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. The Question Itself

“I have at all times thought with my whole body and my whole life . . . I do not know what purely intellectual problems are . . .”

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

a. the critique of reason

b. the analysis of the culture industry

c. the critique of technology

3. My understanding of power

a. power can no longer be conceived 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.”**

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

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 in three

areas: unity of form/content, the concept of undecideability, and deconstructions engagement with social issues.

C. Form-Style: Does a radical critique of the tradition, construction of an emancipatory project as resistance to a system of domination, demand/necessitate an equally radical form/style? Not a specious question?

Martin Jay: (Referring to forms of resistance in the 1960s) “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**.”

1. He frames the 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”?

2. Must adopt form/style consistent with substance of critique.

a. he is not a bad writer, who does not have the literary skills

to write clearly

b. he intentionally is not writing clearly, what does clear mean,

“being able to see through”

c. his critique is the critique of the metaphysics of presence

d. will to be misunderstood by the tradition

3. Tradition: Radical critique of reason and the will to be misunderstood- Nietzsche, Adorno, Heidegger, Foucault.

a. Nietzsche

i. adopted a style(s) consistent with his critique of western philosophy and of society, which necessarily included language

ii. parables, poetry, parody, irony, “lying,” primarily aphorisms

“On the contrary, the grammatical and syntactical order of language, its subjects, predicates, objects, causal and conditional connection, were ‘the petrified fallacies of reason’ which continued to exercise their ‘seductive spell’ upon our intelligence.

Ancient thinkers who, wherever they “placed a word” believed they had made a discovery. Yet the truth about it is quite different! they had touched upon a problem and, deluding themselves that they had solved it, put up an obstacle to its solution.—To come to know means now to stumble over petrified words that are as hard as stone, and to break one’s

leg rather than a word

iii. did not want to be, or expect to be, understood by either

what he called the common person or scholars.

iv. on being understood: speaking to the future

v. In a letter he said that he was convinced it would take at least 50 years for a few to understand him.

vi. but in a separate letter he also said that he was “terrified by the thought of the sort of people who one day would invoke my authority.”

b. Adorno

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

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

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

5. Derrida’s form/style and the specter of Nietzsche

1. Is it legitimate to place Derrida in this tradition?
2. History of philosophy is homogenous monologue of the same over the other, it produces, reproduces and legitimates society’s hierarchies, its inclusions and exclusions, its violence, its institutions, its codes.
3. reason, clarity, logic masks violence towards the other
4. “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”?

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.”**

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.”**

6. He claims that this style is consistent with his critique and together they

are an intervention, too political for some, an openness to the voice of the other

7. Irony: the fear of not being taken seriously

a. not happy with his reception in English departments, not a

textual practice, and feel he is being misrepresented.

b. debate with Searle

c. defenders

8. Response: prove deconstruction was both ethical and political by demonstrating how it must intervene in social issues: terror, terrorism, refugees, crimes against humanity, rogue nations.

D. Undecidability is the key concept in Derrida’s thought, it is through this concept that he justifies his claim that deconstruction is an intervention, a response to a call and t too political for some. He says undecidability is the beginning of ethics and politics.

1. Deconstruction leads us to a position of exile

a. exile from the given that puts everything into question

b. opens us to the voice of the other, always present, but marginalized.

c. it is the position from which we must make a decision in relation to the other, but a situation for which there are not general rules.

d. requires/demands genuine decision

“A decisions can only come into being in a space that exceeds the program that would destroy all responsibility . . . there can be no moral or political responsibility without this trial and this passage by way of the undecidable.”

2. Ethic of hospitality

a. aporia of undecidability: two poles

b. unconditional openness to the other,

i. invitation to the other to one’s abode (ethos)

ii. no conditions

iii. no expectation of reciprocity

c. reality of every particular situation

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

poles

e. there is no general rule or principle that can be applied, and he uses

the story of Abraham and Isaac

3. democracy for the future

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 other

d. democracy for the future

a. now as future, never finished

b. dynamic of justice vs present conditions

E. Deconstruction and social issues: refugee crisis, terror and terrorism, friendship,

a. In the essay/talk On Cosmopolitanism, Derrida addresses refugee crisis in France in the late 1990s and the project/goal of creating cities of refuge

b. he argues that the concept of cosmopolitanism (Kant) is central to understanding the issue

c. cosmopolitanism is the belief that people are citizens of more than their

nation-states, and that borders should not be barriers to refuge.

d. he points out that France while claiming to be more cosmopolitan is actually enacting legislation and pursuing policies that are quite the opposite

e. and that the international community of sovereign nations while establishing a framework for respecting the rights and dignities of all, they

work not to fulfill these agreements. (Hannah Arendt)

f. Examines cosmopolitanism in the western tradition, he argues that it is in the Judeo/Christian tradition, Greek, Middle Ages, Sanctuary, Kant, domestic and international law

g. he argues that in each tradition there is an aporia, unconditional openness, and specific conditions, even in Kant

h. he then addresses the specific conditions of the French situation, but

one could say refugee cities in general