Strategies of Deconstruction, or the Endless Death of Theory

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Summary

This paper aims at clarifying some aspects of the relationship between deconstruction and theory, and of the definition of "theory" as such. The specific quality of this relationship becomes indistinct if deconstruction is merely regarded as a *method* or *theory*, and only becomes evident once considerable attention has been paid to the role of *metaphor* and of *strategy* in the text of deconstruction, and to the particular ways in which these two notions are elaborated upon by Derrida. A confrontation with structuralism (unavoidably brief owing to circumstances) contributes to the attempt of presenting some distinctive traits pertaining to deconstruction with regard to "theory".

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel beoog om sekere aspekte van die verhouding tussen dekonstruksie en teorie, asook die definisie van teorie as sodanig, te belig. Die spesifieke kwaliteit van die verhouding verdwyn heeltemal indien dekonstruksie bloot as 'n teorie of 'n metode beskou word. Hierdie besondere kwaliteit word aansienlik duideliker wanneer heelwat aandag aan die rol van *die metafoor* en van *strategie* binne die dekonstruktiewe teks bestee word. Die spesifieke wyse waarop laasgenoemde twee konsepte deur Derrida verwerk word, verg ook besondere aandag. 'n Vergelyking van die konsepte met die strukturalisme (noodwendig net kortliks weens omstandighede) dra daartoe by om sekere kenmerkende eienskappe van dekonstruksie met betrekking tot "teorie" daar te stel.

Two metaphors

Two opposing sets of metaphors often (albeit not always consciously) subtend the endeavours of the literary critic or theorist, and sometimes emerge in the process of defining the meaning, the objects, the methods and the limits of what we usually call "literary theory" and "literary criticism": that is, whenever a conscious effort is made to understand, on the one hand, the nature and the structure of the literary or poetic text, and, on the other, the different ways in which the literary and poetic text can, should, or happen to be approached.

I would describe these two groups of metaphors as follows: 1) metaphors referring to the poetic/literary work as an organic, living body, on one side; 2) metaphors depicting the poetic/literary text as a structure of relations, spaces and differences, on the other. On a first level, the opposition concerns the metaphor of the body/organism against the metaphor of the system/ structure. It is interesting to note, however, that this alternative (rather anodyne in itself) regularly tends to slide into a stronger dichotomy sustained by a powerful (if unperceived) system of ethical values, in which the full = the body = the living is opposed to the differential = the empty = the dead. It is not unusual to discover, associated with these, metaphors representing the

critic as the one who kills the text by dissecting or violating it, opposed to metaphors representing the critic as the one who respectfully and faithfully brings it to life or keeps it alive.

These two sets of metaphors (in short: LIFE *versus* DEATH) are somewhat special; in their irredeemable opposition nothing less than the meaning and the value of literary theory and criticism (and certainly much more than that)[1] are at stake. These two images (supposing that we can reduce them to that) often seem to command the choice of position with respect to literary work, or to the relationship with literary work, more powerfully than any rational argument. Precisely for this reason, the simple, overwhelming and (perhaps) deceptive clarity of the fundamental opposition itself (life/death) needs to be carefully reconsidered.

Literary theory in general is sometimes confronted with broad reproaches that have their origin in that primary opposition, and deconstruction in particular, in many people's minds, clearly seems to dwell on the side of emptiness, of death. Its strategies (that many see as cold and senseless procedures, marked by the disdain for any practical result, and by the masochistic glorification of the intellectual "cul-de-sac") seem to justify the worst fears among those that always accompany all analytic endeavours: fears of irreparable damages inflicted on the living body (of the literary work, in this instance) that is being submitted to analysis.

Let us note, by the way, that speaking of *text* (as opposed to poem, work, novel etc.) seems in itself a dangerous indication of preference for the deadly structuralist/post-structuralist procedures. And, having pronounced these two names, I shall add that, in general, structuralism and deconstruction, in spite of all differences, are often associated as the best representatives of what is perceived as the "danger of theory": they are seen as similarly insensitive, cold (and with similarly freezing and deadly effects) in their ways of approaching the fragile and precious life of literary work. It will perhaps be useful to stop for a moment and give further consideration to the implicit reasons for (and the shortcomings of) such assimilation, or amalgamation.

Structuralism and Deconstruction

> ...we take nourishment from the fecundity of structuralism....
>
> (Derrida 1963: 4)

When we try to provide ourselves with a simple, clear idea of what structuralism and deconstruction are and of what they can contribute to the critical approach to the literary object, we inevitably run the risk of forgetting their larger (that is, properly philosophical) implications, and of reducing them to models, applications, or appliances. The student, the critically minded reader, comes to the field of literary criticism and theory and expects to find a series of interchangeable tools (the Marxist, the psychoanalytic, the sociological, the structuralist, the deconstructive tool, and so forth) with which to "access" the literary text.

This metaphor is only useful up to a point: structuralism and deconstruction (as well as Marxism, psychoanalysis and so on) can hardly be compressed into

easily operable applications without losing much of their impact; in fact, they are not simply methods, and they do much more than just process textual material; they actually interfere with and change the world around them, mainly by modifying its co-ordinates.[2]

As simply methods of literary criticism, and if methods are to be judged by their immediate "results", structuralism and deconstruction are very poor instruments, since they almost regularly lead to some form of degeneration of their original thrusts: to inert formalism and superficial technicism, in the case of structuralism, or to vagueness, nihilism and uselessness, in the case of deconstruction. But the impact of both, inside and outside the literary field, is far greater than the one resulting from the mere application of fixed procedures to texts.

The fact that the scope of both structuralism and deconstruction goes beyond the limits of literary criticism, not to mention the even narrower limits of specific *methods* in literary criticism, does not mean that their effects in literary criticism are of no value. On the contrary it rather means that structuralism and deconstruction, although they can certainly be used and be considered as two methods, in literary criticism as well as in other fields, are first of all two different ways of perceiving, understanding and enacting the theoretic gesture in general: by "theoretic" gesture I mean the one by which and in the frame of which knowledge is made possible, gained, validated, cumulated, revised, discarded and so forth.

This must be kept in mind at all times, in order to avoid reducing the two theoretic gestures to two mere sets of tools and procedures, and in order to perceive in their functioning the implications that exceed the order of immediate applicability. In effect, once the philosophical frame of structuralism and deconstruction has been excluded from consideration, any chance of understanding the reasons and the direction of what is going on in those gestures is forever lost, even if we were left with the perfectly understandable handbooks of two perfectly functioning text-munching machines.

In many ways, and particularly when they are seen as methods, structuralism and deconstruction can be considered as equals, as two different (albeit not totally discontinuous) intellectual attitudes, two different positions on the same plane of theoretical approach to knowledge. I would now like to advance the question of a possible difference of level, with regard to theory (its notion and its practice), between structuralism and deconstruction; a difference which inevitably tends to fade when one deals with, so to speak, *applied* structuralism and, even more, *applied* deconstruction. In fact, the risk of losing sight of the difference of level between structuralism and deconstruction is indeed one of the more ·immediate and less visible effects of incorrectly (or at least insufficiently) perceiving them as simple methods.

I should add at this point that I will not argue for the superiority of one over the other, for instance of deconstruction over structuralism. I am interested in showing that structuralism and deconstruction (not as methods – this would be self-evident – but as theoretic movements) function in different ways and at different levels, not only and not essentially because they apply different tools to the same object, but because they create two entirely different types

of objects and because the theoretical movements they generate and exploit are radically different. This difference of level also generates a difference in the range of effects that structuralism and deconstruction produce.

To summarize these two different intellectual gestures, I would describe them, very generally,[3] as follows: structuralism aims at *exploiting* the possibilities of a given and well-defined system; deconstruction aims at *exploring* the limits of any given (but never closed) system. Structuralism is essentially *description and explanation*, whereas deconstruction is essentially *question*. I would go so far as to argue that, for structuralism, there are basically no problems and no questions, apart from those generated and controlled within a closed system. On the other hand, for deconstruction all problems and questions may get out of control, which in itself is proof that no system is ever closed, and therefore that any system can be subjected to a radical interrogation concerning its borders, the seal of its limits.

Structuralism does not question the oppositions on which it founds itself: it either accepts or creates them. For example, it does not challenge the basic set-up of the subject/object relationship. It sees itself as (and *is* in fact, to a point) the discourse of science about a certain object; for instance the literary object, one among many others. Anything, from a structuralist point of view, can be constituted as an "object", following an act of delimitation of the field and of definition of relevant factors and correct procedures. Deconstruction, on the other hand, questions all conceptual dichotomies, and in particular the very ones on which it, no longer entirely and securely, founds itself. Both movements can be understood only by reference to philosophic positions, or, rather, to "dispositions of philosophy": structuralism, and for example structuralist literary criticism, is philosophy at work in delimitating and analysing a particular class of objects, for example the literary text. Deconstruction is philosophy questioning itself everywhere, even beyond its own territorial limits, for instance within the literary text. The two activities seem to be mutually exclusive: in fact they are not absolutely exclusive, but distinct enough to be discernible and to place the theoretical activity of structuralism and deconstruction on two different levels.

In this respect (and, by the way, all this has a lot to do with *respect*: that is, the relation with a given order of priorities, the acceptance or rejection of a state of things) structuralism belongs to the tradition which (through both idealism and empiricism) strives to regulate the relation between subject and object that is called THEORY, and links it inextricably to the metaphoric field of VISION. For example (and, once again, simplifying extremely), we could say that from the structuralist point of view the literary object (as any other object) is initially positioned outside the field of vision of the reader/subject, but can in principle always be included in the theoretical field through operations of the mind aimed at the discovery/production of structures. This set-up or disposition is never really questioned; nevertheless, it constitutes the foundation not only of structuralism, but also of that necessary part of structuralism which is at work everywhere in criticism and in theory, even beyond the recognizable legal borders of structuralism itself.

Deconstruction questions any given opposition, it even questions the very *position* from which only theory is possible (for instance, the position of the subject, external to the object): the "old name" (Derrida 1981: 4) of this position is philosophy. It can, therefore, be argued that deconstruction sees the theoretic relationship (that is, philosophy) as a problem in itself, as the first and most important problem of theory. This problem regularly seems to be one of *limits*.

Deconstruction is haunted by the problem of limits, and attempts to deal with it as radically as possible. There is always, at the heart of theory and criticism, a problem of borders and of inclusion; for instance, in the case of literary criticism and theory, deconstruction would question the very distinctions in which those activities find their initial impulse, and ask: what is the difference between literature and theory, between literature and criticism? If theory and criticism belong essentially to philosophy, if not as *corpus*, corporation and genre, at least as mode of discourse and disposition of the mind, what is the deep difference (if any) between literature and philosophy? On the other hand: what if philosophy were, after all, *inside* literature, one possible form of the literary text? Where does the one end and the other begin? These are the type of questions that distinguish deconstruction from, for instance, structuralism.

However, not only the type of question, but also the type of answer is different. For deconstruction, no answer is final, all answers are strategic: that is, only locally and temporarily valid. In the case of the relationship between literature and philosophy ("which is *in* which?"), both answers, both positions are possible. Strategically, one can and will be made temporarily dominant: *literature* can become strategically dominant, for instance, to expose the desire of philosophy to constitute itself in absolute seclusion from the non-essential, the non-serious, and thus to deconstruct its dream of total control of itself and of the other; or *philosophy* can become strategically dominant, to show certain regularities at work, in any kind of discourse, and even outside the proper discourse of metaphysics, even in literature, or in art.

The difference between structuralism and deconstruction is not a difference in depth, nor does it derive from totally different philosophic traditions: on the contrary, Derrida himself recognizes some continuity between structuralism and deconstruction. The very term "post-structuralism" (often applied also to deconstruction) implies not only an intention of overcoming, but also, and very correctly, a measure of continuity, of common belonging to the same tradition and to a destiny that, somewhere (in spite of a radical bifurcation), remains the same. At times, as we have seen, this common belonging of structuralism and deconstruction to philosophy, to theory, is even perceived as predominant, and it is very often this perception which justifies, in the name of "life" and against the dangers of hypertheoretical approaches, the coupling of structuralism and deconstruction in one and the same movement of rejection. There are points of view, however, from which the two machines and the two gestures are radically different, function in totally opposite directions, and refer to different and incompatible theoretical horizons.

Force and Form

> *Form* fascinates when one no longer has the force to understand force from
> within itself. That is, to create. This is why literary criticism is structuralist in
> every age, in its essence and destiny.
>
> (Derrida 1963: 4–5)

It is interesting to note that one of the very first essays published by Jacques
Derrida ("Force et signification", in 1963) deals precisely with a certain
uneasiness in respect of the then dominant structuralist approach to the
literary text.[4] Structuralism, and in particular, in Derrida's terms, "ultrastruc-
turalism" (which is a sort of extreme generalization, at times with "degener-
ative" results,[5] of structuralist principles), by focusing on the teleologic,
simultaneous presence of its object, and by reducing it to a spatial structure
(that is, to its *form*), misses in the literary work nothing less than the essential,
something that Derrida – for want of something better – calls *force*.

Deconstruction in its early stages, therefore, already seems to include a
critical approach not only to structuralism, but also to literary criticism in
general, inasmuch as it must include a structuralist component; and Derrida's
criticism concerns precisely the fact that structuralism, by forcing a model (in
this case the geometrical model) onto the text, loses sight of the specific, vital
quality of the literary work.

At the same time, Derrida recognizes that a certain loss of force and life is
unavoidable in literary criticism, be it officially structuralist or not: in fact, all
literary criticism, as soon as it includes a theoretic movement, is (up to a
point) structuralist, *precisely* because it must include a reduction of *force* to
form. Reading with the intent of doing more than merely enjoying the text,
reading with the intent of understanding not only the message delivered by
the surface of the text, but also other and less explicit (but not less important)
meanings, all this is already, in part, "structuralist".

On the other hand, criticism is not (and never will be) science. It belongs
to the uncertain realm of the middle: to the obscure region of the limit
between pleasure and duty, creation and repetition, control and driftage.
Something (and not anything) has to be said about a text; something
meaningful, understandable, enlightening and new must be added to the text
itself; but this "something" will never be able to exhaust the text. This might
be, in utterly general terms, the specific role and limitation of any critical
approach to the literary text; and this might be the reason for the constitu-
tively precarious situation of criticism, that forces it to be always somewhat
structuralist, but prevents it from fulfilling entirely the structuralist intention.

In "Force and Signification" Derrida, while criticizing the excessive reli-
ance on structure and geometry (for instance – it is Derrida's example – in
Jean Rousset's structuralist criticism), could be seen as exalting force, beauty,
everything which, in the literary work, is mysterious and incomprehensible,
inaccessible to science and to its categories. In fact, his text can only be
understood by taking into account the strategic value of any deconstructive
statement. The revaluation of *force* at the expense of *form* is a strategic "step
back": Derrida is not trying to reach the ultimate truth of the matter, and to

rescue literature from theory, but to destroy the appearance of ultimate truth which is created by the reliance on the notion of structure, and therefore to keep theory alive in its relation with the literary text.

What is force, in fact? *Force*, when opposed to *form*, seems to belong to the metaphoric field and the orbit of LIFE, in its cosmic opposition to DEATH: this "appeal to life" is certainly visible in Derrida's text, as one of its effects. But deconstruction does not rest in the comfortable opposition of fundamental metaphors. In fact, in Derrida's text the opposition force/form does not signal the end of the critical work. On the contrary, the opposition demands an act of deconstruction, in the course of which *force* itself (described as "a certain pure and infinite equivocality, which gives signified meaning no respite, no rest, but engages it in its own *economy* so that it always signifies again and differs")[6] becomes a deconstructive factor.

What kind of critical-theoretical activity (supposing that this is what it is) is deconstruction then? Deconstruction does indeed belong to theory, *is* a theoretic mood, remains a theoretic effort, even in spite of its own pertinacious and perfectly justifiable denial, even in spite of its own strategic rejection of the classical opposition of "theory *versus* practice". It remains a *motion of theory*, even if it is *not a theory*.

It is not without reason that Deconstruction strives *not* to be a theory; it cannot become a theory without dying as a motion of theory. Deconstruction fights death; nevertheless, it has, indeed (as any other philosophic approach to the world, I would argue), a lot to do with death; but not particularly, I surmise, with the death of its "objects", for example literary work, whose life and radiance little depend, in general, on critical/theoretical efforts. Rather with the life and death of theory itself: in other words, with *its own* unavoidable, inconceivable and endless death.

Precisely this (i.e. this particular relationship between theory and death) might be the special quality of deconstruction and its specific difference from other theoretical positions. Deconstruction relates to its own life and death in a different way, as we shall see in a moment.

Metaphor, Theory and Super-Theory

Death, life; force, form; grasping, penetrating, dwelling: always metaphors. Why have all these metaphors at all, when dealing with theory? Why can we not say what theory is in a purely abstract, purely intellectual way, without detours, illustrations, or metaphors? One possible answer is that maybe there is no way of avoiding metaphor in theory, because, in fact, theory *is* metaphor: it is a certain type of metaphoric displacement of the available resources of meaning.

At the heart of theory and of our relationship with theory there is metaphoric displacement, in at least two important ways: 1) firstly, theory produces a special kind of metaphoric displacement of the meaning when it is "applied" to a text, or to an "object" in general: it translates, shifts meanings toward a new explanatory configuration; 2) in a second way, because a theory, a theoretic system or cluster, is seizable and manageable only

metaphorically, it is accessible only when it is possible to draw a visible, sensible, albeit not necessarily complete, model of its invisible, or even non-existent, structure.

This is why the two metaphors mentioned above (text as full, living body and text as interplanetary space made up of emptiness, attraction, repulsion, difference, nothingness) are essential to the comprehension of the theoretic machines that they represent, or betray, and in general to the understanding of our relationship with the text.

In this perspective, a theory is a metaphor for understanding the world, and it in turn needs a metaphor to be understood, and even to be born. There is no possibility of isolating either one of the two terms (metaphor/theory) without the other;[7] this is clearly a circle, and this circularity is the main problem of theory, from a philosophical point of view. From other points of view, however, it is no problem at all: the operative circularity between metaphor and theory nourishes any theoretic endeavour, and becomes an obstacle only when it is thematically approached as such, with the radicality proper to philosophy.

When it is thematically and radically approached, the problem becomes really complex and can no longer be reduced to a mere question of "style", because metaphor is not only one among many rhetorical figures, but also (in the larger sense of "displacement of meaning") all the different ways in which the discourse is ordered, strategically shaped and disposed in order to say something and to convince: in other terms, language in general. Theory is not only a model, but also philosophy in general, it encompasses all instances in which the power of metaphor is used to create and control truth-effects. The relationship between "metaphor" (meaning) and "theory" (control) is then nothing less than the philosophic question *par excellence*. One aspect of this problem is that it is no longer certain whether theory can really "use" metaphor; beyond a certain limit, which becomes rather uncertain, theory is itself used, driven by metaphor.[8] Will this circularity then, perhaps, finally and totally engulf philosophy's dream of theoretical control?

I shall momentarily abandon this question, and suggest instead another and less terroristic one: would it be possible to put together a super-theory capable of unifying and explaining the different metaphoric operations produced by the different theoretical movements and systematizations (for example, the two opposing metaphors/theories: text as body, text as net of differences)? A super-theory of theory? A model capable of encompassing all theoretic possibilities?

The question is less idle than it may seem; Deconstruction, more than a specific theory, is in my opinion a dynamic fragment of the path leading toward (but not nearly approaching, and for essential reasons) such a super-theory of all possible theoretical effects. The path is not simply long: it is, in fact, endless. The old (and almost empty) name for such a super-theory would be, once again, as it has always been, philosophy. Today perhaps, admittedly, an agonizing philosophy; whose agony, nevertheless, according to some, is not yet about to end.[9]

A central element of this global (if imaginary) systematization of the theoretic effort should be acceptance of the fact that metaphor resides at the heart of theory, and also that metaphor is essentially more a *displacement of meaning* than a meaning, and as such it can never be entirely controllable. As a consequence, first of all, a pragmatic rule, a sort of regulatory principle saying: do not throw yourself blindly into any particular metaphor (for example – it is always the same example – "life", "death"), or do it only for exploratory purposes, to see where it leads. Don't, however, trust a metaphor blindly, nor even a theory, because theory is always somehow metaphor, and metaphor has always to be either partly unseizable, partly ineffective, or guilty. In Derrida's terms: "Metaphor is never innocent. It orients research and fixes results" (Derrida 1963: 17).

In other words: all the metaphors we find in theory are not wrong, but the dogmatic interpretation of each one of them leads to "error". In this case, what I call error is at the same time the very force of metaphor (and of theory): its visibility, its explanatory quality, the fact that it promotes understanding, for there is no understanding without it. The problem, however, is that in any metaphor, part of the meaning must remain hidden, unseizable, absent. The petrification of a metaphor into a given meaning or set of meanings is an excess of the very "seizability" that is essential to metaphor. This, in turn, is an effect of the even more fundamental quality of "unseizability" that accompanies all metaphoric processes: because of its own instability, any metaphoric process tends to stabilize in an image; when a metaphor becomes perfectly clear, the unseizable parts of meaning are eliminated, making the grasp total. There precisely the metaphorical effect ceases to be a displacing force and becomes an inertia, a black hole; a theoretic effort becomes a theory; a quest ends in a model. For example, the spatial model, in the case of structuralism: "When the spatial model is hit upon, when it functions, critical reflection rests within it. In fact, and even if criticism does not admit this to be so" (Derrida 1963: 17).

Apart from the pragmatic principle (or the moral imperative) mentioned above, the relationship of theory and metaphor could also be approached from a different angle and once again, the approach requires a metaphor; once again, as we shall see, life and death are involved.

Fidelity and Transgression

The strategy of deconstruction is certainly an accentuation of difference, of space, of time, against all kinds of metaphysical fullness of whatever body. Deeper than that, however, it is an act of fidelity to the necessity, to the fragility and to the infinity of theory, and therefore, paradoxically, it must include an element of infidelity to itself: deconstruction cannot trust itself and its own metaphors entirely; its mistrust starts right from the beginning, when it rejects the very possibility of providing itself with rules, theorems, principles, hence of "deciding".

Deconstruction is not (but can become, sometimes with unfortunate results) a *method* for reading texts: first of all, deconstruction is a strategy of

exasperated but controlled attention to the fact that, in front of the text (in front of the world), total awareness is not possible, complete control is never reached, full presence of the meaning, of the intention, of the truth, is out of range. Deconstruction does not dictate rules; on the contrary, it always also looks for the unruly. Its only regulatory principle is a double one: that any intelligible text must simultaneously belong, in one form or other, to *the same* (*logos*, past, the only way in which we can reasonably think and make ourselves understood), and that no text can exclude from itself *the other*, the unseen, the illogical, the difference, the noise.

Deconstruction is at the same time faithful and unfaithful, reactionary and revolutionary, stuck in the possible and stretched towards the unthinkable. By denying itself access to a totalizing system, deconstruction confesses its own finiteness and mortality, but postpones indefinitely its own death; and this is precisely what makes it best suited, in a certain particular moment, and not forever, to the theoretical endeavour, to the endless life/death of theory. Not forever, because even deconstruction inevitably tends to solidify into a set of metaphors, into a position, a theory, a method; and any theory, sooner or later, becomes repetitive and unproductive and, perhaps only temporarily, dies.

Deconstruction is the ambiguous position in which somebody half resists and half accepts one's own language, metaphors, past. This position requires a complex strategy, one important aspect of which is what Derrida calls "paleonimy" (the art of old names): the strategic use of old names, of old words, of words taken into the network of the language, but deformed, distorted, obliged to mean differently, to differ from themselves (Derrida 1981: 3−4). Deconstruction is always a strategic act, and strategy is certainly a problem of space, but also and first of all of time; time, as the dimension of change, is essential to deconstruction. A strategic act requires time, is not conceivable in the absolute, but only as a moment in a sequence of moments. In this sequence a change or even a complete reversal of positions is possible: no moment is final, no meaning is fixed.

As a consequence, the notion of strategy in deconstruction presents one obvious difference from its normal acceptation: there are no final aims, objectives, or positions to conquer. But even this statement is not final: on the other hand, as a matter of fact, in different contexts, there may indeed be positions to conquer and to maintain. We only need to think of current debates in American universities, where deconstruction has risen to powerful institutional positions, is being attacked and is resisting attack. This is not specific to deconstruction, and deconstruction cannot avoid it: intellectual positions and institutional positions should not be totally confused with one another, but there is definitely a relationship, and an evolution of this relationship between the two.

However, the position of deconstruction with regard to theory (that is, with regard to a specific way of pursuing the truth) and with regard to metaphor (that is, with regard to language, its limits, its pitfalls and so forth) is specific and makes deconstruction different from other positions, and this difference can best be perceived through the metaphor of strategy. This means, for

instance, that the position from which, and the movements within which, the statements of deconstruction are uttered, are more important and crucial than those statements and their contents themselves.

Even the metaphor of strategy, then, is strategic and temporary. Deconstruction can only momentarily be seen as a strategy, that is, as a series of acts unified by a certain intention. There are important aspects of deconstruction that are not conveyed, that are even utterly betrayed by this metaphor or "old name". At times, deconstruction can also (and better) be described, for instance, as a drama which happens entirely *within* the text itself; in which opposed forces not governed by any intentional agency come to grips with each other (Culler 1983: 216). From this point of view, the literary object deconstructs itself by showing/hiding its belonging/ non-belonging to multiple and contradictory dimensions, and finally contributes to deconstruct (which does not mean to destroy) the distinction between the opposing dimensions themselves.

Deconstruction anticipates the partial failure of any one of its own statements, which does not make them meaningless, but rather strategically operative. A typically deconstructive statement, such as: "there is nothing outside the text", is valid only dynamically, as part of a strategy, and does not exclude the validity, in a different context, or from a different point of view, of the very opposite statement: "everything is outside the text". Once again, the real problem here is not the truth or the falsity of the statement itself; the real problem is that the strategy, in spite of the extreme caution and prudence with which it is carried out, is not entirely controllable, being in fact always much more a motion of the language, the partly controlled liberation of a ply, of an anfractuosity of language, than a movement of an intentionally determining subject.

Deconstruction is always more a matter of questions than a matter of answers. As everybody knows, there are at least two kinds of questions; "internal" questions, which require, allow and direct an answer, and "external" questions, which pursue an impossible answer: that is, questions whose deep intention is not to find an answer, but to keep the questioning alive, because of reasons escaping the rational order, and essentially in fulfilment of an ethical need of looking for truth even beyond the possibility of an answer. The kind of questions that deconstruction asks are basically of the second type, namely, questions without an answer. When an answer is offered, it often consists of excluding the ability of a particular answer to provide a solution to a particular question, thereby keeping the questioning open.

Life and Death

The question of death, of mortality, as I have already indicated, concerns theory in a very central way. Let us think for a moment of death, ideally, not as an interruption, but as the accomplishment of a process. Let us imagine life as the desire to rest, to die: all that which is vital wishes to die, but not before its own time; it wishes to die, and can rest (as Beckett's voices), only after the exhaustion of all its given possibilities.

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The peace.that is calling from the end of life asks the living/dying to exhaust the possibilities, to try all the differences. Not because difference is good in itself, but because the path of difference is the voyage of life toward death. Death is then no longer the absolute opposite of life; it is its accomplishment, its "summa". As far as theory is concerned, it is the total and instantaneous recollection of all possible combinations of thought.

This, perhaps, (beyond all reasons and interests, and without excluding them) is what drives theory: the unreasonable, unjustifiable compulsion to occupy and control with the means of reason all the available and all the possible spaces of meaning. Not only for the sake of power, but also and even more for the sake of peace; so as to be able, having said all there is to say and explained all there is to explain, finally to rest; which, of course, is impossible.[10]

Through its metaphors, theory endlessly approaches super-theory, its own accomplishment, end and death. Petrified metaphors, perfectly working models, can never exhaust all possibilities; they become static, each of them a trap for the meaning. It is each time a bad end, a false death for theory. A new metaphor will soon be born.

Real beings always reach death before all possibilities have been exhausted. In particular, death is always untimely for human beings, because their species seems to know no limits to its own possibilities. The process of human knowledge, however, of which theory is a part, can afford an endless death, must take advantage of this, and is trapped in it. Deconstruction is, among many other things, a powerful reminder of the endless death of theory. The general theory of theory, or the general metaphor of theory, if anything like that existed, would be at the same time a theory and a metaphor and therefore also, in a circular way, the theory (or the metaphor) of the infinity of the effort, of the unseizability of metaphor, of the impossibility of theory.

The relationship between deconstruction and metaphor certainly deserves much closer examination than the quick sketch that I can present in this short paper.[11] Here I wish to note only one thing. Derrida often gives the impression of exalting metaphor, which is certainly true, but only to a certain extent. For deconstruction (and this is easily said and repeated, but much less easy to think about and, so to speak, to put into practice) nothing is absolute, nothing is pure, everything has to be seen from a strategic point of view. The recognition of metaphor and the proliferation of metaphors are part of the strategic deconstruction of metaphysics. However, any metaphor can in turn become a body, a metaphysical body of absolute presence and fullness of meaning, of truth, and thus it automatically becomes the new "target" of the deconstructive strategy, not because it is a metaphor, but because it no longer is a metaphor: it has been transformed into a solid body, a final body of celestial purity and perfection.

Philosophy has long fought against metaphor, but for different reasons, in fact for precisely the opposite reason: namely, that it saw (and still sees) metaphor as a danger to its own body (be it textual or spiritual), to presence, to truth.

In deconstruction (and, according to deconstruction, everywhere), any truth, any presence, any meaning is metaphoric, partially absent, partially improper. Metaphor cannot be avoided; and even the solidification of metaphor is necessary to a certain extent, because there is no intellectual understanding without representation, without image.

Beyond this uncertain limit, any metaphor becomes an obstacle, not to some superior or deeper truth, but simply to other metaphors, to more possibilities, and to the final, inconceivable peace of the accomplished exhaustion of the possible, which remains the deadly aim of theory.

NOTES

1. It could perhaps be argued that the opposition between these two metaphoric fields informs all instances of the relationship between an understanding subject and a meaningful object, however complicated or uncertain this relationship may become through the elaboration (or deconstruction) of the very notions of "subject", "object" and "meaning".
2. The obvious reference for this kind of discussion is Culler 1983.
3. The following generalization is indeed very extreme. I am aware of the existence of many variations of the structuralist gesture, not all of which will easily fit my description; but I agree with Derrida when he hints that "ultrastructuralism" shows something which is present in any kind of structuralism (see Derrida 1963: 15).
4. On Derrida's position on structuralism, see also Derrida 1966.
5. "What is most serious is that this *ultrastructuralist* method, as we have called it, seems to contradict, in certain respects, the most precious and original intention of structuralism" (Derrida 1963: 26).
6. Derrida 1963: 25. The notion of *force* is here, I believe, the forerunner of what, at that time, did not yet (and indeed never will) have a proper name: *la différance*.
7. On the problematic relationship between metaphor and concept in philosophy, see in particular Derrida 1971 and Ricoeur 1975.
8. On this, see also Ulmer 1983: 29–58.
9. See for instance Sloterdjik 1983: 7.
10. The question whether or not this compulsion is exclusive to theory and makes it different from science, politics, art and other spheres of activity, is central to the problem at hand, but must remain unanswered for the time being.
11. In this regard, it is essential to read Derrida 1971 and 1978.

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