I. The Will to Be Misunderstood as Critique: Nietzsche, Critical Theory, Deconstruction

A. The context in which this paper emerged

1. My on-going question: what is the nature of power in contemporary society and what are the possibilities of resistance to power?

2. My answer to the question concerning the nature of power in contemporary society has been influenced by Critical Theory, specifically

a. its critique of reason

b. its analysis of the culture industry

c. its critique of technology

3. My understanding of power

a. power can no longer be conceived of only, or primarily, as negative, and juridical: the capacity to coerce and manipulate

b. power has the capacity to produce individuals, to produce compliant subjectivities who experience their oppression as freedom

c. Marcuse

Domination is in effect whenever the individual’s goals and purposes and the meanings of striving for and attaining them are prescribed to him and performed by him as something prescribed. Domination can be exercised by men, by nature, by things—**it can also be internal, exercised by the individual on himself, and appear in the form of autonomy.**

d. In Neil Postman’s Amusing Ourselves to Death frames this a as 1984 vs Brave New World

As he says, “. . .in Huxley’s vision, no big Brother is required to deprive people of their autonomy, maturity and history . . .**people will come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think.”**

e. The panopticon with a few changes, Act Three Waiting for Godot

4. The problematic of power: the conceptualizing of power determines possible resistances to power

a. Critical theorists were aware of this and answered it in different ways

b. psychoanalysis, the Great Refusal, negative dialectics, theory of communicative action, autonomy of art,

c. the answers still leave the question open to me.

5. It is within this context that I turned to work/writing of Derrida

B. The paper focuses on Derrida’s deconstruction and this problematic of power

1. Derrida claims that deconstruction is an intervention which is both ethical and political: “a response to a call,” “subversive,” “too political for some”

2. He argues that

a. western philosophy is a homogenous monologue embedded in system of power

b. is part of its production, reproduction, and legitimation of the system

c. concepts, categories, universalism, reason, clarity, logic reflects exclusions (other), hierarchies, violence of the same over the other

“There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism”

d. Derrida’s question:

“How can philosophy as such appear to itself as other than itself, so that it can interrogate and reflect upon itself in an original manner”?

3. Derrida’s answer: it is absolutely essential for this interrogation that form be

consistent with the substance of the critique.

4. To understand Derrida’s claims that deconstruct ion both ethical and political one must analyze is work as a unity of form/content

C. Unity of form/content

1. I situate Derrida’s thought in the tradition of what Habermas calls

the radical critique of reason

2. Tradition: Nietzsche and Adorno

a. Nietzsche

i. adopted unity of form/content in his critique of western philosophy, western society, ubermensch, will to power

2. parables, poetry, aphorisms, epigrams, parody, irony, “lying”

At one point he says, Poets lie, I am a poet.

3. he neither wants to be understood nor does he expect

to be understood by the common person

4. he says he doesn’t want to be understood by scholars

5. the problem of being understood as the will to be misunderstood:

6. being understood = assimilation of the unique, individual, the particular different to the same

6. To Whom Is He Speaking?

b. Adorno

1. “Defiance of society includes defiance of its language.”

2. Adorno adopts a style consistent with his critique, the style is designed to force the reader to be active/engaged in the process of understanding which is also a process of becoming, of praxix

3. style: irony, ironic inversion, hyperbole, chiasmus, aphorisms,

extensive references and cross references

4. What he says about Schonberg’s music can be said of his own form/content.

\*\*\*start\*\*\*

Reminds me of Martin Jay’s introduction to Dialectal Imagination: In reference to subsequent co-optation of modernist art, the avant-garde, existentialism and the sixties counter-culture, he states – “Here too the mechanisms of absorption and cooptation have shown themselves to be enormously effective. **The result of all this that the intellectuals who take their critical function seriously have been presented with an increasingly rigorous challenge to outdistance the culture’s capacity to numb their protest**.”

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“It requires the listener spontaneously to compose its inner movement and demands of (the listener/reader) not mere contemplation but praxis.”

5. To Whom Is He Speaking?

3. Derrida’s fomr/style and what he says about it.

He says about his style, it is analogous to Menippean satire, “or something like philosophic parody where all genres—poetry, philosophy, theater, et cetera—are summoned up at once . . .it is something like farce.”

“Perhaps the desire to write is the desire to launch things that come back to you as much possible in as many forms as possible. It is the desire to perfect a program or a matrix having the greatest potential **variability, undecidability, pluravocality, et cetera, so that each time something returns it will be as different as possible.”**

4. “Tympan” Introduction to Margins of Philosophy

a. two columns side by side, one his argument, the other extended quote

b. extensive footnotes

c. epigraphs

5. Content The logic of supplementarity

a. deconstruct exemplary texts of the western philosophic tradition

b. reveals the marginalization and exclusion of the other, but

c. reveals not just exclusion but presence of other in self-understanding of the same, the dependence on the other

6. unity of style and content result

a. a position or non-site which calls into question all, including the boundaries of text and world

b. the calling into question reveals the presence of the excluded other

c. and opens us to the call of the other

d. position of undecidability from which one makes a decision, basis of all

genuine decisions

e. undecideability is the start of ethics and political

7. An irony, he wasn’t happy with his reception, being misunderstood,

misrepresented, misappropriated by English departments.

D. Phase II: Form/content: ethic of hospitality, genealogy of tradition

1. “refines” his argument and develops an ethics and

a politics from the position of undecidablity

2. undecidability and the ethic of hospitality

a. it is not decisionism, nor existentialism

b. position that involves two poles

i. unconditional

ii. conditional

c. authentic decision is a **negotiation** between this two

poles

d. ethics begins in this **aporia of undecideability**

e. ethics of hospitality

i. unconditional desire to welcome the other

ii. conditional: reality of the situation

2. as politics

a. the aporia of undecidability creates an opening for

transforming the given

b. reflected in the dynamic of justice and the law

i. deconstruction is justice

ii. reveals the difference between justice and law

iii. justice is the openness to the other, the ethic of hospitality

which confronts the law, which conceals violence and exclusion

iv. justice is the dynamic at work transforming the law

v. judge

c. messianism: openness to the “impossible,” the unconditional response to the the other

d. democracy for the future

a. now as future

b. dynamic of justice vs present conditions

3. Different approach/method

a. he identifies social issues—refugee crises, crimes against humanity,

terror and terrorism, rogue states, justice and law.

b. he reflects/explains the issue through a dialogue with other thinkers, Kant, Hannah Arendt, or artists.

c. he identifies the concept that defines the issue

d. he examines the concept in western tradition

e. he discovers an aporia in each: the unconditional and

the conditional

e. he explains the dynamic

f. example

i. the refugee crisis in France and the project/goal of creating

cities of refuge

ii. he identifies this as the concept of cosmopolitanism (Kant)

iii. examines its origin and development in western society’s

tradition

iv. in the tradition the aporia an aporia is present: unconditional

openness to the other and conditions

vi. he discusses the problems creating cities of refugee would face

in a world shaped by sovereign nations

4. Style is somewhat modified

a. much like Adorno’s

b. Rogue, Specters of Marx

5. To Whom is he speaking? For Whom-the other?

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.”

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An intellectual response to life in the form of radical critique.

It seems a species of philosopher since ancient Greece to the present has taken on the project philosophical discourse to criticize their current given reality as insufficient, unjust, dominating, etc; and also to define an “authentic position or method” to life, i.e. Socrates and Plato, “Plato’s Cave,” Nietzsche, Critical Theory, and some contemporary philosophers. The language that Plato employed was accessible. He wanted to be understood by his citizen peers. At some point, being understood became problematic. With Nietzsche, “the philosopher must learn how to dance.” Therefore his own literary/philosophical that disdained scholarly distance and prudishness. Form = Content. And he wanted to be misunderstood by his contemporaries as he often declared that his true readers were not yet born. He accused his contemporaries of operating under the false premises of the age (Enlightenment). Yet Nietzsche was still more accessible than Adorno, or Derrida, and other current thinkers. His audience was the future. And eventually he was heard, both understood and misunderstood.

Now, philosophy for the most part is an academic affair, sequestered/or quarantined in universities. It is far removed from the streets that Socrates walked on, among his fellow citizens. It employs a highly specialized language that is not very accessible, on purpose. And perhaps rightly so, if it wants to preserve its critical voice. But who is the audience? Only other philosophers? The future?

Has current life been so maligned that communication must obscure itself in order to be heard properly.

Based on your notes on Derrida, Derrida seems to have outlined a method for the inclusion of the Other and other forms of life. The liberation of other modes of life. Etcetera.