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DERRIDA, LACAN, AND DECONSTRUCTION

(TITLE)

BY

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Derrida, Lacan and Deconstruction

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Derrida, Lacan, and Deconstruction

Derrida and Lacan are two French intellectuals who share many of the same key concepts.

Derrida's work mainly includes deconstructing texts in order to understand the how of the text versus the what of the text. Lacan is a psychoanalyst that takes Freudian concepts and makes them accessible and understandable for the modern world. After researching both Derrida and Lacan, it is easy to see that they share the same ideas of an overall system of functions and the idea of signification.

To start, in Of Grammatology, Derrida explains his system of deconstruction. In order to further explain this concept, Derrida defines the terms "book" and "text." For Derrida a book is a self-contained totality that has an author, and a beginning, middle and end. One reads a book in relation to the author's interpretation and the author's intended meaning. A text, however, has no beginning, middle or end. Additionally, there is no inside or outside of a text, but a network of signifiers that extend in many different directions. Specifically, Derrida (1976) says "il n'y a pas de hors-textes" which translates to "there is no outside-text" (p. 158). Derrida believes that if one reads a book as a text, then they can link one text to multiple other texts because this chain of signification goes off in different directions. Thus, texts refer to more texts. Nothing exists independently of the text because the possibility of indicating something outside of the texts ultimately refers back to that very text.

Therefore, one can deconstruct any text as long as things are read as open texts to begin with. Deconstruction shows that certain assertions are put into a text by the way that it is signified. Additionally, there is no natural end or beginning to deconstruction. Moreover, a deconstructive reading produces another text because it finds a system that was not accounted for in the original text. Derridian deconstruction is against the re-reading of a text simply to get to what the author intends to say, but instead deconstruction looks at how the text actually functions.

Furthermore, the terms “arche-writing,” “trace,” and “differance” all mean practically the same thing in Derridian deconstruction. For example, arche-writing is the difference between speech and writing in a traditional sense. The term trace is the spaces in between visible marks that cannot appear as literal marks. Differance, for Derrida, means to defer and to differ. This gets at *how* something means then what it actually means. Meaning is spread out, or deferred in texts and also differs because one can never get to the actual meaning. It is the difference between signified and signifier because it differs itself while at the same time defers from itself. Therefore, there is a differance for every opposition within a text. Differance ultimately shows that if one pushes an opposition far enough, it will flip back onto itself. Take for example, the opposition of security and insecurity. If one pushes insecurity far enough eventually there is security. The same goes with security to insecurity. The reason one has security is because there is something that they are insecure about and vice versa.

Another term that can be substituted for differance, trace or arche-writing, is the term supplement. For Derrida, a supplement is neither presence nor absence, but a type of differance. Additionally, Derrida states that “supplements produce the sense of the very thing that they defer” (157). Moreover, supplements supplement for an origin, which really is also a supplement. The idea of an origin is a supplement because it has always already occurred and thus, for Derrida, there really is no origin for anything. The supplement is the origin for an origin that is always a stand-in. An example Derrida uses to show how supplementarity works is the motif of the abyss, e.g., a picture of a shield on an actual shield. The example of the abyss shows what a text within a text is and additionally that there is an endless movement of doubling at work in supplements. Additionally, the abyss is a type of differance because in the abyss the thing is differing from itself. Furthermore, the movement of mechanisms at work in differance is supplementary and cannot be mastered. For example, Derrida (1976) explains “the movement of supplementary representation approaches the origin as it distances itself from it” (p. 295).

Derrida and Lacan are similar in many ways, especially because Derrida attended many of Lacan's seminars. In order to further illustrate the similarities between them, some background of Lacanian psychoanalysis is needed. To start, Lacan believes that since psychoanalysis consists of the analysand speaking to the analyst and then identifying and interpreting what the analysand really means, that the focus of psychoanalysis should be in the only medium that exists, i.e., the function of speech and language. For Lacan, speech gives the subject its identity, yet takes it away at the same time. The subject identifies the self in language, but also loses himself because he is the object in the speech. This relates to the difference in *moi*, as the subject himself, and *je*, as the active subject, in French. Lacan (1953) explains: "for in this labour which he undertakes to reconstruct *for another*, he rediscovers the fundamental alienation that made him construct it *like another*, which has always destined it to be taken from him *by another*" (p.42). The function of speech allows the subject to define himself as such, i.e. man, in relation to the other in which the function of speech is taking place. Even if there is no reply from the other, there is still the recognition of an exchange of speech. One speaks to an other because he desires to be recognized as a separate subject through the other (Lacan, 1953). Lacan (1953) states, "in short, nowhere does it appear more clearly that man's desire finds its meaning in the desire of the other, not so much because the other holds the key to the object desired, as because the first object of desire is to be recognized by the other" (p. 58).

In Lacan's mirror stage, for example, the subject forms an identity through the external mirror. Even though it is held up by the mother, the child realizes that it is a separate thing. Because of this, the subject wants to become separate and independent and identify itself in this way. Through this event, the subject forms the Ideal-I, the identity of what it wants to be. However, even though we are always moving toward this ideal, we really can never achieve it.

According to Lacan (1953), the unconscious in psychoanalysis is this function of speech between the subject and the other and is realized when spoken in words. Moreover, the unconscious only emerges in this conversation (Lacan, 1953). For Lacan (1953), it is important to remember that the unconscious is just a function that produces meaning, but really does not mean anything in itself. Additionally, the unconscious can function differently for different people because of their experiences, but ultimately the function and network of the unconscious is still the same.

Furthermore, Lacan (1953) believes that language is a system of signifiers and that the function of communication between one subject and the other signifies that there is signification, i.e. that language only has value in relation to other words. For example, in Freud's theory, the phallus is an actual anatomical object that is the center of castration anxiety and the Oedipus complex. However, in Lacan's theory, the phallus is not anatomical, but acts as a meta-signifier, i.e. a signifier that designates all signified for practically anything the subject ideally would like to be and have others perceive him as (Lacan, 1958). Subjects believe that this thing will make them truly happy, but really the phallus is just a stand in for something the subject will never get. In fact, the phallus is really empty and actually does not even exist, but is the signifying system itself (Lacan, 1958). Furthermore, the real is always and only outside the system of signifiers, but signifiers always refer to it as other. Lacan (1958) elaborates on Freud's idea of castration anxiety by explaining that subjects want to be the phallus, but the phallus actually signifies the subject and gives him his place. Man is not really whole, like he would like to think he is, but is subject in relation to the phallic signifier that functions in the other (Lacan, 1958).

The phallus also causes the difference between needs and desires. Needs, i.e. basic food, shelter, clothing, etc., turn into desires in relation to another, through the signification of the phallus (Lacan, 1958). Because one wants to be recognized by the other as some certain type of person, the subject will turn their needs into desires that coordinate with who they ideally want to be, even though

he subject can never really be this ideal. For example, any type of food will suffice as a need in ceasing hunger, however, this turns into a desire for steak from the most upscale and expensive restaurant when the subject wants to project his ideal self as rich, important, classy, etc., to the other. Additionally, tap water will be a sufficient need in order to quench thirst, but if a subject wants to be projected in a certain way to the other, they might drink irrationally expensive bottled water, like Fiji brand water, in order to suffice their desire. Thus, subjects want to be like the phallus so that they are desired by the other.

The phallus also creates the idea of demand, i.e., love from another. Lacan (1958) believes that desire is “neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the phenomenon of their splitting” (p. 287). This splitting is the desire to be a self-contained independent self, but the subject needs the other in order to be a subject and recognized as such in the first place (Lacan, 1958). This demand for love is to be recognized and loved by the other. A child desires love from the mother, but realizes that there is something unspoken that it cannot be, mainly the father, so it tries to be this phallus for the mother. For example, children often demand that their parents buy them toys, or constantly play with them, but according to Lacan really this demand is only for love and attention from the parent (Lacan, 1958).

Since Derrida attended Lacan’s lectures, as did many other French intellectuals, there are many similar concepts in both of their works. For example, they both share the idea of an overall functioning system. Derrida uses his method of deconstruction as his overall system of functions while Lacan uses the overall system of language and speech that is functioning between the analysand and the analyst. Additionally, Lacan’s unconscious is just a function that produces meaning, much like Derrida’s signifiers produce meaning. Furthermore, both Derrida and Lacan share the idea that signification only means

something in relation to other things. Because Derrida and Lacan share similar ideas, it is interesting to see a Derridian deconstruction of Lacanian texts.

The Title of the Letter, is a Derridian deconstruction of Lacanian psychoanalysis and texts.

Psychoanalysis is a practical task that implied or needed a theoretical reconstruction. Lacan represents an explicit passage of psychoanalytic discourse through philosophical discourse, which of course Freud also does, but implicitly. To start, Nancy & Lacoue-Labarthe (1992) deconstruct the Lacanian letter as matter, not a substance, and they believe that this letter has a major place in the unconscious.

Additionally, the letter is the unconscious in language. A signifier is not masterable by consciousness because it only has meaning in relation to other arbitrary letters.

Another way, and the main way that Nancy & Lacoue-Labarthe (1992) deconstruct Lacan's text is through the idea of the subject. They show that the subject reinforces the literalization of the letter and language. Moreover, the subject is enslaved to the structure of language and to the actualization of language in discourse. For Lacan, the subject is always already a social subject and a subject of communication. For example, one way that the subject is always already a social subject is through proper names. A subject is given a name and this sometimes happens before the subject is even born. Additionally, in Lacan, there is a contract of communication between subjects, a type of economy between two individuals. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the other's discourse is the unconscious.

Additionally, for Lacan, the signifier is what represents a subject for an other. Moreover, the subject is what the signifier represents and cannot represent anything but for another signifier (Nancy, Lacoue-Labarthe, 1992). In the deconstruction of the Lacanian subject, the subject is instituted by and in the signifier. The subject is a function of metaphor and metonymy. Therefore, if everything is a function in Lacanian texts, then nothing is actually present.

Moreover, in this deconstruction, Nancy & Lacoue-Labarthe (1992) show that the subject is in a way arbitrary. For example, the position of the subject shifts, even though Lacan believes that the position of the subject is in the center. This also shows that all of the functions that make up Lacanian texts move. Therefore, the subject moves because of the function of signification, i.e., metaphor and metonymy. The subject is also always a subject in relation to the letter. Furthermore, moving the referent moves the position of the subject because of the instability of the system of signification. Because of this, Nancy & Lacoue-Labarthe (1992) say that the subject is never really present, even to an other (p. 70).

Another way of deconstructing Lacan is looking at the way Lacan appeals to the Saussurean foundation of linguistics as a science. Nancy & Lacoue-Labarthe's (1992) task is to seek the science of the letter in Saussure's linguistics. Lacan takes concepts from Saussure and makes them fit into his psychoanalysis. For example, he uses the concept of an algorithm. This algorithm is the signifier over the signified and is a signifier that signifies a function, but does not signify itself. The algorithm itself is a "pure function of the signifier" (Nancy & Lacoue-Labarthe, 1992, p. 47). Additionally, Nancy & Lacoue-Labarthe (1992) believe that there is a point in this bar of the algorithm that is the center in the deconstruction, even though Lacan believes it to be the subject in the center position. Moreover, the science of the letter is the division introduced in the sign, a sign that is not functioning as such because it does not signify. All of this disrupts the signified/signifier/signification system in Lacan. For Lacan, a signifier is an "order of spacing, according to which the law is inscribed and marked as difference." (Nancy & Lacoue-Labarthe, 1992, p. 46). The signifier is not the other side of the sign in relation to the signified.

Another deconstructive move for Nancy & Lacoue-Labarthe (1992) is the Two Floating Kingdoms schema (p. 53). This schema explains the concepts of signifiers and signifieds further. For example,

there are ideas in relations to other ideas and sounds in relation to other sounds; this is a horizontal movement. One can also cross vertically from sounds to ideas and ideas to sounds through signification, however, for Lacan the bar of the algorithm can never truly be crossed. Furthermore, the signifier has been seen as an algorithm and the signifying operation for the which the algorithm must ultimately function (Nancy, & Lacoue-Labarthe, 1992, p. 61). In a way, significance both crosses the bar of the algorithm, but really can only slide along the bar for Lacan.

Another deconstructive aspect in the Lacanian system is the ultimately it is a system of borrowings. Lacan borrows the features of one system (from Saussure, Heidegger, Hegel, Rousseau, Descartes, and Freud) and puts them into a new system, i.e., the Lacanian system. Because the Lacanian system is a system of borrowings, there is a major motif of repetition in the Lacanian system. For example, there is repetition of Descartes within the Lacanian system, especially the link between the cogito and the subject of strategy. For example, the cogito shows the “moi” and “je” difference in Lacan that shows the difference between statement and enunciation. For example, “I am not wherever I am the plaything of my thoughts; I think of what I am where I do not think” (Nancy & Lacoue-Labarthe 1992, p, 98). This difference is the Lacanian split subject.

Nancy & Lacoue-Labarthe (1992) believe that this idea introduces the idea of desire in Lacan’s texts. The necessity of a metaphorical substitution is a desire that is defined by locking onto a refusal of the signifier. Nancy & Lacoue-Labarthe (1992) explain that metaphor is a system determined as the substitution of a physical signifier for another repressed signifier (p. 99). It is the replacement of a psychological trauma with a physical symptom; a form of Derridian supplementarity. Furthermore, the necessity of a metonymical displacement is what the incompleteness of the desire is bound to, i.e., a lack of being (p. 99). Nancy & Lacoue-Labarthe (1992) explain that metonymy is a desire as a perpetual

desire for something else and in turn, this always already dooms fulfillment of a desire because all a person ever gets is substitutes and this prompts the movement to more substitutes in metaphor.

Nancy & Lacoue-Labarthe (1992) sum up the deconstruction of the Lacanian system into a circular movement. This circular movement has the identity of a system, but this deconstructed system is closed even though Lacan believes his system stays open. However, as in most deconstructions, Lacan's texts performs differently than Lacan actually states. Moreover, Nancy & Lacoue-Labarthe (1992) show that the repetition in the Lacanian texts is a type of difference. This circular deconstructive movement shows a system within a system, with the middle of the circle being what Lacan is actually trying to say and eh outside of the circle being the other texts that help signify the inside and therefore the rest of the system.

Derridian deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis are similar in many ways. Deconstruction and psychoanalysis both deal with an overall system that function in certain ways in relation to supplements and signification. Because of the similarities it is interesting to look at a Derridian deconstruction of Lacanian psychoanalysis to see how exactly Lacan's texts function.

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