

Existentialists Presentation – 07 March 2015 – Pierre Van Osselaer

## **“Jacques Derrida: Text and Differance”**

Deconstruction questions interpretation. Deconstruction is provocative.

### **Some Kind of Warning**

This presentation on traces referring to Derrida cannot be one that abides by traditional formats; as this presenter argues that we must address the issue of language as an essential means for making sense, not a re-presentation of it.

### **Some Kind of Lecture**

It is ab-surd. C'est absurde, n'est ce pas.

I suggest we improvise some sense

In this décor of decay and corruption.

Let us reflect about the trace of Derrida

Ma presentation est à propos de Derrida

It is à-propos. So, à-propos, why this ?

Why do we use language to make sense?

Why the question? Heidegger mentioned

That questioning was the piety of thought.

Derrida stated some kind of agreement

Then asked: “what comes before the question?”

Heidegger had proposed an answer: Dasein.

Derrida states questions about existence

And now, I propose, as a trace of a trace,

As a trace about Derrida from a other traces,

Including traces attributed to Derrida

That from what is, ab-surd and irreconcilable  
We make sense, we come in that making sense  
From traces, always in text, or as traced by Derrida  
Never “hors texte” in a process not just being  
A process becoming not just in the present  
Not merely with a past present in the past  
And a future present in the future but a moment  
A becoming with traces to make sense  
To become identified by traces of making sense  
In differance and now, in this process,  
We make sense with what was different  
And deferred, spoken from a read trace  
One that could not merely be spoken  
But had to be a sustained trace  
To differentiate “différance” from “différence”  
Spoken the same in French but written differently  
In English as well as in French, a translation,  
A moment that is not limited to a “now present”  
An emergence out of the control of some I  
As it become with a making sense of a “present past”  
On a trace for a “present future”  
Becoming a teleology, undefinable,  
As if I am called to perform a function  
As it were for what may eventuate  
According to traces and there being here and now.  
Now, this is not Derrida speaking. It is I,  
Pierre, just an agent in this emergence,

Or as Heidegger would have it, an efficient cause,  
Sharing the burden of transformation of traces  
With the material cause of traces  
With the formal cause of traces  
With the teleological cause of traces  
As we must consider, with the traces by Derrida,  
That we too are traces in a text,  
Never outside of the text. Never “hors-texte”,  
Textual, traces carriers of traces, ad infinitum,  
In some kind of infinite progression  
As changing between parallel mirrors  
With every turn provoking another horizon  
Another set of traces, sets after sets,  
Dimensions beyond the traditions  
Yet stooped into their traces  
In a disrupted and ab-surd set of continuums  
Where nothing is logos but for the sense we make  
No past, no present, no future, just fragmentations  
The paradoxical disruptions leaving traces  
Compilations of diversity and differences  
In “difference” for the time to emerge with sense  
But that is another trace, for Derrida mentioned this,  
The trace of Being and Time yet focussed  
On an ab-surd becoming that makes sense  
By incessant bricolage, incessant and inescapable,  
The using of traces at hand for traces to hand  
...

Over to us.

### **Some Kind of Puzzle**

[Leaflets... Bricolage and deconstruction.]

### **Some Kind of Reading(s)**

### **Jacques Derrida (1930—2004)**

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/derrida/> 04/04/2015

Jacques Derrida was one of the most well known twentieth century philosophers. He was also one of the most prolific. Distancing himself from the various philosophical movements and traditions that preceded him on the French intellectual scene (phenomenology, existentialism, and structuralism), he developed a strategy called "deconstruction" in the mid 1960s. Although not purely negative, deconstruction is primarily concerned with something tantamount to a critique of the Western philosophical tradition. Deconstruction is generally presented via an analysis of specific texts. It seeks to expose, and then to subvert, the various binary oppositions that undergird our dominant ways of thinking—presence/absence, speech/writing, and so forth.

Deconstruction has at least two aspects: literary and philosophical. The literary aspect concerns the textual interpretation, where invention is essential to finding hidden alternative meanings in the text. The

philosophical aspect concerns the main target of deconstruction: the “metaphysics of presence,” or simply metaphysics. Starting from an Heideggerian point of view, Derrida argues that metaphysics affects the whole of philosophy from Plato onwards. Metaphysics creates dualistic oppositions and installs a hierarchy that unfortunately privileges one term of each dichotomy (presence before absence, speech before writing, and so on).

The deconstructive strategy is to unmask these too-sedimented ways of thinking, and it operates on them especially through two steps—reversing dichotomies and attempting to corrupt the dichotomies themselves. The strategy also aims to show that there are undecidables, that is, something that cannot conform to either side of a dichotomy or opposition. Undecidability returns in later period of Derrida’s reflection, when it is applied to reveal paradoxes involved in notions such as gift giving or hospitality, whose conditions of possibility are at the same time their conditions of impossibility. Because of this, it is undecidable whether authentic giving or hospitality are either possible or impossible.

In this period, the founder of deconstruction turns his attention to ethical themes. In particular, the theme of responsibility to the other (for example, God or a beloved person) leads Derrida to leave the idea that responsibility is associated with a behavior publicly and rationally justifiable by general principles. Reflecting upon tales of Jewish tradition, he highlights the absolute singularity of responsibility to the other.

Deconstruction has had an enormous influence in psychology, literary theory, cultural studies, linguistics, feminism, sociology and anthropology. Poised in the interstices between philosophy and non-philosophy (or philosophy and literature), it is not difficult to see why this is the case. What follows in this article, however, is an attempt to bring out the philosophical significance of Derrida’s thought.

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/derrida/#SH3c> 04/04/2015

### **c. *Différance***

*Différance* is an attempt to conjoin the differing and deferring aspects involved in arche-writing in a term that itself plays upon the distinction between the audible and the written. After all, what differentiates *différance* and *différence* is inaudible, and this means that distinguishing between them actually requires the written. This

problematizes efforts like Saussure's, which as well as attempting to keep speech and writing apart, also suggest that writing is an almost unnecessary addition to speech. In response to such a claim, Derrida can simply point out that there is often, and perhaps even always, this type of ambiguity in the spoken word - *différence* as compared to *différance* - that demands reference to the written. If the spoken word requires the written to function properly, then the spoken is itself always at a distance from any supposed clarity of consciousness. It is this originary breach that Derrida associates with the terms arche-writing and *différance*.

Of course, *différance* cannot be exhaustively defined, and this is largely because of Derrida's insistence that it is "neither a word, nor a concept", as well as the fact that the meaning of the term changes depending upon the particular context in which it is being employed. For the moment, however, it suffices to suggest that according to Derrida, *différance* is typical of what is involved in arche-writing and this generalised notion of writing that breaks down the entire logic of the sign (OG 7). The widespread conviction that the sign literally represents something, which even if not actually present, could be potentially present, is rendered impossible by arche-writing, which insists that signs always refer to yet more signs *ad infinitum*, and that there is no ultimate referent or foundation. This reversal of the subordinated term of an opposition accomplishes the first of deconstruction's dual strategic intents. Rather than being criticised for being derivative or secondary, for Derrida, writing, or at least the processes that characterise writing (ie. *Différance* and arche-writing), are ubiquitous. Just as a piece of writing has no self-present subject to explain what every particular word means (and this ensures that what is written must partly elude any individual's attempt to control it), this is equally typical of the spoken. Utilising the same structure of repetition, nothing guarantees that another person will endow the words I use with the particular meaning that I attribute to them. Even the conception of an internal monologue and the idea that we can intimately 'hear' our own thoughts in a non-contingent way is misguided, as it ignores the way that arche-writing privileges difference and a non-coincidence with oneself (SP 60-70).

- *Of Grammatology*, trans. Spivak, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976 (OG).
- *'Speech and Phenomena' and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. Allison, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973 (1967) (SP).

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/derrida/> 04/04/2015

## 2. "The Incorruptibles"

As we noted, Derrida became famous at the end of the 1960's, with the publication of three books in 1967. At this time, other great books appear: Foucault's *Les mots et les choses* (*The Order of Things* in the English language title) in 1966; Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* in 1968. It is hard to deny that the philosophy publications of this epoch indicate that we have before us a kind of philosophical moment (a moment perhaps comparable to the moment of German Idealism at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century). Hélène Cixous calls this generation of French philosophers "the incorruptibles." In the last interview Derrida gave (to *Le Monde* on August 19, 2004), he provided an interpretation of "the incorruptibles": "By means of metonymy, I call this approach [of "the incorruptibles"] an intransigent, even incorruptible, *ethos* of writing and thinking ..., without concession even to philosophy, and not letting public opinion, the media, or the phantasm of an intimidating readership frighten or force us into simplifying or repressing. Hence the strict taste for refinement, paradox, and aporia." Derrida proclaims that today, more than ever, "this predilection [for paradox and aporia] remains a requirement." How are we to understand this requirement, this predilection for "refinement, paradox, and aporia"?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dj1BuNmhjAY> 04/04/2015

Jacques Derrida on Love and Being

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z2bPTs8fspk> 04/04/2015

Derrida: "What Comes Before the Question?"

## **Some Kind of Sending**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8kyulwWXt0> 04/04/2015

Por otra parte, Jacques Derrida

The other day I was watching a documentary on Derrida for not good reason but the desire to prepare a presentation on Derrida...

Derrida : « Je l'ai dit quelque part... Je ne sais plus ou ».

Derrida: "Il n'y a pas de nous".