

Forms of Resistance

Discipline, Deconstruction, *Contre*-Institution, Jewishness...

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Before I explain this title and subtitle (the latter contains four forms or figures of resistance, which there are, of course, many more unlisted – I could easily add justice, woman, architecture, all of which have a similar register in Derrida), I would like to thank to Rossano Pecoraro and other friends from the editorial team of journal “Quadranti” for his (or their) invitation, their good will and hospitality to publish one text about Jacques Derrida (*in memoriam*). The form of this sentence in which I thank first Pecoraro – this construction, in which I prioritize friend and individuals over institution and various functions therein, I would recognize this right away as one of the most important gestures of Jacques Derrida. I would name that gesture *résistance*. Resistance is actually not resistance. Resistance (appearing as a word in the title of one of Derrida's books) is not the confrontation, or negation, or even destruction; rather, it is an exact order of separation and slippage. I prioritize (friend, for example, in my thanking order) in order to create yet another obstacle and establish distance from something else that is before me or whose part (that of an institution or institutions) I comprise.¹ The forms or figures, or, if you like,

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¹ “*Je crois que j’aurai passé ma vie*,” says Derrida on 14 July 1992, in his speech on the occasion of his naming a Chevalier de la Légion d’honneur, “*notamment dans ce qu’elle eut en somme d’académique, et qui ne fut heureusement pas tout, à m’expliquer avec les lois et les ruses de cette ironie institutionnelle.*” Further, “*Qu’il s’agît d’écriture ou de pensée, d’enseignement ou de recherche, de vie publique ou de vie privée, si je n’ai jamais rien eu contre l’institution, j’ai toujours aimé la*

certain protocols of distance, that are most important for Derrida are the ones listed in the subtitle.

As a preliminary move, all these figures are, entirely paradoxically, in very complicated way synonymous: they overlap and interlace with one another, although Derrida is always careful to differentiate them and use them carefully. When Derrida says, for example, that deconstruction is justice, or that “justice is undeconstructible,” (“la justice est indéconstructible”) then justice refers above all to the properly used word. It is a discipline (discipline in every sense of the word). There are only a few texts about discipline as such, yet Derrida often says that what he does is most disciplined.² Hence nothing is fleeting or improvised in Derrida's quoting or readings. When, for example, he is speaking about the norm and normativity (as he does in two short, later texts, “La norme et son suspens” and “La norme doit manquer”), Derrida insists on that which precedes the norm (right, law), or if you like, on *orientation without compass and before institution (orientation sans boussole et avant institution)*.

At the end of the text “Le modèle philosophique d’une ‘contre-institution,’” Derrida brings up the book jacket of *La faculté de juger*, obviously edited by Lyotard, with the words:

“*The judge should [...] judge without set rules, and his decision can make up right. This ‘prudence (caution?)’ is the virtue of being guided without a compass. Before the institution.*”³

Very early on Derrida spoke of *l’activité* and about *une pratique déconstructrice*, about an *autodéconstruction*;⁴ in the first interview to *Le Monde* from January 31st, 1982 he says that Deconstruction never succeeds without love (*Je dirai même qu’elle ne va jamais sans amour...*⁵);

contre-institution, qu’elle fût d’Etat ou précisément a – ou contre-étatique.” Cf. B. Peeters, *Derrida*, Paris, Flammarion, 2010, 549.

2 In a conversation with Florian Rötzer from 1987, Derrida says explicitly: “*Ich bin für die Disziplin.*” (I am in favor of discipline). F. Rötzer, *Französische Philosophie im Gespräch*, München, Klaus Boer Verlag, 1987, 86.

3 *SIECLE. Colloque de Cerisy*, Paris, L’IMEC, 2005, 260. “I would privilege the word institutions over deconstructions and architecture.” “Every institution is an architecture,” says Derrida in 1992. “Jacques Derrida: Invitation to a Discussion, Moderated by M. Wigley, *Columbia Doc.*, vol. 1, 1992, 12-13. “*La déconstruction est une pratique institutionnelle pour laquelle le concept d’institution reste un problème...* » J. Derrida, *Du droit à la philosophie*, Paris, Galilée, 1990, 88.

4 J. Derrida, *Points de suspension*, Paris, Galilée, 1992, 74, 76, 77.

5 *Le Monde*, 8. Later that same year, on 20 June 1982, *Le Monde* publishes a little known text by Derrida, “Le Langage,” in which he repeats several times that the text does not immediately ‘open up’ to everyone, that it is necessary to decode it, and that what is therefore needed is a democratization of discourse (9).

several times he uses the word 'deconstruction,' a code word (*le mot de passe*) to save time or to be better understood and move the conversation along (*pour aller vite*); often he defines a deconstructive reading as different and in opposition to the context, but also, and at the same time, as urgent and necessary; and constantly, from interview to interview, calls for caution and vigilance (“we cannot fall asleep,” “*we shouldn’t take any concept for granted*”⁶).

If I had to quickly classify a few of Derrida's stipulations, in keeping with his hesitations and reservations, I would insist on starting with the negative question: what is Deconstruction not? It is not a project, a system, a book, a critique, method, position, politics, technique, analysis, act or gesture, not an operation, not a questioning, it cannot be lectured, it cannot be classified, it is not an issue of discourse,⁷ it cannot be critiqued (finally, Deconstruction cannot be deconstructed). Then I would mention an interesting solution of Derrida's from 1991 (“*it is about one possible name to describe...that which will happen [which is coming] or which is not able to happen [to arrive]...[ce qui arrive ou n’arrive pas à arriver]*”⁸), which takes its true form only in 1999 in an interview to the daily *Le Figaro*: “It is not a question of destruction: at issue, and with great commitment, is only the attempt to think through how something happens, how something which is not natural comes about: a culture, an institution, a tradition.”⁹ I would end this preliminary enumeration of Derrida's experiments with a 'definition' of Deconstruction with two more of his ideas that further complicate the issue: the first is in the phrase “*ça se déconstruit*” (meaning, that which is arriving, which is ahead of us, in itself, without intervention, is already in the process of deconstruction); the other idea takes the form of an instruction to “take into account (which is what analysis cannot be in the strict sense of the word) everything which cannot be broken down into simple or theoretical elements.” Hesitation, but also caution, discipline, resistance, acceptance – these are all words from a Deconstructionist register – is doubly marked: our resistance towards that which arrives in itself and, *à la fois*, our acceptance, 'taking into consideration', that part of what is arriving remains untouched, and

6 I. Salusinszky, *Criticism in Society*, London-New York, 1987, 15-17.

7 “Jacques Derrida in Discussion with Christopher Norris,” in *Deconstruction – Omnibus Volume*, ed. A. Papadakis, C. Cooke & A. Benjamin, London, Academy Editions, 1989, 72-73.

8 J. Derrida, *Points de suspension*, 367. It is impossible to achieve the same word play of the signifier and the polysemy of the French verb 'arriver' in translation.

9 *Figaro Magazine*, Saturday 16 October 1999, interview with Eliette Abécassis, 60.

that we accept it as such. Perhaps in this way as well, could Derrida's insistence on the affirmative quality of Deconstruction be explained.

“Deconstruction as affirmation” – is this the minimal and preventive condition for Deconstruction to begin, and can it even satisfy us? Namely, reconstructions of deconstruction, but also in the singular, reconstruction needs to show that there is one, let us say, non-deconstructive element, for example a non-deconstructive element (although I am not sure), which repeats and is potentially recognizable in one's deconstructionist 'moment'. It is necessary, for reconstruction to be possible, in order for it to last, that in each deconstructionist moment something repeat, but at the same time that which repeats remain unrepeatable. If Deconstruction is not a method, then it has no protocols, no procedures, *procédés*, cannot be repeated, carried over, translated, and hence cannot be thematized or recognized. In opposition to this, if Deconstruction is exclusively Derrida's method, if that was his thing or if it is only my thing, then it is probably without some great value. “For a method that does not repeat (“I have my own method”) we could easily think that it is useless.”¹⁰

I suggest without grand preambles and overtures, that Deconstruction be put in place of hesitation and overture, as a preamble of every method. It seems to me that the future of Deconstruction and its strength could be recognized, not as a kind of parasite on any method or institution, nor as an unrepeatable part (a personal moment, for example, Derrida's or mine or yours) of that which is always repeatable, but as a rhythm of any method, as a process of approaching something, as a force of institutionalization of every institution, as a '*sur*,' '*avant*' and '*contre*' of every method or institution.¹¹

Of course, the placement of the word institution or *contre*-institution in this little sketch of a suggestion of my project, announces my own reconstruction of Deconstruction that could be in harmony with Derrida. I am interested in Derrida who thinks an institution and the strength of institutionalization, the relationship of violence and force to institution, ways of forming an institution (a good institution), but also a theory of resistance and fear of institutions.

10 J. Derrida, *Recherches sur la philosophie et le langage, Cahier du groupe...*, Université de Grenoble, 1983, 37.

11 “The analysis of institution is not simply a passive reading; it's an active and selective transformation.” “Jacques Derrida: Invitation to a Discussion,” Moderated by M. Wigley, *Columbia Doc.*, 12.

The 'before' and 'after' of the institution of philosophy should be that which is 'counter-institution.' However, within the time and space of the institution of philosophy, unless you put to the side and hold in reserve all the other possible and impossible institutions, there is something which we can call 'counter' (but not 'against' institutions). Else it can be called a move, an act, an action, a deed which runs *contre*, and in opposition – for example, *destitution*, bringing into question, the de-establishing (uninstitutionalization), destabilization and probably, deconstruction.

What is 'counter' any institution, what is 'counter' to institution as such, or what is it that opposes the institution while propping it up, setting it up, what holds it even when lying under it? What is, or what kind of an institution is legitimized by its resistance to any institution, to itself, to its own institution? What is an establishment as 'resistance', as opposed to an establishment as 'support', and what kind of institution contains 'resistance' to its own 'resistance'? In other words, is it at all possible, aside from describing an ideal counter-institution, to differentiate clearly and classify a few activities or actions that build, stabilize, but also destabilize at the same time?¹² Let me now quote from a 1919 lecture by Franz Rosenzweig that Derrida rereads constantly:

We can no longer wish to remain naked people. We look 'backward' (*zurück*), but not in a way for us to sacrifice our living life (*unser lebendiges Leben*) to the image of the holy institution (*heiligen Institution*) that destroys life. No, the institution may only be house, we must know and render true that we are more than an institution, a living Jewish people (*Nein, die Institution darf uns nur Haus sein, wir müssen es wissen und wahr machen, dass wir mehr sind*

12 In one of his last texts, “Le modèle philosophique d’une ‘contre-institution,’” Derrida gives seven basic characteristics of the counter-institution, keeping steadfastly in mind the idea of Collège and Cerisy (*l’expérience contre-institutionnelle de Cerisy*): the counter-institution is non-governmental in origin (*d’origine non gouvernementale*); it does not have war or resistance to any other institution as its mission; philosophy, although omnipresent, does not dominate over other disciplines; it is international; it does not confer honorifics or titles, academic or professional; it ensures space for expertise and experimentation; finally, we never know what awaits us in counter-institutional space, because it holds within itself pre-institutional space, space prior to norm (that which is 'incalculable', this being the word repeated several times in this text). J. Derrida, “Le modèle philosophique d’une ‘contre-institution,’” *SIECLE. Colloque de Cerisy*, Paris, IMEC, 2005, 248, 253-255. “L’idée d’une contre-institution,” says Derrida in conversation with Ferraris, from which I quote page 31 of the manuscript, in French (J. Derrida, M. Ferraris, *Taste of the Secret*. Interview held 25-26 June 1994), “non pas spontanée ni sauvage ni immédiate c’est le motif le plus permanent qui m’a guide en quelque sorte.”

als die Institution, lebendige jüdische Menschen).¹³

I should say – although I feel a strong resistance and discomfort as I utter this (even if I am speaking about resistance to the institution as such, to the holy institution [*heilige Institution*], as well as about resistance to 'belonging', to 'being part' of something, to the phrase 'Jewish people' [*jüdische Menschen*], all while trying to defend the house [*Haus*] as a counter-institution, as something both greater and lesser than the institution) – as I was saying, I should mention something very important about “belonging,” about Derrida's “various feelings of belongings” (an not only his).¹⁴ I could ask more specifically, how can we differentiate among holy state institutions, counter-institutions, the house, and (why not?) the belonging to a people (any people)? (For it seems to me that others too, and not just Jews, today more than ever before, require the institutionalization and protection of life.¹⁵) Before I attempt to justify a portion of the subtitle of my text (which is all I can do, really, given that this is a sketch or preamble of a more complicated move), let me underline the necessity of architecture in or with deconstruction, in the context of speaking about Derrida and “the Jewish” (leaving the adjective as an attribute, without object). The following anecdote coming from Marguerite Derrida goes like this: Marguerite, visited Algiers with Jacques for the first time in the late fifties. She saw his family home for the first time, met Derrida's mother and father, Aimé Derrida. She says:

In 1957 we go to Algiers together for the first time after Harvard, Derrida fulfills his military duty in a civil capacity, and Jackie presents me to his family. It is Yom Kippur

13 F. Rosenzweig, “Lessings Nathan,” *Der Mensch und sein Werk*, GS, 3, *Zweistromland*, 1984, 450. Note from Rosenzweig's lecture held in late December, 1919.

14 Derrida insists he is following Gide's indictment: “I am not one of the family” (*je ne suis pas de la famille*). “I am not one of the family' means: do not consider me 'one of you,' 'don't count me in,' I want to keep my freedom, always: this, for me, is the condition not only for being singular and other, but also for entering into relation with the singularity and alterity of others. When someone is one of the family, not only does he lose himself in the herd, but he loses the others as well; the others become simply places, family functions in the organic totality that constitutes a group, school, nation or community of subjects speaking the same language.” However, Derrida continues, the “second dimension (...) is that the fact of my not wanting to be one of the family is supposed by the fact of wanting to be one of the family.” “I am someone who has never left university.” J. Derrida, M. Ferraris, *Taste of the Secret*, 26-28; 43.

15 Of course, the question is whether institutions as such guard and protect life at all? One of the great French institutionalists, Georges Renard writes about this in *La théorie de l'institution. Essai d'ontologie juridique*, Paris, Sirey, 31-32.

and the rabbi comes to the house. The male members of the family are offered a white rooster, and the female a white hen. Aimé (Haïm) Derrida presents me to the rabbi and says: “she is Esther.” I am silent, following what is required of me. After the ceremony, in the yard, while dinner is being prepared, I ask Aimé whether he knows I am not Jewish. “Of course I know, but if I decide you are Esther, then you are Esther”.

It seems that such a house, in which Aimé Derrida and Marguerite Derrida meet, in which the man names or renames the woman, fits entirely with the idea of the house as an institution that Rosenzweig puts forth forty years prior. In a letter to Gertrud Oppenheim of 2 August 1917, Rosenzweig speaks about sexual difference, insisting that the woman possess a certain natural un-free aspect lacking in men, called passivity (*die Frau hat ein Stück Unfreiheit von Natur das der Man nicht hat, ihre Passivität*). It would certainly be impossible today to ignore such claims made by Rosenzweig in (not only) this letter: “In the house all are to be educated; for the house none but the women” [*Im Haus werden alle erzogen, für das Haus aber nur die Frauen*], or else Rosenzweig quoting Milton, “He for God only, she for God in him.”¹⁶ Still, what is of much greater importance for us, given that the house becomes the model for a new and completely open institution and counter-institution, is that the house can be anywhere, that the living of a small group persevere alongside holy customs, that there is no war and direct violent opposition of the counter-institution of the house to holy institutions, because the latter, says Rosenzweig, destroy life. In wrongfully and willfully naming Marguerite Esther, Aimé Derrida prevents conflict and, paradoxically, ensures the future openness of the institution.

I would now like to quote a brief fragment, a portion of a conversation between Derrida, the famous architect Peter Eisenman and the architect Jeff Kipnis, taking place early one afternoon 17 September 1985 in New York. This passage leads us to the thematization of the relationship of deconstruction and institution or counter-institution. Derrida, Eisenman and a few other architects have gathered that day to construct or project something without name or space. Throughout the afternoon Derrida expounds in detail what *chora* is for Plato, upon which they all together reach the following formulation,

16 F. Rosenzweig, 1. *Briefe und Tagebücher*, GS 1, 1900-1918, 1979, 425, 427, 428. In *Totalité et Infini* (chapter “Maison”), Levinas faithfully copies and adopts Rosenzweig's positions.

attractive to all: “*Chora* is the spacing which is the condition for everything to take place, for everything to be inscribed.” This construction is interesting in the context of the search for a “place” or “no-place” of the word or attribute “Jewish.”

“Afterwards, the discussion resumes on the topic of the role of being Jewish, in the thought of displacement.

JD I suppose it has nothing to do with my upbringing.. I mean, of course, I am Jewish by birth, but my Jewish background and history are very poor I am very surprised that my readers have located these traditions.

PE The same is true for me. I have no Jewish religious experiences at all, but I think that I sense in your work an innately Hebraic way of thinking.

JK The currency of doubt, which is the medium of exchange in both your economies, is Hebraic currency.

JD There is something specific in the Hebraic tradition referring to architecture.

PE There is the temple... G. Steiner in a very interesting essay called “The Text, My Homeland”, talks of the fact that the temple may have been transgression against Hebraic thought.

JK A transgression because it involves representations?

PE Representations, concretization of presence and being. That is what so interests me about *chora*. As you say, it is a non-Platonic idea. To me, it seems more like a Hebraic notion.”¹⁷

Conversely, if we had to define the nature of Derrida and Eisenman's contribution to the “*Chora L Works*” project, it is certainly in opposition to Hebraic thought, since they both work on figuration of an idea of *chora*, and they both wish to build or make what Plato was barely able to name. Still, more interesting or more entertaining is the initial banter between Derrida and Eisenman, where they actually inscribe the importance of Hebraic thought to one another (“but I think that I sense in your work an innately Hebraic way of thinking”; “There is something specific in the Hebraic tradition referring to

17 J. Derrida, P. Eisenman, *Chora L Works*, New York, Monaceli Press, 1997, 11.

architecture”). All while each rejects for himself any debt to the Hebraic tradition or debt to belonging to the Jewish community.¹⁸

When we begin to discern the inseparability of the institution, architecture and deconstruction, to offer a sketched explanation of a rather audacious claim: whatever “Jew” or “Jewish Difference” (the attribute, element, trace, moment, 'something') is, it is certainly engaged or in action (in play) precisely when it is being built. It is the moment when the house of which Franz Rosenzweig speaks is being built, or when the *contre-institution*, of which Derrida speaks in one way or another, is being institutionalized. This institution is really not an institution, although it has the characteristics of an institution: protecting life or being suitable for the life of diverse individuals, containing within it people working and experimenting together, not excluding those who are not present at that moment (that is, being open), being on the other side of the holy (of religion or state), standing before the ever-present danger of dissolution (the threat of destruction is certainly an important condition for the possibility of the institutional). And it seems to me that this institution which is not really an institution could also feature the “Jewish” (difference), or at least could not be easily extricated. To be exact, the way of building and constructing joint work in Rosenzweig, Derrida or in Eisenman could affirm the existence of what neither Derrida (nor Rosenzweig in his own special way) could then controvert or repudiate, and which could subsequently be termed as *Jewish*. Of course, we are not simply dealing with some sort of social ontology by these authors or their theory of institutional action, but also their lives and work with others. We are dealing with the always personal act of creation.

18 In conversation with Ferraris, Derrida says: “I had begun to experience anti-Semitism outside, in the streets, in my circle of friends, my old playmates who treated me like a “dirty Jew” and wouldn’t talk to me anymore. And, paradoxically, the feeling of not belonging came to affect my relationship with the Jewish community and with the Jewish children who, like me, had been grouped together in the Jewish school. I hated that school. (...) I was on very bad terms with the Jewish community, which was trying to get organized and adapted to the situation. (...) The unpublished manuscript contains the following, in French: “*J’ai eu un rapport très négative à la communauté juive, avec ce geste obscure, qui s’est formé à ce moment-là, et qui est resté, je crois, permanent chez moi, qui consiste, sur le fonds de ce traumatisme-là, non seulement à cultiver une espèce de non-appartenance à la culture française et à la France en général, mais aussi un rejet, en quelque sorte, de l’appartenance juive.*” I am part neither of this nor of that, neither of this anti-Semitism nor of its victims. (...) I never took part in any group of Jewish students.” J. Derrida, M. Ferraris, *Taste of the Secret*, 38, 39.