

# *Dons et résistances: Études sur Jacques Derrida*, edited by Jolán Orbán and Anikó Radvánszky, L'Harmattan, Paris, Budapest, 2019.

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As Jacques Derrida does not use theorems and axioms in the traditional sense, his thinking appears to be rather difficult to approach. His concepts, such as *différance*, *trace* or *writing*, do not primarily intend to facilitate positive statements, but rather the observation of internal contradictions within philosophical premises. Hence the paradoxical position of the Derridean thought, in which a completely free attitude towards concepts in fact does not exclude the basic assumption that “there is nothing outside the text”. This conceptual freedom in principle allows the individual to conceive the world free of schematic constraints, while the text, with nothing outside it, appears as an absolute schema. In other words, the text in the Derridean sense, i.e., the set of spatial and temporal articulations brought about by the fact and dynamics of differentiation, presupposes a continuum of transitions in which the individual is forced to reconstitute his linguistic strategies of utterance, given that in *différance* all utterances are deconstructed. Deconstruction thus reveals itself as an intellectual attitude of radical ambiguity, which requires unfaithful loyalty in the application of its principles. The collection of essays on Derrida discussed below, *Dons et résistances* [Gifts and Resistances], attempts to assess the relevance of this line of thought, with particular reference to the fields of “metaphysics and epistemology”, “politics and ethics”, as well as “art and literature”.

The three main sections are divided into five chapters. The first chapter, “Resistance towards Metaphysics”, examines questions of Cartesian cogito, transcendence and the perception of space through a Derridean paradigm. The second, “The Gifts of Writing”, explores Derrida’s concept of writing and its impact on philosophy and art. The third, “The Power of Music”, explores a rarely discussed theme in Derrida’s philosophy, his relationship with thoughtful music. The fourth, “Pharmacology, Hospitality, Performativity”, focuses on the ethical and political

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implications of Derrida's philosophy. Finally, the fifth, "More than a Work of Art", explores the possibilities of a biography in the Derridean sense and the afterlife of the author's oeuvre. The volume thus sets out to explore almost every aspect of the philosopher's thought. Given that Derrida's philosophy does not acknowledge the existence of independent substances, dividing the totality of the thought in question into chapters is intended to guide the reader and render the volume more accessible, rather than to provide any methodological reflection on the subject matter itself. In other words, in Derrida's view, metaphysics, ethics, politics and the arts cannot strictly be separated. As Zsolt Bagi notes, "[...] I am indebted to [Derrida], not only for theoretical thought, but also for political and ethical thought, which for him have never been distinct, absolute domains." (29).

The suspicion towards separation is already evident in the first chapter. Jean-Luc Nancy's article on the Derrida-Foucault debate on the *History of Madness* stresses that the Derridean reading of Descartes' *First Meditation* contradicts Foucault's in that it does not interpret the distinction between reason and madness as an exclusion of the latter, but rather posits madness as an elementary doubt inherent in reason itself. "Thus, Derrida must consequently identify himself," writes Nancy, "with madness in which reason *ea ipsa* [in itself] evacuates as soon as it recognizes itself – provided that the opposite is not true, that is, Derrida must have arrived at philosophy driven by the madness he discovered in himself, which is on a forced course towards philosophy" (15–16). In another text, also in the context of the Derrida-Foucault debate, Zsolt Bagi asks why one could not apply the Derridean and the Foucauldian readings simultaneously to the analysis of the *First Meditation*. For, according to Bagi, the two philosophers have a different understanding of the reduction found in Descartes' writing: "I would describe the difference between their interpretations of Descartes' *First Meditation* in such a way that whereas Derrida sees a reduction (or, to be more precise, a demonic, hyperbolic doubt, a deconstruction that appears as phenomenological reduction), Foucault sees subjectivation. My hypothesis is very simple: why not see reduction *as* subjectivation?" (emphasis in original, 31). Bagi's starting point, then, drawing on Derrida's argument, fits into a non-exclusive logic based on the generality of reason (cf. 30). Along similar lines, Eszter Horváth stresses the inseparability of the body (through touch) and the intellect as the result of meaning-making. "With touch, reality is no longer conceived as a (self-)reflexive entity in itself. The sensual, as touch, challenges the introspection of the thinker – to touch one must be outside, one must 'touch from outside', one never touches 'oneself'. The touch challenges the closedness of thinking and the closedness *in* thinking: all this is exploration, invention" (44).

Finally, Anikó Radvánszky's text discusses the conceptual separation of space and time: "[...] one could say that the master of deconstruction [Derrida] is primarily interested in how *time becomes space and space becomes time* in the process of meaning-making" (emphasis in original, 59). The writings in the first chapter thus reveal a critical stance against separations on the metaphysical plane, which in the case of Derrida's thought is a critique of metaphysics as such.

The second chapter, "The Gifts of Writing", also stresses the denial of a strict separation of the different fields. This is evidenced by Michel Lisse's text, which, referring to Derrida's *The University Without Condition*, explores the conditions of the possibility of a writing, that does not fit into either philosophical or literary tradition, and yet combines the two. The stakes of this mode of writing would be the creation of an essentially free and unconditional discourse. To paraphrase the *The University Without Condition*, Lisse concludes that "the university must be without condition, unconditional, in so far as it is necessary to conduct all research in all fields of thought and art within its framework" (69). The theoretical foundations of such generally liberating tendencies of Derridean philosophy are, according to Jolán Orbán, to be found in his *Of Grammatology*. Orbán draws on the theories formulated in *Of Grammatology* in order to analyze Derrida's relationship with certain artists such as Simon Hantai or Valerio Adami. In exploring this complex web of inspiration, Orbán emphasizes that "the multigendered, multivocal, multidimensional, delinearized writing that Derrida lays down is not merely a philosophical construction, a theoretical constellation, but also a way of writing that he employs, which produces textual events quite alien to philosophy and quite close to literary text and artistic activity" (84). Derrida's multidimensional thinking can also be observed in his contributions to visual culture, which Anna Keszeg analyses through the prism of the Platonic notion of Khôra. This proves to be a central notion in Derrida's work as well, especially in his description of space as a 'container', i.e. a neutral framework that gives space to everything. Using this concept, Keszeg concludes that "Derrida's Khôra is the fundamental expression and category of the medial culture of our time [...]" (109). The writings in this volume thus once again reveal a philosophy in which transmission, mediation and the crossing of boundaries are of primary importance.

The third section, "The Power of Music", comprises three chapters that explore similarities between Derrida's writing (both as a philosophical concept and as a writing practice) and music. Marie-Louise Mallet sheds light on the aspects of Derrida's thought that have made new approaches to music possible: "[...] Derrida's deconstruction of the intuitionism of total presence, of the logocentrism of the accumulation of meaning under the unifying configuration of the concept, removes

many obstacles and allows a way of approaching music that philosophy as ontology or even as phenomenology almost necessarily misses” (120). Indeed, the notions of trace, *espacement*, or *différance* challenge the linearity of music in the same way that they shake the belief in the linearity of writing. In her own article, Anikó Radvánszky also notes that “by deconstructing the concept of sound, rooted in the philosophical tradition, Derrida reinterpreted the hierarchy of writing and sound in a way that was deeply embedded in writing, and it was precisely because of the conclusions he drew about the written character of music that he laid the foundations for a sound-based critique of logo-phonocentrism.” (148) Finally, Adrián Bene’s text thematizes the similarities between Nietzsche’s and Derrida’s writing through concepts of musicality, polyphony, and even dance: “to write, for both Nietzsche and Derrida, is to whirl. Thinking is movement” (156). These three texts, which discuss Derrida’s concept of music, help to dispel the misconception that music plays only a minor role in the thought of Derrida. The essays of chapter three demonstrate that music is an integral part of his philosophy, both as an object of reflection and as an inspiration.

The fourth chapter raises the question of the ethical and political application of deconstruction, with particular reference to the Derridean concepts of *trace*, *hospitality* and *performativity*. In his essay, Bernard Stiegler criticizes the concept of trace, which in itself may prove inadequate to describe becoming an individual. To complement the concept of trace, which refers to the Husserlian dynamics of retention and protention, Stiegler proposes the use of the concept of tertiary retention. The latter denotes the information-bearing conditions that precede individualization: “[...] one would like to think [...] that the formation of intentional consciousness constitutes the psychic side (as a stage of individuation) of the technical formation of tertiary retentions such as literacy in the strict sense” (169). By this, Stiegler wishes to contribute to the development of a new critique of political economy, since the concept of tertiary retention is useful for a modern analysis of alienation. In another essay, Lóránt Kicsák discusses Derrida’s notion of unconditional hospitality, reflecting on its possibilities and necessary conditions. Following Derrida, Kicsák concludes that “unconditional hospitality does not tolerate any condition, any calculation, any exchange that would prevent both encounter and reception in the literal sense, reducing the relation with the other to a legal-economic relation” (196). A similar form of unconditionality reappears in another text by Kicsák, which analyses the performativity, or even eventuality, of deconstruction as a result of its unconditionality: “Since it deconstructs institutions, deconstruction eliminates the institutional conditions of its own unfolding, and thus can only rely on itself: it is forced to provide its own specific activity, which always requires a performative

procedure” (230). The fourth chapter also contains an essay by Fernanda Bernardo, which also examines the unconditionality of deconstruction. Through this feature, deconstruction, according to the author, can open up radically new perspectives in philosophical and political thought. Drawing on Derrida’s *University Without Condition*, Bernardo stresses that “it is only in the light of this affirmation of ‘unconditional freedom’ that the University can truly become a definitive source of resistance and a home for invention” (217). The texts in chapter four thus explore the political-philosophical possibilities of Derrida’s thinking, emphasizing its capacity to take on a performative character even as it deconstructs its own conditions of possibility.

The fifth and final chapter examines the legacy of Derrida’s life and philosophy, and the work of posterity. The first two texts explore the prospect of a possible biography in the Derridean spirit, which would question the definite separation of the life and the philosophy of the individual. Benoît Peters states that “what is most often missing from the biography of significant people are precisely those things that give life its real content: thinking, creating or loving in their very essence” (259). János Boros continues this line of thought by concluding that, since such elements of biography are in fact inaccessible, “the ethics of biography consists of the recognition that it is impossible to know the subject in the very way he or she forms himself or herself. The biographer’s only chance is to describe the subject’s impact on other subjects and on the common language” (270). Finally, Eszter Horváth asks whether Derrida founded a school of thought and, if so, how this school relates to the search for truth. Horváth concludes that “although he is critical of all possibilities of the real presence, Derrida nevertheless puts his faith in the real event that disintegrates reality, that is different and which generates difference [...]” (277). If there is a Derridean school, then, it consists in a hypercritical thinking that advances the search for truth by an in-depth examination of the concept of truth itself, which opens the way to the development of a number of different, radically new philosophies.

The essays found in *Gift and Resistance* shed light on a philosophy that does not stop at deconstructing traditional schools of thought. Derrida’s philosophy is based on a certain performative thinking; an event-oriented thinking that always seeks to extend its philosophical, political, ethical and artistic questions beyond the existing, beyond the given. It is also able to ground itself through a critique of its own conditions of possibility, and to this extent deconstruction is truly thinking without condition, which resists any simplistic appropriation. It is indeed at once gift *and* resistance.

Translated by *Gábor Patkós*