

## **“The Presence of the Present”: Derrida, Adorno, and the Autonomy of Philosophy**

### **Abstract**

*In Voice and Phenomenon, Jacques Derrida conducts a critique of Husserlian phenomenology, simultaneously articulating crucial concepts for a theory of deconstruction in the interstices of Husserl’s premises. His critique of Husserl is synecdochic insofar as it works to facilitate a much broader critique of the tradition of Western philosophy itself. In Against Epistemology, Theodor Adorno similarly takes up a critique of Husserlian phenomenology toward a broader critique of the history of philosophy. Several theorists have, for this occasion among others, taken to drawing comparisons between Derrida and Adorno. The occasion of their respective critiques of Husserl forms the basis of my analyses here. These critiques represent a kind of microcosm from which one can extrapolate broader methodological tendencies in deconstruction and critical theory. To address claims about deconstruction and its relation to the future of critical theory, it is worthwhile to consider the literature devoted to this comparison and the political implications expressed therein. A review of the primary texts and the relevant literature reveals critical assumptions about what is meant by the term “politics” in contemporary philosophy. This restricted sense of what is meant by politics reveals presuppositions concerning the nature of philosophy and its relation to social critique.*

KEYWORDS: *Derrida, Husserl, Adorno, phenomenology, critical theory, deconstruction*

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“Moreover, there is no possible objection, within philosophy, in regard to this privilege of the present-now. This privilege defines the very element of philosophical thought.”

Jacques Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon*

“The first of the philosophers makes a total claim: It is unmediated and immediate.”

Theodor Adorno, *Against Epistemology*

In *Voice and Phenomenon*, Jacques Derrida conducts a critique of Husserlian phenomenology, taking the opportunity to articulate crucial concepts for a theory of deconstruction in the interstices of Husserl's premises. His critique of Husserl is synecdochic insofar as it works to facilitate a much broader critique, indeed, a critique as broad as the tradition of Western philosophy itself. In *Against Epistemology*, Theodor Adorno similarly takes up a critique of Husserlian phenomenology toward a broader critique of the history of philosophy. Several theorists have, for this occasion among others, taken to drawing comparisons between Derrida and Adorno. Given that a critique of Husserlian phenomenology is among either's earliest works, the need for a comparative analysis seems to follow. Further, that either represents a pivotal figure in distinct traditions – the former being the proverbial patriarch of deconstruction and the latter a notable member of the first generation of the Frankfurt School – suggests that a comparative analysis of their works where the overlap is most overt yields rather important insights. The occasion of their respective critiques of Husserl forms the basis of my analyses here. These critiques represent a kind of microcosm from which one can extrapolate broader methodological tendencies in deconstruction and critical theory. To address contemporary claims made about the possibility of a deconstructive politics and its relation to the future of critical theory, it is worthwhile to consider the substantial body of literature devoted to the very comparison I take as my starting point and the political implications therein. A review of such literature reveals critical assumptions present in what is meant by the term “politics” in contemporary theory. More importantly, this restricted sense of what is meant by politics reveals presuppositions concerning the nature of philosophy and its relation to social critique.

### **Critique of the Transcendental Subject**

To clarify as well as contextualize the persistence of a presupposition of autonomy in the history of philosophy, one can begin by briefly examining the theoretical ramifications of this presupposition in the object of Derrida and Adorno's critiques. This presupposition in Husserl's work is clearest in the gesture of *epokhē* (i.e., phenomenological reduction). The antinomies identified by Derrida and Adorno indicate that the limits of phenomenological premises are a result of their being theorized as separable or independent from historical processes, in particular political as well as economic conditions. What I have referred to here as the presupposition of autonomy results in a tendency to falsely construe, for example, conditions of immediacy or givenness. Derrida's interrogation of the Husserlian transcendental subject points to an internal contradiction, produced by Husserl's own theoretical terms. This contradiction, he suggests is *intrinsic to the concept* itself. As Derrida points out “what we already have here is a phenomenological reduction, that isolates the subjective lived-experience as the sphere of absolute certainty”.<sup>1</sup> In other words, Husserl in the process of reduction tacitly assigns primacy to a subject characterized by unimpeded intention. Derrida's critique focuses on the emphasis placed on the subject, and thus the subjective qualities of Husserl's ostensibly objective analyses of the structures of experience. The strict opposition of subject and object represented by Husserl's *epokhē* warrants critique for

Derrida, because the privileging of one term (i.e., the subject) participates in a hierarchical “metaphysics of presence”.<sup>2</sup> In this case, “presence” takes the form of a subject “whose self-presence is pure and depends on no external affection, on no outside”.<sup>3</sup> In this way, as Derrida suggests, “it is already imagination...which gives the movement its privileged medium”.<sup>4</sup>

Derrida sets out to diagnose the antinomies of Husserlian phenomenology while acknowledging that such an undertaking must “work over from within, from a certain inside, the language of metaphysics”.<sup>5</sup> Through an investigation of Husserl’s premises on their own terms, demonstrating their logical impossibility, Derrida conducts a kind of immanent critique of classical phenomenology. As Ryan points out, both Derrida and Adorno “see this strategy of subversion as an imposed necessity”.<sup>6</sup> However, this “imposed necessity” has a distinct cause for each thinker. While Derrida’s sense of this necessity is imposed by the structure of language and the nature of metaphysics, this methodological necessity in Adorno pertains to his attempt to “use the concept...in order to transcend the concept”.<sup>7</sup> Although Derrida accepts that one “cannot attempt to deconstruct this transcendence without plunging in, and groping our way through the inherited concepts,” his analysis does not work through these concepts to *exceed* them.<sup>8</sup> Rather, the antinomies produced in the concept are a product of *différance* – itself a conceptual schema – of a concept<sup>9</sup>, not as results of antagonisms in the world beyond concepts.

An overlapping component in Adorno’s account consists of an insistence on the intrinsic failure of the phenomenological reduction. For Adorno, “even the search for the subset of givenness...leads to an antinomy”.<sup>10</sup> What he alludes to here is the fact that Husserl presupposes a *given* subject to investigate the structure of phenomenological givenness. The transcendental subject of Husserl’s *epokhē* “must obviously not be the patio-temporal, empirical and already constituted subject” and therefore must take for granted its *immediacy*.<sup>11</sup> In other words, the very mechanism of the phenomenological reduction produces the transcendental subject as “a determination of thought, a product of abstraction, which is not to be straightaway brought to a denominator with the immediate”.<sup>12</sup> Adorno’s insight – akin to Derrida’s critique of Husserlian “imagination” mentioned above – foregrounds the mediated character of thought.

Adorno’s reflections on Husserl’s transcendental subject aim not only to unveil the internal contradictions in his conceptual schema but also to suggest that those contradictions are a result of his theory being *mediated* by the dominant political ideology – namely, liberalism.<sup>13</sup> Husserl’s theory, Adorno claims, “unreflectively takes the position of the individual,” in a particular social situation which is constituted by “the objectivity of the social process” as a given.<sup>14</sup> Husserl effectively reproduces “the priority of the individual, the self-deception of traditional liberalism”.<sup>15</sup> That Husserl’s transcendental subject is conceived as an unmediated individual consciousness is evidence that “the judgement that society is organized before the individual prevails,” Adorno argues, “in a distorted form”.<sup>16</sup> What seems to preclude a more rigorous reflection on the nature of

Husserl's reduction and the subject it produces is the fact that the tendency toward individualism is understood as distinct, even unrelated, to the social and political forces propelling such a conception of subjectivity to the forefront of European society. In pointing out the absence of any reflection on the material conditions of Husserl's premises, Adorno demonstrates how the shortcomings of Husserlian phenomenology are not a matter of mere theoretical oversight, but rather reflect a kind of philosophical myopia produced by and for a particular politics.

### **Critique of the 'Principle of All Principles'**

Another point of convergence between Derrida and Adorno's critique of Husserlian phenomenology concerns Husserl's "Principle of All Principles." For Derrida, this critique takes the form of indicating an instance in which Husserlian phenomenology is inseparably tied to a "metaphysics of presence."<sup>17</sup> In this case, said metaphysics appears in the form of a *temporal* privileging.

What does the "principle of all principles" of phenomenology actually mean? What does the value of originary presence to intuition as the source of sense and evidence, as the *a priori* of *a priori*, mean? It means first that certainty, which is itself ideal and absolute, that the universal form of all experience (*Erlebnis*) and therefore of all life, has always been and always will be the *present*.<sup>18</sup>

This "principle of all principles," represents a kind of universalization of the present moment. Indeed, Derrida claims that "this privilege of the present-now" is "the very element of philosophical thought".<sup>19</sup> His critique of the centrality of the "present-now" is a part of a larger, overarching critique of *identity* and self-presence. What is especially interesting about this focus on the temporal valence of "presence" is its role in the Husserlian *epochē*. For Derrida the privileging the "present-now" is the "movement by which I transgress empirical existence, factuality, contingency, mundanity".<sup>20</sup> Husserl relies, according to Derrida, on "the principle of all principles" – "namely, the originary giving evidentness, the present of the presence of sense in a full and originary intuition" – in order to perform his phenomenological reduction.<sup>21</sup> Derrida's critique vaguely alludes to the *ahistorical* character of Husserl's premises, however, neither the historical, empirical, nor the mundane is thematized in his own account. Nonetheless, at the center of this critique is the question of "the lived-experience" which is posited as "immediately present to itself" given Husserl's principle.<sup>22</sup> Again, one sees that Derrida's critique of identity is put to work in undermining the presuppositions of the phenomenological reduction. Only, Derrida's critique does not avoid reproducing the ahistorical logic of the "the principle of all principles" since he posits another origin, albeit of a qualitatively different character: the "originary non-presence" known as *différance*.<sup>23</sup>

Inversely, Adorno explicitly thematizes the material, as *mediation*, in his own reproach of "the principle of all principles." "This norm," he writes, is dependent on the

presumption that the object of the supposed originary intuition “could be observed passively by consciousness without the observed changing through the act of observation and regardless of the internal composition of what appears”.<sup>24</sup> Adorno’s emphasis elaborates on the weakness of Husserl’s account based precisely on this bracketing of the object or, as he puts it, Husserl’s “discrepancy between what is both proper and foreign to the subject”.<sup>25</sup> In a general sense, Derrida and Adorno seem to share an opposition to the strict binary of subject and object. Adorno argues that “only by reducing consciousness to mistaking itself in one of its moments and...positing it as confronting itself and simply existing, can something like objecthood be spun out of sheer consciousness in general”.<sup>26</sup> What is largely implicit and, ultimately, never fully articulated in Derrida’s critique is this notion of the subject’s mediation by the object, as opposed to its production in discourse or by *différance*.<sup>27</sup>

Interestingly, although Derrida insists that “the domination of the now” constitutes a historical lineage spanning the Western philosophical tradition “that continues the Greek metaphysics of presence into the ‘modern’ metaphysics of presence as self-consciousness,” he otherwise neglects the historical conditions of his own, as well as Husserl’s, premises.<sup>28</sup> Further, although Derrida does not make a point to bracket the empirical, his account remains insulated from any genuine consideration of concrete experience insofar as it remains intent on maintaining a *discrete* focus on signification and language more generally. Though Derrida and Adorno share thematic points of interest, their philosophical as well as political aims are quite distinct. Though scholars placing the two in a comparative juxtaposition are not without justification, the conclusions of those accounts require diligence given the nature of their differences.

### **Deconstruction, Primordality, and the Problem of Immediacy**

The “reference to concrete experience is,” as Dews argues, “crucial for an understanding of the distinction between Derrida and Adorno”.<sup>29</sup> As Derrida places *différance* in the position of origin, he – as Husserl has done with the subject before him – “[erases] the contingency of the historical process”.<sup>30</sup> It is with this crucial difference that “a final decisive gap opens up between his thought and that of Derrida”.<sup>31</sup> Derrida prompts us to ask whether that which is “always presented as the derived” (i.e., difference) is “in a new way a-historical, ‘older’ than presence and the system of truth, older than history.”<sup>32</sup> Unlike Adorno, Derrida does not “[move] downstream towards an account of subjectivity as emerging from and entwined with the natural and historical world”.<sup>33</sup> Instead, Derrida begins “a quest for the ground of transcendental consciousness itself”.<sup>34</sup> In other words, his critique is not of the transcendental *as such* but rather of a conception of the transcendental as characterized by identity and self-presence *rather than* alterity and difference. This recourse to the transcendental is quite different from Adorno’s strategy. If *différance* is to be understood “in a non-historical sense” then Derrida precludes any consideration of *what produces différence*. Thus, his account remains unequipped with the tools to interrogate the relation between *différance* and the social and political world. This suggests that he is primarily interested in a *politics of*

*concepts*. In this way, although Derrida engages with ethical and political themes his account of their causes cannot facilitate an analysis of the *material* conditions which produce the philosophical problems he identifies.

These concrete material conditions, obscured by his conceptual schema, play a significant role in the formulation of the very concept Derrida sets out to critique. As previously mentioned, Husserl's presuppositions reflect particular social and material relations, those of capitalism and its abiding political pretext, liberalism. Husserl's requisite condition of an individual, self-present subject is not unlike the logically necessary individualism necessitated and sustained by liberalism. It is worth noting that such a conception of the individual subject structures various social, economic, and institutional practices in contemporary society as it did in Husserl's own time. To construe the appearance of such a widely held belief concerning the status of the individual in Husserl's project would amount to a philosophical negligence toward *how* such a conception has gained its status, in this case for reasons poignantly *un-philosophical* (i.e., not resulting from philosophical reflection but from its hindrance). Husserl, through the positing of this philosophical starting point may not have *intended* to sustain the liberal narrative, however, he takes for granted what has been produced as a result of these concrete economic and social relations – thereby reproducing the tendency to *eternalize* what is historically contingent.

In Husserl's account of the transcendental subject, Adorno claims, "whatever occurs cognitively in that second nature gains the appearance of the immediate and intuitive".<sup>35</sup> Adorno articulates the relation between the suppositions of an unmediated subjectivity and the seamlessly intentional apprehension of objects through experience in Husserl's phenomenology. Such a claim, however, could apply not only to Husserl but also to Derrida. Différance, in its supposed primordially, is understood as the mediating force and thus is itself taken as *immediate*. In other words, because différance functions as a transcendental, the concept by definition precludes any account of *its own mediation*, or of its production by means other than itself. In order to understanding différance as originary – even as "non-presence" – one must *already* take for granted the concept's immediacy. On the other hand, one might, following Adorno, suggest that the contradictions Derrida locates in concepts are produced by contradictions in the material relations of production, concrete politics, and particular historical conditions. As Michael Ryan suggests, Adorno makes a very important point which Derrida neglects: He "relates Husserl's monadology of consciousness to a social world in which private interest reigns".<sup>36</sup> The important point here is that the positing of antinomies as originating in the concept amounts to what Adorno would refer to as "reified thought".

For Adorno, "Reified thought is a reflection of the reified world".<sup>37</sup> That is, the eternalization of what is historically specific itself a "a function of reality and historical tendencies".<sup>38</sup> A central facet of his critique of the Husserlian subject rests on the notion that the transcendental subject "by trusting its primordial experiences" (i.e., "originary intuitions") "lapses into delusion".<sup>39</sup> By taking for granted the immediacy of that which is

considered “primordial,” Adorno argues, one precludes any interrogation of the mediating conditions presented by the social world. Adorno insists that “the question of absolute origin pushes aside that of the ‘labour’ of social production as the condition of cognition”.<sup>40</sup> For Adorno, either Husserl’s beginning with the transcendental subject or Derrida’s positing of an originary difference would represent *prima philosophia*. Following Adorno, Dews argues that “Derrida has still not escaped the ‘idea of the first,’ even though this first cannot take the form of presence”.<sup>41</sup> This has the same consequence of erasing the processes of social and material production which are the conditions of philosophy itself.

### **Critique of the Subject-Object Opposition**

The tendency to presuppose philosophy’s autonomy from liberal, capitalist society in Husserl’s work is reproduced – in a modified form – in Derrida’s critique of Husserlian phenomenology. This becomes apparent in a close examination of the differences in Adorno and Derrida’s respective critiques. For example, though both thinkers present a critique of identity and self-presence they locate the contradictions of these principles in markedly different spheres. For both Derrida and Adorno, the subject is possessed of a constitutive alterity which troubles Husserl’s self-present, unmediated subject; for either Derrida or Adorno subject such as that posited by Husserl is an impossibility. However, for Derrida this self-identity and full presence is impossible because “the movement of *différance* produces the transcendental subject”.<sup>42</sup> The impossibility of the transcendental subject is predicated on its production through “an [*originary*] non-self-presence”.<sup>43</sup> The subject which occupies the position of “origin” in Husserlian phenomenology is itself produced by another transcendental concept: *différance*. In this respect, Derrida remains a rather faithful inheritor of Husserl insofar as he remains committed to transcendental thinking. Peter Dews, in *Logics of Disintegration*, draws a similar conclusion:

For Derrida the permanent evidential gap within phenomenology itself, which appears to be the result of the intrusion of facticity and historicity, is the effect of a transcendental structure more fundamental than that of consciousness.<sup>44</sup>

As Dews points out, Derrida’s critique of Husserl installs *différance* as a transcendental structure prior to the subject. Indeed, it seems that Derrida’s critique is that Husserl’s phenomenological subject is *not transcendental enough*. There remains a still more fundamental condition which requires investigation. In response to the “silent monologue” of the transcendental subject, Derrida insists that “the category of empirical, that is, merely probable existence” must intervene into the very subject which is produced by its bracketing.<sup>45</sup>

This inevitable interruption of the transcendental by what Dews calls “the intrusion of facticity and historicity,” however, does not occupy a central role in Derrida’s critique. Rather, Derrida remains focused on this “structure more fundamental”.<sup>46</sup> This

emphasis is significant insofar as Derrida's consideration of the object of experience is framed by a transcendental concept. The appearance of "the category of the empirical" is the appearance of the object *as the object of speculation*. While Derrida is critical of a rigid opposition of subject and object, the critique he presents is concerned with the *conceptual* determinations of either category. Derrida claims that one limitation of Husserl's theory is that it remains "within the closure of the metaphysics" by maintaining this "subject-object opposition".<sup>47</sup> However, it should be noted that the term "object" here seems to refer to the *phenomenological* object, the object of *contemplation*. Thus, even as Derrida addresses this subject-object opposition, he does so *at the level of the concept*. This marks a pivotal difference between Derrida and Adorno's critique. Derrida locates the antinomy in the *concept* while Adorno locates these same antinomies in the *object*.

Adorno's critique of the transcendental subject takes the conceptual impossibility of a transcendental subject as a *symptom* of contradictions in material relations. Material relations and their correlative politics represent a mediating force of concepts. For Adorno, the appearance of the category of the empirical in Husserl is evidence that "the material element simply cannot be rooted out of it".<sup>48</sup> Husserl's *epokhē* is necessarily unsuccessful in isolating the subject in the first place. Adorno argues that "Its abstractness is the refuge in which whatever cannot be created out of pure subjectivity entrenches itself against the object".<sup>49</sup> Husserl must *presume* that such a subject – wholly divorced from the unintentional forces of material relations and their conceptual consequences – is possible *prior* to the *epokhē*. According to Adorno, "the composition of the object out of the 'elements' of cognition and their unity" – as Husserlian phenomenology sets out to do in specifying universal structures of experience – constitutes a *petition principii*, assuming "what is to be deduced".<sup>50</sup> In addition, to assuming the possibility of isolating the subject, Husserl must take for granted that objects *are such* that they conform to the categories which he posits. One might say that Husserl's understanding of objects in the world is of those objects *only* as they are divorced from the social relations in which they acquire meaning. This "composition" of the object, however, does not account for the particular determinations of objects themselves and assumes that objects *are simply as they appear* to a knowing subject, taking for granted their immediate apprehension. Derrida's critique of the transcendental subject leaves this premise uninvestigated. This critical shortcoming produces a performative contradiction in Derrida's account.

### **Deconstruction and 'Subjectless Idealism'**

Whereas Michael Ryan suggests that deconstruction "subverts the grounds of metaphysics in general and idealism in particular," I would argue that the opposite is the case.<sup>51</sup> Derrida's notoriously polemical stance toward the tradition of Western philosophy and its "metaphysics of presence" hardly constitutes a subversion of philosophical idealism<sup>52</sup>. Rather, his project remains firmly planted in the idealist tradition insofar as it allots primacy to the internal determinations of concepts, prior to any material or historical circumstance. Although Derrida's attempt to undermine the notion of a



transcendental subjectivity appears to subvert the classical modes of philosophical idealism, the critique of this tradition's philosophical starting point is not sufficient to place his work beyond the charge of "idealism." Notwithstanding his critique of a central tenet of classical idealism, Derrida manages to maintain the primacy of concepts, legible only to a knowing subject. Derrida's appropriation of this philosophical tendency represents a kind of *subjectless idealism*.

One might understand the term "subjectless idealism" as referring to a theoretical movement which, while undermining the notion of constitutive subjectivity maintains the idealism which is supported by such a conception of the subject. To be clear, this is not to say that there is, in fact, no subject in Derrida's account, only that such a subject is not understood as *enacting* the conceptual schema. By claiming that "the movement of *différance* produces the transcendental subject" deconstruction undermines the classical starting point of philosophical idealism while maintaining the primacy of concepts.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Adorno argues that Husserl's project "remains imprisoned in the subjectivistic domain," even as it denounces subjectivism.<sup>54</sup> Derrida's own project, one might say, is fraught with a similar problem. Though Derrida refuses the notion of *constitutive* subjectivity, the more fundamental structure to which he ascribes the production of a *constituted* subjectivity logically necessitates the very subject his critique ostensibly undermines. In other words, Derrida *maintains the effects* of subjectivity – it would be difficult to account for the existence of conceptual schema without some thinking subject – while attempting to displace the subject as the casual principle. Put another way, Derrida's inversion of the origin story of classical phenomenology, though it construes the subject as derivative, necessitates the very thinking subject which is displaced in favor of the productive capacity of the structure of language.

Though Derrida rightly illuminates the profound contradictions of Husserl's transcendental subject – a task likewise shared by Adorno – his attempt to reveal the instability of the Husserlian subject, as Adorno might refer to it, "[desubjectivizes] the subject".<sup>55</sup> What Adorno refers to here – the tendency to extract the *subjective* quality from the figure of the subject – is an insightful description of what this figure undergoes in Derrida's account of the production of transcendental subjectivity. The subject is not fully suspended from Derrida's account of *différance*, rather it is rendered as an *object* of conceptual production.

The political ramifications of what I have referred to here as "subjectless idealism" have been pointed out by Terry Eagleton in his reflections on deconstruction and its relations to liberalism. In "Deconstruction and Marxism," Eagleton argues that many premises of deconstruction "reproduce some of the most commonplace topics of bourgeois liberalism".<sup>56</sup> In particular, the "the privileging of heterogeneity, the recurrent gestures of hesitation and indeterminacy; the devotion to gliding and process, slippage and movement" and finally "the distaste for the definitive".<sup>57</sup> With these remarks one is reminded of Marx and Engels's rather well-known description of the social consequences of capitalism:

Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty, and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air...<sup>58</sup>

In the remarks of Eagleton as well as those penned by Marx and Engels, one sees reflected the tendency of deconstruction to privilege the play of signification, to highlight the indeterminacy of concepts, and to emphasize constitutive alterity. However, for Eagleton, deconstruction represents not only a mere reproduction of liberalism but also “a radical mutation of the bourgeois-liberal problematic”.<sup>59</sup> What Eagleton suggests is that deconstruction overturns the “humanistic” element of liberalism; deconstruction is “anti-humanist” in the sense that it minimizes the importance of human intention in the process of signification.<sup>60</sup> Even as Derrida sets out to undermine a transcendental notion of the subject – a form which is central to liberal political theory – he maintains the ahistorical structure which sustains liberalism. As Eagleton phrases it, deconstruction is “a liberalism without the subject”.<sup>61</sup> Characterized by the same tendency toward abstraction and formalism, deconstruction undermines the transcendental subject while sustaining the conceptual apparatus to which such a subject<sup>62</sup> gives rise.

### **Autonomy, Politics, and the Definition of Philosophy**

As Ryan points out, “both negative dialectics and deconstruction are immanent critiques of philosophies of identity”.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, both thinkers engage in a process of undermining central tenets of Husserlian phenomenology “from within, on [its] own ground and using its own principles”.<sup>64</sup> In light of this overarching similarity, it is no coincidence that others have found an occasion for their comparison. However, such an occasion is not without complication. In *Marxism and Deconstruction*, Ryan characterizes the most important contrast between the two as follows:

The greatest difference between the two emerges around that point where they most converge – the critique of identity. Derrida much more successfully executes the critique on philosophical grounds; Adorno more successfully articulates the critique within a critique of capitalist society.<sup>65</sup>

Ryan’s description of “the greatest difference” between Derrida and Adorno is a rather revealing one. Implicit in Ryan’s account is a distinction not only concerning these two thinkers but also about how philosophy is defined. Ryan distinguishes the two projects by classifying the former as “a critique on philosophical grounds” and the latter as a critique embedded within “a critique of capitalist society”.<sup>66</sup> By distinguishing the critiques in this way, Ryan tacitly affirms the longstanding presupposition of philosophy’s autonomy. To presume that the philosophical inquiry and the critique of capitalist society exist *in*

*mutual exclusivity* is dependent on an understanding of philosophy as separable and autonomous from such a society.<sup>67</sup> Implicit in this contrastive analysis is the assertion that a critique of capitalist society does not *properly* constitute a *philosophical* investigation.<sup>68</sup> What is perhaps especially problematic about Ryan's distinction is not that he does not consider anti-capitalist critique "philosophical" but rather that this latent boundary reflects a deeper tendency in contemporary philosophy to take for granted the *neutrality* of the philosopher's position with regard to the economic and political conditions of his own life. Of course, Ryan does not set out to offer a definition about what should or should not be considered philosophy in the proper sense. Only, his account does so by perpetuating assumptions about the nature of philosophy and its relation to social critique.

Further, as he attempts a political reconciliation of deconstruction and the more "metaphysical" means and modes of Marxist theory, Ryan claims that "as a critique which is more logical than social, deconstruction more successfully undoes the bases of bourgeois philosophy from within, on its own terms".<sup>69</sup> However, in his suggestion of the critical potential of a deconstructive politics, Ryan reveals yet another assumption. He suggests that because deconstruction is "more logical than social" deconstruction can better undo "the bases of bourgeois philosophy from within".<sup>70</sup> Implicit in this assertion are two tensions. Firstly, to argue that by taking up critique in "logical" terms one can undermine bourgeois philosophy *from within* one must already take for granted the insularity of bourgeois philosophy from the material conditions it seeks to cover over – namely, antagonisms characteristic of the social relations emerging from capitalist exploitation.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, to some degree, one must already be persuaded by bourgeois philosophy in order for such a claim to be intelligible. In other words, one would first have to be convinced that "politics" consists solely in a rational discourse concerning abstract ideals and not the concrete struggle for power and material resources. This relates to the second tension in Ryan's account. His emphasis on the efficacy of a "logical" critique is an effect of his initial distinction. Put another way, it is only if we both assume the autonomy of philosophy and accept the formalist terms of liberal political philosophy that a "logical" critique appears preferable to a "social" one. In other words, Ryan does not consider the possibility that the resolution to the contradictions of a philosophy gripped by capitalist ideology is to *alter the material conditions* which necessitate the ideological justification (i.e., bourgeois philosophy). The formulation of Ryan's evaluations of Derrida and Adorno's critique is not incidental. Rather, it results from the characterization of philosophy as concerned, first and foremost, with transcendent, abstract principles. In turn, this position reflects the needs of liberal political theory to obscure the material inequality that legal, formal equality cannot redress.<sup>72</sup> The shortcomings of Ryan's contrastive analysis of Derrida and Adorno, it seems, are *themselves an effect of the politics he aims to undermine* (i.e., capitalist, liberal democracy).<sup>73</sup>

The distinction Ryan makes concerning the “philosophical” nature of Derrida’s critique appears in another account of the same comparison. Drucilla Cornell, in *The Philosophy of the Limit*, gives the following description:

But in spite of the interpretation I have just given of how...Derrida can be read historically and socially, it is undoubtedly the case that Derrida remains committed to traditional philosophical discourse to a degree that Adorno would have rejected.<sup>74</sup>

Cornell’s claim that Derrida’s commitment to “traditional philosophical discourse” is one that “Adorno would have rejected.” However, this is a rather strange characterization considering his lifelong engagement with the history of philosophy.<sup>75</sup> She further claims that Derrida “endlessly exposes the *limit* of philosophy, but does so *philosophically* through a quasi-transcendental inquiry”.<sup>76</sup> It is unclear how Cornell draws the conclusion that Derrida remains committed to philosophy while, in her view, Adorno departs from it – unless one takes the meaning of the term “philosophical” to indicate *a commitment to transcendental thinking*. On these terms, one can see why Cornell might suggest that Adorno lacks the same commitment to “traditional philosophical discourse,” if by that one means a formal consideration of concepts divorced from their social and historical conditions, i.e., as ideals, in abstraction. Cornell, like Ryan, implicitly delimits what is meant by the term “philosophy.” In her comparison of Derrida and Adorno, the implicit criteria of this definition concerns a commitment to transcendental thinking and has similar consequences insofar as it construes philosophy as a practice of contemplation with no obligation to consider itself in relation to the world from which it emerges and in which it remains immersed.

### **History, Deconstruction, and the U.S. Academy**

Indeed, much of the literature on this oft attempted comparison or reconciliation of the Derrida and Adorno’s projects reflects an institutional bent in favor of deconstruction. In *Late Marxism*, Fredric Jameson suggests that trends in favor of francophone theory in the U.S. academy of the 1970s prompted those committed to Adorno’s work to engage in “elaborate translation schemes to ‘reconcile’ Adorno with Derridean orthodoxy”.<sup>77</sup> In other words, Jameson sees the generous readings of the intersection between critical theory and deconstruction – generally skewed to subsume Marxist analyses to deconstruction – as an effect of a historical change in the political climate of the U.S. as well as French academies. During the seventies, Jameson argues, as “French theory” gained increasing popularity in the U.S., “the French intelligentsia was in the meantime in the process of full de-Marxification; so that the next decade drew the curtain open on a wealthy and complacent, depoliticized Europe”.<sup>78</sup> In other words Jameson explains the tendency to conjoin Frankfurt School critical theory and Derridean deconstruction to the historical conditions of intellectual life in Europe and the U.S.. Jameson’s insistence of the “de-Marxification” of theory in the 1970s is an allusion to concrete political circumstances: the impending decline of Soviet communism as well as

the internal tensions and political losses of the French Communist Party, leading to the turn away from Marxist theory in France and toward the welcome of new theoretical contributions from the French academy in the U.S.. One need not discuss to the function or efficacy of such a “de-Marxification” to note the clear influence of concrete political events in prompting the theoretical gesture. However, Jameson’s remarks concerning the “translation” of Adorno into Derridean terms is not without examples in more recent literature.

In *The Philosophy of the Limit*, Cornell refers to “Adorno’s deconstructive Hegelianism” in the introduction chapter, dedicated to an analysis of *Negative Dialectics*.<sup>79</sup> Cornell offers no justification for this particular description of Adorno’s critical method. Cornell seems to presume the compatibility (in spite of a more critical treatment of Adorno in the conclusion) of Adorno and Derrida’s projects well before any attempt to articulate such a compatibility. Sabine Wilke, in “Adorno and Derrida as Readers of Husserl” describes Adorno’s account of the internal contradictions of Husserlian phenomenology as follows: “His interest in transcending Husserl’s paradigm is now hidden behind the question of how Husserl’s text, this ‘densely complex thicket,’ as Adorno calls it, deconstructs itself”.<sup>80</sup> Once again, we see that the tendency to “translate” the work of Adorno into Derridean terms take the primary point of reference to be deconstruction. These gestures of hasty “translation” which present a bias in favor of deconstruction indicate a broader *institutionalization* of deconstruction in the U.S. academy.

This institutionalization of deconstruction, according to Eagleton, is not merely an indication of theoretical preferences of U.S. scholarship, but rather a complicity with the dominant political ideology in the U.S.. Eagleton argues that many of the tenets of deconstruction “reproduce some of the most commonplace topics of bourgeois liberalism” and that, for this reason, “it is not difficult to see why such an idiom should become so quickly absorbed within the Anglo-Saxon academies”.<sup>81</sup> Eagleton emphasizes the embeddedness of the academy as an institution in the larger political context of the U.S.. Though he contends with the theoretical limitations of deconstruction, Eagleton is careful not to mistake the prominence of deconstruction as an arbitrary fact of intellectual history nor as an indication of greater theoretical rigor or effectiveness. Rather, Eagleton remains committed to a historicization of such intellectual disputes. This historicizing is warranted not only with regard to the institutionalization of certain theoretical dispositions but also to the particular *politics* which are inaugurated with the crystallization of such trends.

### **Derrida, His Critics, and the Meaning of Politics**

At the time of Derrida’s writing and long since scholars have launched accusations that deconstruction is “opposed to politics or, at best, apolitical”.<sup>82</sup> This is perhaps partly explained, as Dews suggests, by the fact that “Derrida has not been noticeably successful in articulating the relationship between ‘deconstruction’ in its initial discursive

sense...and his more concrete political concerns”.<sup>83</sup> On the other hand, Derrida’s recently published late lectures, as well as several of his well-known later writings<sup>84</sup> have led some to suggest the presence of a “political turn” in his work beginning in the 1990s. Still further respondents have suggested that facets of Derrida’s work are inevitably engaged with politics<sup>85</sup>, with the claim that his work has been so since its inception. Peter Dews, writing in 1987, could not have been aware of the works which would be published soon after the publication of his own *Logics of Disintegration*. However, his remarks<sup>86</sup> remain relevant insofar as his position concerning a lack of explicit articulation of deconstruction’s political relevance reflects a still popular attitude toward Derrida’s writings and skepticism toward the possibility<sup>87</sup> of a “deconstructive politics.”

Reading texts as early as *Voice and Phenomenon*, for example, it is less clear what the political stakes of his project may be. This is not to say that there are not such stakes, only that they are perhaps less obvious. It seems worthwhile, therefore, to clarify *how* we identify philosophical texts *as political*. A text may be “political” in the sense that it is *an effect* of a certain politics, in which case it is hard to identify a text which is not, in this sense, political. On the other hand, a text can be construed as political in the sense that it is explicitly concerned with “politics,” the nature of the “the political” or if it forwards some political theory or program. In the case of this latter sense far fewer works fall into the category of “political” texts. The gamut of contemporary attitudes concerning “the politics of deconstruction” or a “deconstructive politics” seem to either affirm or deny the presence of political stakes, or at least their clear articulation, on the basis of the second sense described here. My emphasis in this paper, however, is more focused toward the political stakes of Derrida’s work in the first sense. I foreground the way that deconstruction is complicit with and constituted by a liberal politics with which it does not expressly concern itself. In the hopes of examining the ramifications of even a text which is not explicitly political, such as *Voice and Phenomenon*, my emphasis tends toward the politics implied *without intention*. Indeed, it is the *absence of intention* with regard to philosophical presuppositions that motivates this analysis since the unexamined persistence of such assumptions indicate a barrier to philosophically rigorous political thought. However, to be clear, I would respond to those critics who suggest that Derrida’s work is “apolitical” that such a claim is quite unfounded. It is clear that there are political stakes in Derrida’s work, not excluding his earlier writings. However, although Derrida’s work is political, it is political *in a particular sense*.

As John O’Kane observes in his essay titled “Marxism, Deconstruction, Ideology,” this particular sense is perhaps not incidental. Remarking on Michael Ryan’s attempts to synthesize the ends of deconstruction and critical theory, he argues that Ryan “reinforces the institutionalization” of a “romantic textual politics”.<sup>88</sup> Devoting much of *Marxism and Deconstruction* to the explication of the principles of deconstruction, Michael Ryan, O’Kane argues, makes “little effort to challenge the precepts of its critical orientation”.<sup>89</sup> What O’Kane suggests is that Ryan’s uncritical engagement with deconstruction reflects not only an individual bias but also a larger institutional one. This trend in the secondary literature, represented by Ryan’s work among others, indicates at least one manner in

which the term “politics” has come to be understood, largely by way of an *implicit* process, in the contemporary U.S. academy. Theorists such as Ryan, Cornell, and other proponents of a “deconstructive politics” likewise share this latent understanding of the term. Derrida himself, in *Limited Inc.*, explicitly describes, at least with regard to his earlier work, as being concerned with a “politics of language”.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, for Derrida, “there is always something political ‘in the very project of attempting to fix the contexts of utterances.’ This is inevitable;”.<sup>91</sup> It is important to note the emphasis that Derrida places on *fixity*. Put another way, it is not the *content* of the utterance with which he is concerned. Rather, the *form* of the utterance—as having a singular, stable meaning—is, for Derrida, the political move<sup>92</sup>. While a “politics of language” is certainly not without consequences beyond language textual politics does not constitute the entirety of “politics” *in general*. Yet, this particular understanding of politics as a “textual politics” seems to indicate the content of the broader term for theorists of “deconstructive politics.”

The limited sense in which Derrida’s work is political is *symptomatic* of a much larger tendency in contemporary philosophy, namely the tendency to presume philosophy’s autonomy from the social and material world. Dews alludes to this shortcoming in his own comparison of Derrida and Adorno’s critiques. He points out that although deconstruction works to undermine fundamental assumptions in the history of philosophy, it focuses largely on “logical contradictions.” Such a project is not sufficient if one seeks radical political transformation, he argues, because “political antagonisms...cannot be reduced to logical contradictions”.<sup>93</sup> One might also say that politics cannot be reduced to a “politics of language.” Dews seems to take after Adorno in this respect. In “The Actuality of Philosophy,” Adorno describes the consequences of primordial, immediate premises for philosophers:

Losing contact with the historical problems of philosophy they [forget] that in every assumption their own statements are inextricably bound to historical problem and the history of those problems, and are not to be resolve independent of them.<sup>94</sup>

Adorno presses us to consider whether philosophy’s own understanding of its relation to the historical problems it aims to solve does not *inhibit* the resolution of the very problems it identifies.

When Dews states that political antagonisms are not reducible to “logical contradictions” he implies that such contradictions are not *in themselves* origins. In other words, where Derrida seems to locate the antinomies apparent in Husserlian phenomenology and in Western philosophy more broadly in the originary non-presence of *différance* he functionally excludes the possibility of conceiving of such antinomies as resulting from antagonisms *in society*. Though Derrida identifies the contradictions implicit in characterizing the relationship between identity and difference, reality and representation, subject and object as one of *identity*, his conception of *différance* cannot

account for the relationship between its own premises and capitalist society. As Adorno puts it, philosophy which takes for granted its autonomy, which does not investigate its relation to its social and material conditions “will not go the entire path to the rational presuppositions, but will stop where irreducible reality breaks upon it...at the price of that reality in which its actual tasks are laid”.<sup>95</sup>

### **“The Task of Philosophy” and the Future of Critical Theory**

In several comparative accounts pertaining to deconstruction and critical theory, it has been proposed that the most promising contribution deconstruction might offer critical theory is in the realm of *ideology critique* – a central practice of the early Frankfurt School which has fallen into ill-repute. Ryan, for example, suggests that deconstruction is “potentially very useful for a Marxist critique of ideology”.<sup>96</sup> By “ideology” Ryan means “the set of ideas and practices which reproduce class rule” (38). Ryan is not alone in proposing such a reading of the possible intersections of deconstruction and critical theory. As Callinicos points out, theorists such as Christopher Norris (though with greater focus on the work of Paul de Man) have also offered readings of deconstruction “as a form of Ideologiekritik”.<sup>97</sup> This impulse arises from what Ryan perceives as the capacity of deconstruction to “question the ideological bases of philosophical conservatism”.<sup>98</sup> As I have argued above, however, it is perhaps difficult to locate the seemingly radical break that deconstruction represents from the history of Western philosophy insofar as its fundamental assumptions seem to reflect a longstanding presupposition of philosophy’s autonomy. In other words, Derrida’s critique represents a kind of conservative inclination in philosophy, a tendency to maintain a certain theoretical *status quo*.

The “governing assumption behind Ryan’s argument,” argues O’Kane, is that “a linguistic determinism grants ‘signifying practice’ equal status with other practices in the social whole”.<sup>99</sup> These remarks reflect what I have above called an idealist tendency in deconstruction resulting from the primacy of concepts. O’Kane is careful to note the repercussions of such a theoretical equivalency, arguing that through a focus on what he elsewhere refers to as textual politics “The critique of ideology becomes a reduction to the fundamental and essential features of aesthetics and literary experience, above all language”.<sup>100</sup> Implicit in such an evaluation of deconstruction’s critical potential is the fact that ideology critique requires more than the exposure of internal contradictions in the realm of concepts or discourse. If a critique is to be a *critique of ideology*, it must also contend with the material circumstances from which the contradictions emerge, a task which is precluded by allotting primacy to the appearance of ideology *as discourse*. O’Kane suggests something similar:

The critical potential of “deconstruction” as “ideology critique” focusing on language would therefore seem to occupy only a subordinate or participating position if an articulation with “materialist” principles is what is desired.<sup>101</sup>



Though I would describe O’Kane’s account as optimistic, he raises a rather important point through a rather careful turn of phrase. O’Kane suggests that deconstruction should occupy “a subordinate or participating positing” on the condition that there exists a desire to articulate a critique according to “materialist’ principles.” Indeed, it is keen to express this conditionally given the tendency to eschew such principles as outdated or archaic – a tendency, I would argue, is actually quite an accurate reflection of our own historical moment. Though the suggestion of deconstruction’s potential as a kind of ideology critique misses the larger aims of a critique of ideology, the emphasis placed on this potential is rather revealing; it expresses a theoretical need, however, which cannot be satisfied by deconstruction.

In “The Actuality of Philosophy,” Adorno gives an account of what he conceives as “the task of philosophy”:

The task of philosophy is not to search for concealed and manifest intentions of reality, but to interpret unintentional reality, in that, by the power of constructing figures, or images, out of the isolated elements of reality, it negates questions...<sup>102</sup>

The necessity for the philosophical interpretation of “unintentional reality” is perhaps especially apropos of the discussion initiated here concerning the *unintentional politics* of deconstruction. If we accept Adorno’s description of the philosophy’s task, it seems that contemporary philosophy has fallen short. What I have attempted to demonstrate here is that the assumption of philosophy’s autonomy from the concrete politics of capitalist society “negates questions” insofar as it precludes reflection on the very presuppositions such a society supplies. Adorno’s emphasis on how such accidental realities are constituted through the construction of images “out of the isolated elements of reality” is a worthwhile reminder that a narrow focus on the language and concepts inadvertently negates the question of philosophy’s own relation to its material circumstances.

It is at this point, Adorno argues, that “one can discover what appears as such an astounding and strange affinity existing between interpretive philosophy and that type of thinking which most strongly rejects the concept of the intentional, the meaningful: the thinking of materialism”.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, he claims that “the interpretation of the unintentional...is the program of every authentic materialist knowledge”.<sup>104</sup> Adorno alludes to the philosophical limitations of the very presupposition which one sees reproduced in contemporary philosophy, not least of all in the work of Jacques Derrida. If the aim of critical theory remains not only to explain but to *transform* the society which it sets out to critique, then deconstruction’s contribution is, at best, remarkably limited insofar as its unintentional politics remains within the bounds of capitalist society, within the grips of ideology. Although Derrida insists that we investigate the tendency to search for the “*presence of the present*,” he seems to abscond from the duty in his own work which is marred by the distinctive mark of our present historical moment, not least of all by its discontents.<sup>105</sup>

*Endnotes*

- <sup>1</sup> Derrida, Jacques *Voice and Phenomenon: Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl's Phenomenology*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010), 38.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.
- <sup>6</sup> Ryan, Michael, *Marxism and Deconstruction: A Critical Articulation*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1984), 74.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.
- <sup>8</sup> Derrida, *Voice and Phenomena*, 66.
- <sup>9</sup> Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.:* "Like that of *différance* and several others, it is an conceptual concept or another kind of concept, heterogeneous to the philosophical concept of the concept, a 'concept' that marks both the possibility and the limit of all idealization and hence of all conceptualization" (118).
- <sup>10</sup> Adorno, Theodor, *Against Epistemology: A Metacritique*, (Malden: Polity Press, 2013), 142.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.
- <sup>13</sup> For a historical account of Husserl's influence in the history of liberalism See. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*, (New York: Picador, 2010): 119-120.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.
- <sup>17</sup> Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon*, 72.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.
- <sup>24</sup> Adorno, *Against Epistemology*, 137.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.
- <sup>27</sup> Derrida, *Voice and Phenomena*, 71.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.
- <sup>29</sup> Dews, *Logics of Disintegration*, 41.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.
- <sup>32</sup> Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon*, 88.

- <sup>33</sup> Dews, *Logics of Disintegration*, 19.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.
- <sup>35</sup> Adorno, *Against Epistemology*, 109.
- <sup>36</sup> Ryan, *Marxism and Deconstruction*, 75.
- <sup>37</sup> Adorno, *Against Epistemology*, 109.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.
- <sup>39</sup> Adorno, *Against Epistemology*, 109.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.
- <sup>41</sup> Dews, *Logics of Disintegration*, 40.
- <sup>42</sup> Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon*, 71.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.
- <sup>44</sup> Dews, Peter, *Logics of Disintegration: Post-Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory*, (London: Verso Books, 1987), 18.
- <sup>45</sup> Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon*, 36.
- <sup>46</sup> Dews, *Logics of Disintegration*, 18.
- <sup>47</sup> Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon*, 72.
- <sup>48</sup> Adorno, *Against Epistemology*, 155.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.
- <sup>51</sup> Ryan, *Marxism and Deconstruction*, 79.
- <sup>52</sup> Alex Callinicos in *Against Postmodernism*, points out that “various authors have detected in Derrida’s argument strong foliations with the German idealist tradition” (76). However, Callinicos argues, the difficulty of this influence of classical idealism is not “the denial of the existence of objects independently of thought” (76), but rather one of “[denying] our ability to know these objects” (77).
- <sup>53</sup> Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon*, 71.
- <sup>54</sup> Adorno, *Against Epistemology*, 90.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.
- <sup>56</sup> Eagleton, Terry, “Deconstruction and Marxism” *Contemporary Literature* 22 (1981): 477-488.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 483.
- <sup>58</sup> Marx, K. Engels, F. “The Communist Manifesto,” *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994): 161-162.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 484.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 484.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 484.
- <sup>62</sup> There is a complex and wide-ranging body of literature on the matter of political subjectivity and the political implications of various theories of subjectivity. Though these theoretical concerns are not unrelated, in this paper my focus is on Derrida’s curious performative contradiction as an effect of the presumption of autonomy.
- <sup>63</sup> Ryan, *Marxism and Deconstruction*, 73.
- <sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>65</sup> Ryan, *Marxism and Deconstruction*, 78.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>67</sup> Ryan, in the opening lines of *Marxism and Deconstruction*, presents a stronger formulation of this sentiment: “Deconstruction is a philosophical interrogation of some of the major concepts and practices of philosophy. Marxism, in contrast, is not a philosophy. It names revolutionary movements, based among other things on Marx’s critical analysis of capitalism” (1).

<sup>68</sup> To emphasize the widespread unreflectiveness concerning this attitude, it is worth noting that even critical reviews of *Marxism and Deconstruction*, such as that offered by John O’Kane in “Marxism, Deconstruction, and Ideology” (1984) do not take issue with Ryan’s distinction. O’Kane, in fact, confirms the distinction even where he is elsewhere critical of Ryan’s project. He credits Ryan with “the acknowledgement that Adorno’s strengths lie in a critique of capitalist society, in the realm of the social and conceptual as opposed to that of philosophy, language, and style in Derrida” (224).

<sup>69</sup> Ryan, *Marxism and Deconstruction*, 80.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>71</sup> “Bourgeois philosophy,” as Ryan uses the term likely refers to any philosophy which affirms or justifies the positions of the bourgeoisie in capitalist society. This corresponds in Marx’s terms to “The ruling class ideas” which are “nothing more than the ideal expression of dominant material relations.” Marx, Karl. *The German Ideology*, (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1998): 67.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Charles Mills *The Racial Contract*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997). Also, Carol Pateman *The Sexual Contract*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

<sup>73</sup> To clarify what I mean here, it is helpful to consult Anita Chari who has given a rather succinct explanation of the relation between liberalism and formalism: “Liberal formalism operates by working the form of normative concepts, such as liberty, against their social content. In addition liberal formalism is based on a sociological premise that also has normative implications: the separation of the economic and political spheres.” *A Political Economy of the Senses: Neoliberalism, Reification, Critique*, New York: University of Columbia Press, 2015.

<sup>74</sup> Cornell, Drucilla, *The Philosophy of the Limit*, (New York: Routledge, 1992), 180.

<sup>75</sup> Some examples of Adorno’s writing on philosophy include: *Kierkegaard: Konstruktion des Ästhetischen* (1933), *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie*. (1956)—translated as *Against Epistemology* (Blackwell 1982, Polity 2013)—*Drei Studien zu Hegel* (1963), *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit. Zur deutschen Ideologie* (Adorno’s 1964 critique of Heidegger and German existentialism), and *Negative Dialektik* (1966).

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>77</sup> Jameson, Fredric, *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, the Persistence of the Dialectic*, (New York: Verso Books, 2007): 5.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>79</sup> Cornell, *The Philosophy of the Limit*, 37.

<sup>80</sup> Wilke, Sabine, "Adorno and Derrida as Readers of Husserl: Some Reflections on the Historical Context of Modernism and Postmodernism". *Boundary 2* 16 (1989): 79.

<sup>81</sup> Eagleton, "Deconstruction and Marxism," 483.

<sup>82</sup> McGowan, John, *Postmodernism and Its Critics*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991): 110.

<sup>83</sup> Dews, *Logics of Disintegration*, 35.

<sup>84</sup> For example, *Specters of Marx* (1993), *Politics of Friendship* (1997), *Monolingualism of the Other* (1998), *The Beast and the Sovereign* (2009), and *Death Penalty Vol. I* (2013) .

<sup>85</sup> Cornell in *Beyond Accommodation*, for example, suggests the Derrida's work is "inherently ethical and political" because it offers "the possibility of breaking beyond the identification of the feminine as the opposition of the castrated other" (98). Indeed, a substantial amount of Cornell's work is devoted to exploring the ethical and political dimensions of deconstruction and its productive alliances with feminism.

<sup>86</sup> Callinicos has a similar view, though he goes a step further to suggest that deconstruction itself *prevents* such an articulation. He writes: "Whatever Derrida's personal political commitments...he is unable rationally to ground them because he denies himself the means either to analyze those existing social arrangements he rejects or to justify this rejection by outlining some more desirable state of affairs" (79). Callinicos's critique is focused largely on *the lack of a normative or positive political project* in Derrida's work. With a similar concern in mind, I have suggested above that deconstruction is possessed of a certain political "formalism."

<sup>87</sup> Focusing specifically on the question of a "deconstructive politics" which is compatible with the tradition of critical theory descended from Marxism, Jameson describes his own positions as follows: "The torturous and hypersubtle 'undoings' of Negative Dialectics in its way with the Concept have also seemed too many to offer the proverbial family likeness with Derrida and deconstruction. (In my opinion, no very solid foundation for a 'dialogue' between this last and Marxism will be laid by wishing away the basic differences;" (10).

<sup>88</sup> O'Kane, John, "Marxism, Deconstruction, and Ideology: Notes toward an Articulation," *New German Critique* 33 (1984): 221.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>90</sup> Derrida, Jacques, *Limited Inc.*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1977): 135.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Adorno, Theodor. "The Actuality of Philosophy," *Telos* 31 (1997): 131. It is perhaps worthwhile to note that this represents a kind of inversion of Adorno's reflection on the concept of "ideology" which, he claims, "is robbed of its cutting edge by defining it formally as the arrangement of contents of consciousness in regard to particular groups without allowing the question to arise any longer as to the truth or falsity of the contents themselves."

<sup>93</sup> Dews, *Logics of Disintegration*, 35.

<sup>94</sup> Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy," 121.

<sup>95</sup> Adorno, *Against Epistemology*, 132.

- <sup>96</sup> Ryan, *Marxism and Deconstruction*, 38.  
<sup>97</sup> Callinicos, Alex, *Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique*, (Polity Press, 1991): 77.  
<sup>98</sup> Ryan, *Marxism and Deconstruction*, 38.  
<sup>99</sup> O’Kane, “Deconstruction, Marxism, and Ideology,” 222.  
<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.  
<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.  
<sup>102</sup> Adorno, “The Actuality of Philosophy,” 127.  
<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.  
<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.  
<sup>105</sup> Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon*, 19.

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