida might be said to exemplify the second kind. In each case the message can be said to exemplify its own condition, its own laws and the rules of its constitution. In the second case one should be able to see, at the level of enunciation, that the text is already so constituted as to exemplify its conditions of construction. It would in that case simulate a presentation of its own singularity, the alterity of its origin and the alterity of its addressee, with no appeal to a transcendental concept that would otherwise ground it. In the case of literature this singularity is so powerful that it allows Derrida to formulate the questions and, thus, the laws that govern iterable singularities the laws that govern the iterability of singularities generally--which is already a paradox. What is fascinating is perhaps the event of a singularity powerful enough to formalize the questions and theoretical laws concerning it. It then begins to differ from itself sufficiently to become exemplary and thus involve a certain generality. This economy of exemplary iterability is of itself formalizing. It also formalizes or condenses history. A text by Shakespeare or Joyce is a powerful condensation of history i. The Ethics of Deconstruction applications of the rule of the impossible Some recent works by Derrida at first sight suggest a move into ethical and political areas: Consistently there is vigilance against any tendency towards purification, totalization, completion and towards the transcendental. But you will also find a consistent affirmation of what Derrida calls the undecidable. In other words responsibility deconstruction or justice begins in the face of an undecidable, like Europe in this context, which indicates a double injunction, a against monopoly, and b against dispersion. An application conventionally implies that a decision has already been made: When the path is clear and given, when a certain knowledge opens up the way in advance, the decision is already made, it might as well be said that there is none to make: Perhaps, and this would be the objection, one never escapes the program. In that case, one must acknowledge this and stop talking with authority about moral or political responsibility. The condition of possibility of this thing called responsibility is a certain experience and experiment of the possibility of the impossible: A responsibility as such must be exercised beyond the order of the possible:

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Chapter 2 : Study Guide for the GRE Lit Exam

Tracing a beginning through past theory voices / Joseph Natoli --Structuralism and critical history in the moment of Bakhtin / A.C. Goodson --Tracing hermeneutics / Albert Divver --History and postmodern literary theory / Daniel Stempel --Sociocritical and Marxist literary theory / Eva Corredor --The wellsprings of deconstruction / Irene Harvey.

This page intentionally left blank. It provided a rather comprehensive account of directions and practices in continental philosophy in the past quarter of a century. In contrast to CP-I in which the task was to explore major figures and their practices in the contemporary context, CP-II takes up the methods and orientations of deconstruction with respect to some of the most important names in the history of philosophy. Each of the essays in this volume assesses Derridean deconstruction as a philosophical practice in relation to dominant historical figures in the western tradition. This list of names is brought up to the contemporary era and even into the past several decades in terms of Heidegger, Sartre, Levinas, and Foucault. Naturally, the set of philosophers presented in CP-II is selective. Even with this limitation, there will be other names that ought to have been included here. Comprehensiveness and exhaustiveness has not been our concern. We wanted to offer a general account, not a total account as Foucault would have said. Given limitations of space, we opted for in-depth studies of those figures considered rather than a superficial overview. Indeed, only since he began teaching at Yale and now at the University of California at Irvine for a portion of the academic year has he taken up interdisciplinary contemporary topics in an institutional capacity. Thus many of his formative essays were devoted to readings of important figures in the history of philosophy. While we have set out to present facets of Derridean deconstruction in relation to these major figures in the history of philosophy, our task has also been to demonstrate the principal aspects of deconstruction as philosophy. While other studies of deconstruction bring out the dominant features of the strategy and method,² this volume explores not only what Derrida has said about figures in the history of philosophy but also how his practice both draws upon and rereads the tradition itself. The contributors to this volume examine what Derrida has written about the various philosophers in question, studying and developing the character, features, and implications of the relation itself. At the same time, they demonstrate their own manner of philosophizing in the continental tradition and bring out aspects of Derridean readings that have import for contemporary philosophical understanding. The contributors themselves are philosophers who have already written not only on Derrida and deconstruction but also on the corresponding philosopher whom they discuss. Hence they are each particularly well qualified to treat the conjunction of Derrida and the figure in question. Along with the essays themselves, this bibliography should provide a substantial reference tool for anyone interested in exploring this topic further. Jacques Derrida was born in This element of alterity at the center is important for understanding continental philosophy in general. The term itself was introduced by British philosophers who referred to the philosophy practiced on the European continent as other than that which they themselves did. At first, and in its original version, continental philosophy was characterized almost exclusively as some type of phenomenology transcendental, existential, or hermeneutic. Analytic philosophy positivist, linguistic, or ordinary language set itself off against these accounts of phenomenology. Indeed, often some of the most adventuresome and significant work in continental philosophy has been occurring outside the European continent though still owing its debt to certain traditions and modes of thinking prevalent there in this century. That Jacques Derrida often lectures and teaches in the United States and on occasion in Britain intensifies the non-geographical location of what is now known as continental philosophy. Deconstruction itself has extended far beyond the limits of philosophical gates. To return deconstruction here to the history of philosophy is to revert to its place of formation as textual reading. Indeed, to put it in a nutshell, deconstruction is the reading of texts in terms of their marks, traces, or indecidable features, in terms of their margins, limits, or frameworks, and in terms of their self-circumscriptions or self-delimitations as texts. But what does this mean? It means that deconstruction is concerned with offering an account of what is going on in a text— not by seeking out its meaning, or its

component parts, or its systematic implications”but rather by marking off its relations to other texts, its contexts, its sub-texts. It brings out what the text excludes by showing what it includes. It highlights what remains indecidable and what operates as an indecidable in the text itself. The essays in this volume bring out these elements of marginality, supplementarity, and indecidability as they operate in the reading of texts in the western philosophical tradition. They mutually illuminate aspects of deconstruction and of the philosophical texts in question. They will be valuable to those interested in understanding deconstruction via the history of philosophy, and even the history of philosophy via deconstruction. The making of Continental Philosophy is no simple task in itself. Essays are referred to a reader competent in the topic and evaluated for their cogency, effectiveness of expression, and ultimate importance. The CP staff also reads these essays carefully and helps to edit the contributions down to a polished piece of work. Without the energy and diligence of the Assistant Editorial Staff, CP would not meet the standards of high quality and philosophical significance that we set for these volumes. This project takes shape, moves into place, and reaches its completion through their devoted and generous contribution. Their own efforts on our behalf and in developing the Continental Philosophy series at all of its various stages has our special thanks and appreciation. Silverman, Editor This page intentionally left blank. I follow Derrida in allowing these three strands to play on each other and do not attempt to deal with each of them in isolation. The word pharmakon in Greek has multiple and contradictory meanings. Among these are included: Although, as Derrida points out, Plato never uses the word, pharmakon is related to the word pharmakos which means a scapegoat sacrificed for atonement and purification. It is also related to the word pharmakeia which means pharmacy or sorcery and is also the name of the maiden with whom Orithyia was playing in the myth of Boreas that Plato relates in the Phaedrus. Derrida insists that even when Plato contextualizes this word in such a way as to lead its meaning in one of these directions rather than another, the multivalence of the word remains in effect in the Greek text. For Derrida this is not so much an indication of the difficulty or impossibility of translating as a symptom of a more general problematic with regard to writing. All translations into languages that are the heirs and depositories of Western metaphysics thus produce on the pharmakon an effect of analysis that violently destroys it, reduces it to one of its simple elements by interpreting it, paradoxically enough, in the light of the ulterior developments it itself has made possible. Such an interpretative translation is thus as violent as it is impotent: The problems of translation and interpretation are bound up, therefore, with the metaphysical character of the language to which a text is being transferred and the language from which it is transformed. A remedy is the opposite of a poison and therefore not a poison. The one excludes the other. The resolution of this contradiction in the framework of speculative dialectics, for example, requires a decision that one term be valued over the other and the contradiction be sublated in yet a third term. In contrast, deconstruction attempts to subvert this dialectical logic that would reincorporate whatever operated outside its system by virtue of its being in charge of the opposition between the inside and outside. What Derrida is after in his reading of Plato is not available to the traditional commentator: What is going on here is something altogether different. That too, of course, but still completely other. The kind of repetition such a commentary proffers belongs already within the Platonic system that Plato effected. The commentator subjects the value of his or her writing to the authentic meaning of the text that is being commented on. As a substitute, such a commentary defers to the original in its attempt to uncover it. In contrast, Derrida seeks to displace the assumption of authorial privilege. He begins by saying: This indicates that the text which follows is not governed by intentional structures that unfold a preplanned point of view about the meaning of the writings under examination in Dissemination. But if Derrida has already said all he meant to say, then we might expect to find laid out beforehand, in a pre-text to this lengthy epilogue, what he means to say. This therefore will not have been a book. These texts are assembled otherwise; it is not my intention here to present them D, p. Dissemination deconstructs the difference between the inside and the outside and is itself written around the edges of this opposition”neither inside nor outside, both interior and exterior, to the kind of writing that tries to contain itself within the defined contours of a book: It does not flow from preface to main body to conclusion in the manner to which we have become accustomed. Derrida, like

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Socrates, risks the accusation that he turns everything upside down and makes the lower appear to be the higher. Like Socrates, he risks the charge that he never says anything and refuses to be pinned down. In the case of Plato, it is the pharmakon that functions in this manner. But in wavering and oscillating, these oppositions are neither disbanded nor overcome. Rather their formative power is once again surfaced; they begin again to play out their games, they are enabled again to trace their own origins. Derrida tries to attend to this movement of the text. It is a movement that cannot be experienced if one understands the structure of a text to be emanating from a fixed center or origin. Every origin is always already displaced in the activity of writing. Writing poses signs as substitutes for the intrinsically absent and nonlocatable origin, an origin, therefore, that is always other and different—“an origin that is perpetually deferred by writing. According to Derrida, no text is fixed, stable, and completely circumscribed by its predetermined standpoint. But his writing is not for this reason a willful countertext that forces its interpretation onto the text. Derrida is concerned to radicalize a discourse and movement which already has a certain heritage and necessity in our age. This radicalization involves the recognition that being postmetaphysical or writing after Platonism is always already caught up in relationships between the inside and the outside, the within and the beyond, etc. The woven text has a texture that stretches and shrinks, can expand, can be grafted onto, can fold, warp, and unravel. The surface of the woven cloth dissimulates its complex and intricate networking: Adding, here, is nothing other than giving to read. In the Phaedrus, Socrates makes the point that the written speech of Lysias, like the epitaph on the tomb of Midas, has interchangeable parts that have no organizational or compositional integrity. It has no beginning or end, is not organized like a living being with head and tail. It is a dead discourse—“mere repetition. Having a complete grasp of the subject, nothing more can be added to it. Thus the only task that remains is to memorize it so that one will always have it available to repeat randomly and at will. This decision about the style of writing that befits philosophical discourse sets the stage for the confrontation between sophistry and philosophy. The philosopher places his discourse at the service of a definition of the matter to be investigated. His discourse manifests the truth that this definition reveals and unfolds this truth in distinction from its opposite. It does not hold itself responsible to the truth: Philosophical writing has something beyond itself to report. It can only repeat this message which has been inscribed elsewhere. For Plato, even philosophical writing is tertiary and derivative.

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And when Irene Harvey, in the 'Open Letter to Literary Critics' which opens her book (and we indeed spent some time wondering whether there was some play on the 'open' here, for how could such a 'let'.

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Harvey claims that this question can be answered, alÂ- beit incompletely, by showing the "economic" relations of deconstruction to metaphysics and to difference.