

### **Derrida's Différance (In the Spirit of Einstein)**

Dear Miss --

I have read about sixteen pages of your manuscript ... I suffered exactly the same treatment at the hands of my teachers who disliked me for my independence and passed over me when they wanted assistants ... keep your manuscript for your sons and daughters, in order that they may derive consolation from it and not give a damn for what their teachers tell them or think of them. ... There is too much education altogether. (Einstein, 1949)

"To me the worst thing seems to be a school principally to work with methods of fear, force and artificial authority. Such treatment destroys the sound sentiments, the sincerity and the self-confidence of pupils and produces a subservient subject." (Einstein, 1988)

"Deconstruction is justice. It is perhaps because law (droit) (which I will consistently try to distinguish from justice) is constructible, in a sense that goes beyond the opposition between convention and nature, it is perhaps insofar as it goes beyond this opposition that it is constructible and so deconstructible and, what's more, that it makes deconstruction possible, or at least the practice of a deconstruction that, fundamentally, always proceeds to questions of droit and to the subject of droit. (1) The deconstructibility of law (droit), of legality, legitimacy or legitimation (for example) makes deconstruction possible. (2) The undeconstructibility of justice also makes deconstruction possible, indeed inseparable from it. (3) The result: deconstruction takes place in the interval that separates the undeconstructibility of justice from the deconstructibility of droit (authority, legitimacy, and so on). It is possible as an experience of the impossible, there where, even if it does not exist (or does not yet exist, or never does exist), there is justice. (Derrida, 1983).

Any attempt to define *différance*, which is neither a word nor a concept, involves a logical contradiction (because logic requires stable things in space and time); hence it cannot be defined, but it can be alluded to. *Différence* and *différance* sound the same in French; one can tell the *différence*

between *différence* and *différance* only in writing; when spoken the *différence* is lost; thus, *différance* can be seen but not heard (undermining Saussurian linguistics.)

1. *Différence* is an important concept for the thinkers who influenced Derrida: Nietzsche (metaphysics of Truth, God, Morals), Freud ((consciousness/subconscious: id, ego, superego)), Husserl ((phenomenology (science of the objects of consciousness))), Heidegger (ontology ((study of the real; of being; of what *is* means))); this is especially true for Saussure (linguistics), who understood language as a system of differences (Derrida deconstructs Saussurian linguistics with the concept of the sign: language always only refers to itself.)
2. *Différance* a “non-concept” with double meaning ((other examples: *pharmakon*: poison/antidote (Plato); hymen: virginity/consummation (Mallarmé); supplement: surplus/necessary addition (Rousseau.))
3. Double meaning of *différance* is suspended (never arrives) between differing (to be different) and deferring (to delay, put off till later.) Meaning is never present in *itself* (logocentrism: metaphysics of presence) only *traces* of *traces*: meaning is always differed/deferred both spatially and temporally (deconstruction: an ontology of absence.)
4. The play of *différance* produces and undermines (decenters) binary opposites such as nature/culture, man/woman, poison/cure (all of which centralize/marginalize); *différance* is that which underlies and produces meaning, but is itself meaningless.
5. *Différance* does not exist: even this does not go far enough (existence and non-existence are concepts.)

#### Questions

1. What are the consequences of *différance* for the reader? How can we understand the reader as *différance*? How do we read Derrida *after* Derrida (Spivek)?
2. What are the consequences of *différance* for rhetoric? Is Derrida being rhetorical, is he practicing rhetoric with *différance*? If so, what rhetorical moves does he make? What rhetorical tricks does he play?
3. What are the consequences of *différance* for communication? (Both in the sense of the act of communicating, and the discipline of communications studies.)

4. How does différance relate to knowledge, intelligence, creativity?

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