Dear all,

First of all, many thanks for taking the time to read and discuss this paper. I realize that the content of the paper may appear somewhat foreign to this audience, but I am very keen to hear how political theorists who are less familiar with post-structuralist theory respond to this. The paper is vey much a draft, and there is lots that I would like to revise. Above all, I need to articulate the tensions I identify around deconstruction as method better and not just write about them but also perform them.

The paper is – or will be – a chapter for a book on deconstruction, method and political theory entitled *Provisional Deconstruction: Jacques Derrida, Method, and Political Theory*. The current chapter outline is: 1. Deconstruction as Political Theory; 2. The Politics of Iterability and Rights; 3. Deconstructing Sovereignty Discourse; 4. Provisional Democracy; 5. Democratic Rogues: Populism a la Derrida; 6. Deconstruction as/of Method. What you have is, thus, the last chapter, although when I wrote this draft, it was meant to be the first chapter.

Best wishes,
Lasse

Chapter 6: Deconstruction as/of Method

Introduction

"What is deconstruction not? everything of course! What is deconstruction? nothing of course!"[1] With statements like this by Jacques Derrida, it is perhaps no wonder that many philosophers and social scientists have been skeptical about the value of deconstruction for serious philosophical and social scientific work. It would seem that Derrida is saying that deconstruction is just an empty term that can be made to mean anything and everything. Indeed, one of the most common criticisms directed at deconstruction is that it leads to relativism, and that it is an expression of a post-truth and post-moral postmodernism. The argument of this chapter – and of the book as a whole – is that deconstruction is a serious approach, and that it has something important to tell us about how to approach philosophy and social science in general and political theory in particular. In short, deconstruction is a useful method for doing political theory.

When Derrida writes the following about deconstruction as a method, one may be led to believe that thinking about deconstruction as a method for political theory is bound to be pointless:

> It's not a general method. It's not my property. Deconstruction is not a tool; of course there are some schemes, some types, regular types that you could use as a grammar, as a technique, but they are only secondary things in deconstruction. Deconstruction is not a technique, is not a method.[2]

This chapter argues that it does make sense to think about deconstruction as a method. Doing so can help us get a better sense of what one can achieve by using deconstruction, and it can also help us think productively about common issues in discussions about method, such as generalizability, the use of examples, and case studies.

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[1] Jacques Derrida, "Letter to a Japanese Friend," in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume II*, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 6.
[2] Jacques Derrida, "Interview," *Art Papers* 10, no. 1 (1986): 31–35.

Derrida identified two styles of deconstruction. There is, first, a more or less systematic unfolding of themes, and second, there is the careful and detailed readings of particular texts.

> Deconstruction is generally practiced in two ways or two styles, although it most often grafts one on to the other. One takes on the demonstrative and apparently ahistorical allure of logico-formal paradoxes. The other, more historical or more anamnesic, seems to proceed through readings of texts, meticulous interpretations and genealogies.[3]

Deconstruction should be seen as extended in a tension between what we might summarize as the general and the particular, or between the systematic and the singular, or between concepts and texts. Deconstruction moves back and forth between the general and the particular, and we should think of this moving back and forth in terms of articulation. When we use deconstruction as a method, it articulates the general (the "logico-formal paradoxes") *and* the particular (texts).

This has implications for how we think about what deconstruction "is." There are only particular examples of deconstruction, yet those examples can only be examples if they exemplify something more general. As a result, any presentation – such as this one – of deconstruction is caught in this tension between accounting for deconstruction in general and relying on particular examples.

While Derrida's deconstructive analyses are often interspersed with reflections on his method, and while his interlocutors often raise questions about method, this is usually done in an ad hoc fashion. Even in Derrida's most sustained reflections on deconstruction – the short "letter" of only six pages quoted above, a short section in *Of Grammatology*, and remarks in an interview – his reflections appear enigmatic to those unversed in deconstructive

[3] Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson (New York: Routledge, 1992), 21.

terminology.[4] I propose to pursue the issue of deconstruction as method in a more systematic way. In the first two sections, I lay out the basics of deconstruction, first, by considering its status as a method and, second, by examining the basic moves of a deconstructive reading. In the subsequent two sections, I use Derrida's notion of iterability and his analysis of the event of 9-11 to examine the relationship of deconstruction as theory and method to its particular applications. I shall argue that iterability provides a particularly useful way to shed light on deconstruction as method because iterability draws attention to the relationship between method and application as one of mutual articulation. In the final sections of the chapter, I then consider the use of examples and case studies and bring deconstruction into conversation with research in political science and political theory.

The quotes from Derrida above suggest that "deconstruction," "is," and "method" do not sit well together. That is certainly the case in so far as Derrida aims to deconstruct any "is" in the sense of essence or presence. This is what he tries to express with notions such as differance and iterability. It also applies to deconstruction itself, which we cannot treat as a method that is simply given prior to its use. Even referring to deconstruction "itself" – or to "the basics" of deconstruction – suggests that there is an essence of sorts so that one might lay out the basics of deconstruction.[5]

The language I use suggests that I remain within what Derrida would call a metaphysics of presence, but, as he also points out, we cannot escape the metaphysics of presence altogether. We cannot invent a new non-metaphysical and non-deconstructible language; we are stuck with our inherited languages. Thus also here: deconstruction *as* method implies the deconstruction *of* method, but the deconstruction of method proceeds from, and with the terms of, more or less predominant discourses of method. This is the case, for instance, when it comes to a theme that I return to repeatedly in this chapter, namely generalizability. That is an important part of discourses on method in philosophy and the social sciences, and one can and should deconstruct those discourses,

[4] Derrida, "Letter to a Japanese Friend"; Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 40th Anniversary Edition (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 171–78; Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, Revised Edition (London: Continuum, 2002).
[5] [Check and maybe use Bennington, Lüdemann.]

but this does not mean that we can avoid the question of generalizability, or that deconstruction does not generalize.

Deconstruction as/of Method

What is deconstruction? When asking for a definition of deconstruction, we are asking for the meaning or essence of deconstruction as expressed in the copula "is" in "what *is* deconstruction?" Derrida writes:

> All sentences of the type "deconstruction is X" or "deconstruction is not X" a priori miss the point ... one of the principal things at stake in what is called in the texts "deconstruction" is precisely the delimiting of onto-logic and above all of the third person present indicative: S *is* P.[6]

Deconstruction puts into question any claim to essence and to stable definitions and meanings, and in this way deconstruction puts into question the assumptions behind the question "what is deconstruction?" We must keep this in mind when trying to specify what deconstruction implies as a method for political analysis. Despite these inherent difficulties in specifying what deconstruction implies as a method, I shall nonetheless attempt to spell out what deconstruction as method implies and to do so as systematically and schematically as possible. Later I shall return to the question of the definition of deconstruction.

Deconstruction as method arguably also implies the deconstruction of method. Derrida writes "that deconstruction could not be reduced to some methodological instrumentality or to a set of rules and transposable procedures."[7] However, as Rodolphe Gasché points out, "[a]lthough a deconstruction of method, deconstruction is not a nonmethod, an invitation to wild and private lucubrations."[8] I shall first attempt a negative delimitation of what deconstruction is not. Delimiting and defining deconstruction in a negative way is not unproblematic, but it does give us a useful starting point for approaching deconstruction as a method.

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[6] Derrida, "Letter to a Japanese Friend," 5.
[7] Derrida, 4.
[8] Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 123.

Deconstruction is not analysis if by that is meant the breaking down of a text or a structure to its original or fundamental elements, for instance to show what a given structure consists of "at bottom." On the contrary, deconstruction is skeptical of any attempt to establish an origin or a foundation, whether these consist of a whole or of its parts.[9]

Nor is deconstruction critique, which, in its traditional form, aims at making decisions by discerning between true and false and between right and wrong. Contrary to what is often thought, Derrida does not believe that it is impossible to make (conceptual) distinctions, for instance between democratic and undemocratic, or between democracy and populism. He insists on interrogating distinctions in philosophical and political texts, and those distinctions turn out to be less clear and less easy to draw than the authors want us to believe – the distinction between democracy and populism is a good example, as I will show in Chapter 6. Importantly, for Derrida, a decision always comes hand in hand with undecidability. We cannot avoid making decisions, including political decisions, but there is no decision worth the name that simply follows a rule or a conceptual schema. For there to be a decision, there must be undecidability, an undecidability that does not disappear once the decision is made.[10] As a result, deconstruction problematizes critical decisions and distinctions; they are marked by an undecidability that cannot be eradicated or rationalized.

In the context of deconstruction, the term "critique" would have to mean an incessant critique, one that is always provisional. Political critique would not consist in establishing a firm set of concepts and distinctions, but rather in putting those into question. For instance, rather than identifying the essence of democracy, Derrida refers to a democracy to-come (*à-venir*). This is not a democracy that has not yet been realized, but might be so one day in the future (*avenir*). It is a democracy that will remain to-come, to be determined, but in the name of which any present democracy can be questioned. The distance between democracy in the present and democracy to-come is not a measurable distance between actual and ideal, or between present and future; rather, we

[9] Derrida, "Letter to a Japanese Friend," 4.
[10] Derrida, "Force of Law."

can think of democracy to-come as an excess, as an infliction that turns democracy against itself.[11] I return to this in Chapter 5.

Is deconstruction a method, then? Etymologically, the word method comes from the Greek *hodos* meaning road. Method is precisely supposed to be, or to show, the road to the truth about an object, for instance a text. The traditional view of method is that there is an object with an essence to be known, a method as a set of rules about how to gain knowledge about the object, and a subject who applies the method to the object in order to gain knowledge about it. However, deconstruction challenges this view of method in several respects.

Derrida refers to the objects of deconstruction as texts. The term "text" does not refer only to texts in the usual sense of written words. Instead it refers to any meaningful totality, and this includes practices, institutions and structures, whether philosophical, economic or otherwise; a text can be a text by Marx or the institutions of apartheid.[12] Importantly, a text is not a totality understood as a closed and coherent whole with an inside and an outside and whose limits can be clearly determined. Instead, texts are marked by tensions, contradictions or what Derrida calls aporias, which are irresolvable. That is, the aporias are not Hegelian contradictions that can be resolved at a higher level of rationality in the sense of *Aufhebung*. There is no reconciliation, no higher level of rationality. The deconstructive reading shows how the conceptual unity (systematicity) and conceptual borders of a text are produced.

Literally, aporia means non-passage, and aporias are blind spots where the reader of the text, even when faithfully following the conceptual schema governing the text, comes up against a limit where s/he must invent the road forward by making a decision between equally (un)likely roads ahead in the interpretation of the text.[13] Aporias are the places in the text where our approach to the object and where the road (method) come up against a non-passage (aporia). The objects of deconstruction are not fully constituted as objects with an essence that can be appropriated or known. What is proper to

[11] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).
[12] Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 137, 148; Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, 278–82.
[13] Jacques Derrida, *Aporias: Dying- Awaiting (One Another At) the "Limits of Truth"* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

the text is its non-appropriability because the text is not constituted as a coherent whole that can be determined or known, not even a coherent whole of otherwise contradictory parts. Indeed, the meaning of the text is partly constituted through the deconstructive reading, which should be viewed as an intervention involving a decision on the part of the reader: “Deconstruction ... is not *neutral*. It *intervenes*.”[14] A deconstructive reading is always an interested reading and involves decisions, and it never leaves the text intact, but rearticulates it.

The deconstructive reading is marked by a double bind. Derrida writes: “I try to respect as rigorously as possible the internal, regulated play of the philosophemes or epistemes by making them slide – without mistreating them – to the point of their nonpertinence, their exhaustion, their closure.”[15] The reading will be caught in a double bind because it must, on the one hand, respect the text (“the internal, regulated play of the philosophemes ...”), that is, be fair to the text. The reading must be just *qua* exact. On the other hand, the reading comes up against an internal limit to this, namely the aporias, where the reading can no longer simply follow the logic of the text. These are not two temporally distinguished steps (first follow, then disrupt); from the beginning, the deconstructive reading intervenes with certain questions and interests in mind.

The above may suggest a subject actively trying to appropriate or disrupt the text: a reader, coming prepared with questions, to interpret and to intervene into the text. There is something to be said for such an interpretation. Deconstruction is clearly an intervention, and it would not take place without this active intervention. However, as Derrida also writes, deconstruction

> does not return to an (individual or collective) *subject* who would take the initiative and apply it to an object, a text, a theme, and so on. ... *It deconstructs itself. It can be deconstructed* [Ça se déconstruit]. The “it” [*ça*] is not here an impersonal thing that is opposed to some egological subjectivity.[16]

[14] Derrida, *Positions*, 93.
[15] Derrida, 6.
[16] Derrida, “Letter to a Japanese Friend,” 4.

There is something passive about a deconstruction because there are already deconstructible tensions and aporias in the texts themselves, which means that the text is never in harmony or equilibrium with itself. For instance, in the context of sovereignty, as we will see in Chapter 4, Derrida notes how sovereignty discourse deconstructs itself, especially today when nation-state sovereignty is being challenged from all sorts of directions (international institutions, international terrorism, financial markets, and so on).

Finally, deconstruction is not a method in the sense of a set of procedures or techniques to be applied to an object.[17] We should speak of articulation rather than application, because each time deconstruction is put to use as a "method," both the object (that is, the text being deconstructed) and the method (the procedures, concepts and moves that can nonetheless be identified) are rearticulated. Here I use articulation in the way Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe used articulation to refer to "any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice."[18] Thus, deconstruction as method is not given *to* the individual deconstructions but partly articulated and, hence, constituted *through* them. This is reminiscent of Ludwig Wittgenstein's point that the use of a rule also constitutes its meaning.[19] I return to this in more detail below.

The argument here has implications for how ones does research and writes in a deconstructive fashion. If the object (the text) and the method/theory are rearticulated in the process of a deconstructive reading, then no two uses of deconstruction are identical. Deconstruction is not something to be taken down from the shelf, applied and then put back up on the shelf again. We do not start from a given method or set of procedures; that is, deconstruction is not method driven research, even though no research can be non-methodological or non-theoretical because our intuitions are informed by theories and interpretative schemas. Finally, the argument also has implications for the research and writing process. We do not first find a method or theory and then apply it and do empirical research. Rather, there will be a sort of back and forth between method/theory and "application," whether the application is to empirical cases or

[17] Derrida, 4.
[18] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2001), 105.
[19] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009).

to theoretical issues. There is no hard logical or temporal distinction between the two things. In these ways, deconstruction as method is also the deconstruction of method.

It is important to be clear that deconstruction is not simply negative. The term “deconstruction” may easily convey an idea of negation, of taking apart and breaking down, dismantling and destroying. However, deconstruction is also affirmative and “constructive.” It is affirmative in that it rests on an affirmation – a “yes” – to philosophy, justice and democracy, and in that it proceeds in the name of these ideals even while also putting conventional notions of them into question. Deconstruction is “constructive” too in that it attempts to account for the aporias and undecidabilities in texts through what Derrida calls infrastructures, which I shall return to below.

Deconstructive Moves

Where does one start a deconstructive reading? Derrida states: “We must begin *wherever we are* and ... it [is] impossible to justify a point of departure absolutely.”[20] He adds:

> The opening of the question, the departure from the closure of a self-evidence, the putting into doubt of a system of oppositions, all these movements necessarily have the form of empiricism and errancy. At any rate, they cannot be described, *as to past norms*, except in this form.[21]

We can give reasons for our starting point, for instance that it is a canonical text within political theory or, conversely, an overlooked work that challenges the canon. We find ourselves within one or more traditions that we inherit but also continue and reinterpret. Take, for example, Laclau and Mouffe’s deconstructive genealogy of the concept of hegemony in Marxist theory in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. Their deconstructive genealogy of hegemony spoke at once to their own past and to their concerns about how to develop a Leftist theoretical and political alternative at the time of the neo-conservative hegemony in the early 1980s. They wrote that “Marxism is *one* of the traditions through which it

[20] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 177.
[21] Derrida, 176–77.

becomes possible to formulate this new conception of politics. For us, the validity of this point of departure is simply based on the fact that it constitutes our own past."[22] Given this starting point, it is no surprise that they characterize their position as post-Marxist: at once breaking with important conceptions of Marxism (the base-superstructure model, class essentialism, and so on) and developing "certain intuitions and discursive forms constituted within Marxism," most notably a particular conception of hegemony.[23]

The starting point can never be fully justified or rationalized. Other starting points and openings of deconstructive questioning are always possible. In addition, given the performative and transformative nature of the deconstructive reading, it is not sufficient to refer to existing codes and norms (what Derrida above calls "*past norms*") about how one ought to pursue the reading of a text, because those codes and norms are themselves put into question by the deconstructive reading. This limitation to the justification and rationalization of one's starting point is no justification for not studying carefully. On the contrary, if we must start from "wherever we are," then we must know where we are, which is to say that we must carefully study the canon and the particular texts to be deconstructed. Thus, deconstruction involves a lot of preparatory, close, and analytical reading. In the case of my own work on deconstruction, it started as a deconstructive engagement with the work of Jürgen Habermas and deliberative democracy, which constituted my own intellectual past.[24] This involved reading my way through Habermas's work and through his commentators and the debates about his work. In Chapters 3 and 5, I continue this through an engagement with the works of Seyla Benhabib and Amy Gutmann, retrieving a notion of provisionality from their writings, but moving it in the direction of Derrida's democracy to-come.

A deconstructive reading must start with one foot in the text to be deconstructed. It cannot start from a point outside the text, because this is one of the things the deconstructive reading puts into question: the possibility of conceptual closure of the text. Given the impossibility of establishing an inside and outside to the text, the reading can start neither simply inside nor simply

[22] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 3–4.
[23] Laclau and Mouffe, 4.
[24] Lasse Thomassen, *Deconstructing Habermas* (London: Routledge, 2008).

outside the text. Still the reading must borrow its resources for the deconstruction from the text itself. For instance, Laclau and Mouffe borrow the concept of hegemony from the history of Marxism even as they displace that concept and that tradition. They do so by overturning the conceptual hierarchies of contingency/necessity and hegemony/structure, while at the same time generalizing contingency and hegemony so that they become general categories for understanding society.

The deconstructive reading works on the limit of the text, or rather its non-limit. It is put to work against the attempts to establish the coherence and the limits of the text, for instance through the rationalization of central conceptual distinctions between, say, base and superstructure in Marxism, or communicative and instrumental reason in Habermas. Importantly, the reading does not simply negate, or proceed in opposition to, the text in question. Thus, Derrida writes about his deconstruction of philosophical texts: "I try to keep myself at the *limit* of philosophical discourse. I say limit and not death."[25] The deconstructive reading does not aim to negate or reject, for example, philosophy, but to show the non-closure of philosophical texts by highlighting its undecidabilities and aporias.

It is also in this context that we should understand the (in)famous quote from Derrida: '*There is nothing outside of the text* [there is no outside-text; *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*].'[26] The text is not a closed whole with an inside and an outside; that is, the limits of the text cannot be clearly identified, and so a point *outside* the text cannot be easily identified either. Second, Derrida implies that nothing can determine the meaning of the text once and for all, neither the text as a coherent totality with determined limits (for instance, a closed structure) nor something outside the text, such as its context of enunciation or the intentions of the author.

A deconstructive reading looks for aporias in the text, aporias that cannot be reduced to either mistakes on the part of the author or to logical contradictions that can be dialecticized in a Hegelian fashion – in brief, aporias that cannot be rationalized or reduced in any way. The aim is not to reconstruct or reconstitute the unity of the text, but instead to account for the aporias with

[25] Derrida, *Positions*, 6.
[26] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 172; see also Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 136.

what Derrida calls infrastructures, such as differance, iterability, supplementarity and writing.[27] Here, infrastructure should not be understood as Marxist infrastructures; rather, it is "a transformed concept of 'infrastructure,' … an 'infrastructure' of which the *general text* would no longer be an effect or a reflection."[28] A Derridean infrastructure is not an underlying structure determining the meaning and reading of the text, and it only accounts for the aporias in a very loose sense of the word.[29] Infrastructural accounting takes the form of a double gesture of reversal and displacement (or reinscription), which can also be described as two steps although they are not sequentially ordered. The two steps are best explained in the context of the deconstruction of a hierarchical conceptual distinction.[30]

In a first step, a conceptual hierarchy is reversed, for instance presence/representation or speech/writing, where the first of each pair is usually valued higher, and thought to be more original, than the second. For instance, speech is thought in terms of presence and taken to be more authentic because supposedly immediate, whereas writing – as the representation of speech – is supposedly secondary and derived. In political philosophy as well as in ordinary discourse, representation is usually taken to be a second best to the presence of the voice of the people, as most famously evidenced in Rousseau. The reversal of the hierarchy can have the strategic effect of making us see things differently, but the reversal still operates within the conceptuality of the conceptual hierarchical structure itself; that is, the reversal does not disturb the hierarchical distinction as a conceptual hierarchical distinction.

This is why the second step of displacement, or reinscription, is necessary. The displacement generalizes otherwise repressed traits. It generalizes as a general structure what the old conceptual hierarchy had to repress in order to establish its conceptuality, and, in doing so, it makes visible the traits that make possible and limit the conceptual hierarchy. This generalized structure – for instance, "writing' – is the infrastructure. The displacement, or reinscription, does not consist in a simple break with the old conceptual hierarchy, but instead borrows an old name and marks it in order to

[27] Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, chaps. 8–9.
[28] Derrida, *Positions*, 90.
[29] Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, 142–43.
[30] Derrida, *Positions*, 41–44.

show the displacement from the older hierarchy. Take, for instance, Laclau and Mouffe's deconstruction of the concept of hegemony in the Marxist tradition. They place hegemony at the center, whereas it was previously at the margins of the Marxist conceptual system. They also displace the concept of hegemony so that it is now a general logic of the political that explains how practices, institutions and structures are structured in the first place; in short, hegemony is no longer opposed to, or marginalized vis-à-vis, structures.

Derrida's notion of differance (*différance*) is another example.[31] What does differance mean? Its meaning is constituted through relations of difference with other signifiers, including the signifier "difference." Differance and difference are two different words, but only so in writing, not in speech, where they are pronounced the same (at least in French). The difference of differance is inaudible, and Derrida uses differance as a way to argue against the hierarchical distinction between speech and writing as one finds it in, among others, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's educational, moral and political philosophy and in Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistics.[32] Speech does not enjoy the primacy often given to it, but Derrida does not simply want to reverse the hierarchy between speech and writing and elevate writing to a position of primacy or origin. Rather, his point is that differance introduces something undecidable into signification, and that this is a general trait of all signification, whether it takes the form of speech or writing. For instance, the meaning of the signifier "deconstruction" cannot be fully pinned down because it is constituted through relations with other signifiers, and this system of signifiers is marked by undecidability. Since there is at least one signifier – namely differance – that is undecidable, and since meaning is constituted through relations of difference, this undecidability about differance contaminates the system of differences – that is, the system of signification – as a whole.

The result is to overturn and displace two conceptual distinctions, which typically also function as normative hierarchies: that between identity and difference, and that between speech and writing. We might think of difference as secondary to identity, but Derrida shows that not only is identity constituted

[31] Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982), 1–27; Derrida, *Positions*, 8–10, 39–40.
[32] Derrida, *Positions*, 23–29.

through difference, but – because of the undecidability or "play" of differences – no identity is ever self-identical or pure. When Derrida refers to "writing" in general, he is no longer referring to writing as opposed to, and secondary to, speech. He uses "writing" in general to account for the fact that all signification and, therefore, communication – speech *and* writing – is marked by differance: if we can only "hear" the difference between difference and differance by referring to writing, then writing cannot be secondary to speech as a more or less correct representation of speech.

Iterability and the Event

So far, I have attempted a more or less systematic account of what deconstruction is and is not – that is, of deconstruction in general. I now want to return to the tension I identified at the beginning of this chapter. This is the tension between the general and the particular, for instance between deconstruction in general and particular, singular deconstructive readings, and between general conclusions and particular, singular readings. Derrida's notion of iterability is a good way to approach the back and forth between the general and the particular. In the next section, I use Derrida's notion of iterability to address some methodological issues surrounding deconstruction, including the relationship between deconstruction as a method and its particular uses. In this section, I use Derrida's analysis of the event of 9-11 to show how the notion of iterability can be put to use in the analysis of political phenomena.

This is not the place for a full explanation of Derrida's notion of iterability, which he develops in the context of a discussion of the distinction between performative and constative speech acts.[33] I go into more depth with iterability in the context of Seyla Benhabib's proposal to think of rights in terms of iterability in Chapter 2.

Briefly, Derrida argues that there can be no pure or absolute origin because every act of institution – whether an act of naming or the founding of a nation – draws upon a context of norms and must be repeatable in other contexts. Take, for instance, the act of declaring a nation to be independent.[34]. At first sight, this

[33] Derrida, *Limited Inc*.
[34] Jacques Derrida, "Declarations of Independence," *New Political Science* 7, no. 1 (1986): 7–15.

would appear to be a pure performative act that brings into being what it declares: the independent nation. Yet, the declaration of independence must be recognizable as a declaration of independence, and so those doing the declaration must be authorized to do so. For this purpose, they might refer to natural rights or existing legal norms. In other words, it must be possible to recognize the performative act of declaration in other contexts (as a declaration of independence, as a declaration by *this* nation, as legitimate, etc.). As such, the performative act refers to norms or facts in a constative fashion, and the norms or facts are taken to pre-exist the performative act. The performative gets its force as a performative in part from this constative reference to a state of affairs as well as from the references to the founding performative in other contexts as the act that created the new nation. Thus there is no pure performative or origin because they rely for their condition of possibility on the constative and on repetition.

However, there can be no pure constative or repetition either; every speech act contains something original. Repetition is never pure, but always involves alteration. This is so because to repeat something is to place it in a new context, and meaning is contextual and constituted through relations of difference. To repeat something is to make a difference, to alter it. At the same time, for something to have a meaning that can be communicated from one context to another, it must be repeatable. Repetition is internal to everything (to every thing, every "it"-ness, every "is"-ness, or essence) and, so, to every concept and category, for instance the concept of "deconstruction" or the category of "event." Yet, this necessary repetition introduces alteration and difference at the heart of the thing, concept, or category. To summarize, it is not just that it so happens that there is always both repetition and alteration: there can be no repetition without alteration, and *vice versa*.

Iterability refers to the mutual implication of repetition and alteration, and it is constitutive of the event.[35] This comes out clearly in Derrida's comments on the event of 9-11.[36] He makes those comments during an interview with Giovanna

[35] Jacques Derrida, "A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event," *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. 2 (2007): 452.
[36] Giovanna Borradori and Jacques Derrida, "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides," in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, ed. Giovanna Borradori (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 85–94.

Borradori, who describes her experience of 9-11 in New York City in the following way: "I lived 9/11 first hand: I was separated from my children […] From my perspective, the unthinkable broke out of a glorious late summer morning, which inexplicably turned into something close to apocalypse."[37] This is what Derrida then deconstructs: the references to "the unthinkable," "a glorious late summer morning," "inexplicably," and "something close to apocalypse," all of which suggest an absolute break, where there is no continuity between before and after and between the event and what came before. Borradori takes on board what was, and still is, a commonplace conception of 9-11: first harmony and innocence and then catastrophe and terror, the event of 9-11 being the threshold between a before and an after. There are three problems with this characterization of 9-11. It is, first, a wrong diagnosis since 9-11 was nothing close to the end of the world or of American society. Second, it relies on a dichotomy of before and after, peace and war, which wrongly suggests that there was no terror in the United States before 9-11. Third, it suggests that 9-11 was an absolute and singular event, and Derrida wants to challenge the kind of policies pursued by the Bush administration in the name of this supposedly absolute event. Thus, he wants to challenge the way we think and talk about the event of 9-11 in order to open up new possibilities for political action – in this case, the possibility of a different Left response to 9-11.

This takes us to the way in which we can speak of an event. Borradori starts her interview with Derrida by referring to 9-11 as a "*major event*," which suggests a discontinuity between the time before and the time after 9-11.[38] Derrida questions this discontinuity and the event-ness of the event of 9-11. Here it is noteworthy that Derrida starts by talking about how to talk about 9-11. The reason is that the way we talk about things – the concepts and names we use – cannot be dissociated from "the thing itself" or from relations of power, and so we should not uncritically accept received ways of talking about 9-11. Thus, three pages into the interview, Derrida says that "for the moment we are

[37] Giovanna Borradori and Jürgen Habermas, "Fundamentalism and Terror: A Dialogue with Jürgen Habermas," in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, ed. Giovanna Borradori (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), ix.
[38] Borradori and Derrida, "Autoimmunity," 85.

simply preparing ourselves to say something about it [i.e., 9-11]."[39] Indeed, we are never completely ready to approach the event in an unmediated fashion or with the correct vocabulary, and the deconstruction of the event of 9-11 also creates the language with which to speak about the event. Deconstruction is always world disclosure, even when it aims at problem solving. This can feel frustrating: why doesn't he just get on with it!? The answer is that world disclosure and problem solving mutually imply one another. World disclosure works as problem solving by letting us experience things differently. Problem solving requires that we give an account of the problem at hand, and any such account will be a re-articulation of the context and the problem; it will be both the constative representation of a state of affairs (a problem) and the performative constitution of the problem as a (particular) problem.

"9-11" is the name of the event in this case, and iterability can help us understand the ways in which the event-ness of the event is both created and undercut. "9-11" is first of all a particular date, and this is a way to mark the singularity of the event because there is only one 11 September 2001. If it were to be repeated, it would be something else, a different date. Yet, the dating of the event also makes it possible to draw parallels to previous events, for instance 11 September 1973 in Chile, and "9-11" has become a reference point for subsequent terrorist attacks in Madrid (11-M), London (7/7) and Mumbai (26/11) that were signified in analogous ways by their dates.

The singular cannot be expressed in language, because that would mean that we had a category (after the fact) that would assimilate the event to similar events, or that we were prepared for it in advance and already knew what to call the event and to call it an event. If it is to be an event, then the event must be singular and unprecedented, and we must be unprepared for it so that it takes us by surprise, as if nothing like it had happened before, nothing it could be compared to, and no category of which it could be an instance. What is proper to the event – namely its singularity – cannot be appropriated. Derrida says:

> The undergoing of the event … is, it seems to me, a certain *unappropriability* of what comes or happens. The event is what comes

[39] Borradori and Derrida, 87.

> and, in coming, comes to surprise me, to surprise and to suspend comprehension: the event is first of all *that which* I do not first of all comprehend.[40]

The very possibility of speaking of the event as event presupposes a category of "event" which is not singular and which does not belong to any particular event; only then can we grasp (com-prehend) and appropriate the event. Were this not the case, we could not signify and communicate about events. That is the aporia: what is proper to the event – its event-ness and singularity – means that it is unappropriable, and this is why the event is always to-come ("what comes and happens"): it cannot have any presence except as the experience of the aporia.

Derrida continues:

> That is the limit, at once internal and external, on which I would like to insist here: although the experience of an event, the mode according to which it affects us, calls for a movement of appropriation (comprehension, recognition, identification, description, determination, interpretation [of it as an *event*] on the basis of a horizon of anticipation, knowledge, naming, and so on), although this movement of appropriation is irreducible and ineluctable, there is no event worthy of its name except insofar as this appropriation *falters* at some border or frontier.[41]

In order to use the term or concept of "event" for 9-11, it becomes an instance of "event-ness." What we have here is an aporia: the condition of possibility of declaring the singularity of the event, the event-ness of the event, is to take away from this singularity and event-ness. It is only recognizable as an event insofar as it can be subsumed under the category of "event." The condition of there being events is their impurity, which is to say that the condition of possibility of an event is simultaneously its limit – hence the aporia.[42]

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[40] Borradori and Derrida, 90.
[41] Borradori and Derrida, 90.
[42] Derrida, "A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event," 451.

Notice that “the limit” – or aporia – that Derrida talks about here is not some misfit between language and the world out there, as it were, but an internal limit to the very concept of event. Notice also that this does not mean that there are no events, or that we cannot theorize about events. As Derrida notes: “This doesn’t mean that we have to give up knowing or philosophizing: philosophical knowledge accepts this aporia as something promising and not simply negative or paralyzing.”[43] The promise of the aporia is the possibility of resignifying an event, thereby making possible different political moves.

This deconstruction of the event of 9-11 has implications for how we respond to 9-11. According to Derrida, the event-ness of 9-11 was not something natural about 9-11 as such, but was produced through its repetition in words and especially in images.[44] Repetition neutralizes and relativizes, however. For instance, the repetition of the images of 9-11 both reminds us of the event-ness of the event and gives us a certain distance from the event, which may easily turn into trivialization. Politically, the event-ness of the event of 9-11 has been used to signify a break and to justify a break in policies. Moreover, a subject may appropriate the event as *their* event, as the originator (*we* Al-Qaeda achieved this) or as the only subject capable of responding properly to the event (George W. Bush and Rudy Giuliani, e.g.). Political agents may repeat the event for their own ends, but this also carries a risk for them, because the repetition neutralizes the effects of the event and because one cannot control the way the repetitions are taken up by others.[45] With repetition there is always the possibility – or risk – of alteration because the repetition is open to rearticulation. Thus, even if the Bush administration was very successful in signifying 9-11 in a certain way and in doing so through constant reminders of 9-11, there remains the possibility of resignifying what 9-11 means, for instance as the failure of the Bush administration to protect the US. This would be the political import of iterability, which I return to in Chapter 2 in the context of rights: a politics of resignification that works within existing structures but is also able to resignify and change those structures.

[43] Derrida, 457.
[44] Borradori and Derrida, “Autoimmunity,” 86–87.
[45] Borradori and Derrida, 87.

Iterability and Deconstruction

If we want to use deconstruction and Derrida's work, we must know what deconstruction is, and what Derrida means. Yet, the notion of iterability challenges this in three ways.

First of all, we cannot refer to an essence of deconstruction. We can refer to a "minimal remainder" of any concept, including deconstruction, and this makes it possible to recognize the concept across different contexts and uses.[46] This minimal remainder is not some hard, extra-contextual; it is an effect of iterability. If it must be possible to repeat deconstruction across different contexts, and if the meaning of deconstruction changes with these repetitions, then no essence of deconstruction can be identified independently of, and transcending, these repetition-alterations. This is important because it means that what deconstruction "is" is constituted through its particular uses. Deconstruction does not simply precede its particular uses. What deconstruction "is" is (re)articulated through the particular uses of it, a point reminiscent of Wittgenstein's point that the meaning of a rule is constituted through its particular uses.[47] This is not to say that any particular use of deconstruction singlehandedly constitutes what deconstruction is, because any particular use must claim to be what others have called, and will call, deconstruction. To invent deconstruction anew and from scratch each time with no reference to previous uses of deconstruction, would be like a pure performative or like a private language in Wittgenstein's sense.[48] Deconstruction cannot be reduced to a single use of it, yet it does not exist outside its particular uses, and so we cannot refer to an essence of deconstruction that can simply be applied in different contexts.

Another way to decide what deconstruction is, and what Derrida means, is to refer to Derrida's intentions as the origin or source of deconstruction. Identifying Derrida's intentions may help us understand what deconstruction is (as if it were Derrida's property), and what Derrida means, and so we might read Derrida's own comments on his intentions, for instance in interviews. That is no doubt a useful exercise. However, looking for Derrida's intentions cannot

[46] Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 53.
[47] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*.
[48] Wittgenstein, para. 269.

guarantee that we understand deconstruction and Derrida's texts; whatever my references to "as Derrida writes…," there is an element of rearticulation to it. This does not mean that intentions do not exist: "the category of intention will not disappear: it will have its place, but from that place it will no longer be able to govern the entire scene and system of utterance."[49] We may be able to identify intentions, but no intentions, and no consciousness, can arrest the production of meaning through iterability. Whatever the intentions with a text or a signifier, iterability implies that they can always be taken up, repeated, and, thereby, altered in different contexts; and the uptake cannot be controlled from any particular place, including that of an author's intentions.

Finally, can the meaning of Derrida's texts be determined with reference to the context of their enunciation? One must certainly take the context into consideration when reading a text. This much follows from the deconstructive notion of meaning as constituted through relations of difference, which is to say, through context. There is nothing outside context. However, iterability implies that a signifier must be repeatable across different contexts, and so no single context can determine its meaning. In addition, no particular context can be determined, because, in order to do so, one must determine the totality of all contexts, which is in turn impossible. So again no particular context can determine the meaning of a signifier.

The upshot of the argument from iterability is that we cannot determine the meaning of deconstruction with reference to an essence, to Derrida's or anyone else's intentions, or to any particular context: "each deconstructive 'event' remains singular."[50] Deconstruction is (re)articulated through its particular uses in particular contexts. There is no deconstruction independent of its particular use(s), yet it cannot be reduced to any particular instance. "There is no one, single deconstruction" – there are only deconstruction*s* in the plural.[51] On the one hand, deconstruction can*not* be applied because it is not given as a method prior to its applications; on the other hand, deconstruction can *only* be applied because it only exists through its particular applications, and does not

[49] Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 18.
[50] Derrida, "Letter to a Japanese Friend," 4.
[51] Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 141.

exist independently of these.[52] Deconstruction *as* method incorporates the deconstruction *of* method, and the task is to continue doing so while also putting deconstruction to use and, in this way, develop deconstruction as a method for political analysis. As Derrida writes: "Deconstruction does not exist somewhere, pure, proper, self-identical, outside of its inscriptions in conflictual and differentiated contexts; it 'is' only what it does and what is done with it."[53]

Each reading of Derrida is a translation in the same way that each use of deconstruction is a rearticulation, even if both translation and rearticulation must simultaneously refer to some "original" preceding it. We can think of iterability in terms of translation. Translations are transformative, translating from one idiom to another, but they must also make reference to an "original," that is, they must simultaneously make a claim to be a correct reflection of an original. Translations both have a constative and a performative aspect, both repeat and alter. However, the transformative and performative character of translation – and of communication – does not mean that we should not read the original, and often Derrida's translators keep some terms in French in the translated text. This reflects the idiomatic character of Derrida's French and adds a layer of understanding, for instance of Derrida's puns in French.

We can now make sense of the Derrida quote at the beginning of the chapter. If we ask "What is deconstruction?," then the answer is "nothing of course!," because there is no essence to deconstruction, and therefore we cannot say what it *is*. Yet, we must try to answer the question because deconstruction must have some specificity in order to be a label we can meaningfully apply to a reading or an approach. Hence, if the question is "What is deconstruction not?," then the answer is "everything of course!" Deconstruction cannot be just everything if we are to communicate meaningfully about it. To be a meaningful label, particular uses – events – of deconstruction must make a claim to be instances of something common to each one of them, namely deconstruction, something that can be distinguished from other approaches.

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[52] Jacques Derrida, "As If I Were Dead: An Interview with Jacques Derrida," in *Applying: To Derrida*, ed. John Brannigan, Ruth Robbins, and Julian Wolfreys (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1996), 218.
[53] Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 141.

There is no single correct reading that exhausts the meaning of Derrida's texts or the meaning of deconstruction as a method. New readings and uses are always possible. How, then, can one make judgements about different readings and understandings? Can one reading or understanding be better than another? I would suggest that a good – or perhaps: a better – reading is one that, first, is justified with references to texts, context and intentions, where "just" means precise and fair; second, marks its own incompleteness and provisionality; and, third, is submitted to contestation within the academic community (whose borders should remain porous, and whose hierarchies of knowledge should remain contestable). Ultimately, the problem of the validity of different readings and understandings cannot be resolved, and these suggestions raise new issues in turn, such as how the academic community and its norms are constituted. But the suggestions at least give us a way to start addressing these issues.

Acts of Deconstruction

[Section on Engin Isin, Claudia Aradau and Jef Huysmans and methods as performative acts.]

By Way of Example

Having examined the performative character of method, I now return to the tension between the general and the particular, and I do so by way of the example. We have seen how, for Derrida, each deconstruction is singular, and this is a challenge if we want to say anything about what deconstruction is in general, and if we want to draw general conclusions from singular deconstructions. Derrida addresses these challenges through a consideration of the structure and role of the example in many of his writings. Here I start by identifying the way Derrida's formulates the problematic of the example, and I then suggest a way to account for what Derrida identifies as an aporia of the example. This puts me in a position to consider Irene Harvey's critique of Derrida's use of examples. In the following section, I then turn to consider the use of case studies with the analysis of the example in mind.

I start with an example of how Derrida addresses the use of examples. My starting point is, thus, an example, but it is an example of something more

general, so it is not clear what comes first: the example or what it exemplifies. In any case, my wager is that the example I will use is an instance of how Derrida addresses the use of examples, and that it is a particularly good example, an exemplary example.

The example is from a small book on hospitality, *Of Hospitality*. This was the topic of several seminars and writings by Derrida in the mid-1990s, and he drew on deconstructive readings of a range of texts: philosophical, literary, political, and so on. Here as elsewhere, Derrida writes in the name of authors who have written about what he writes about, in this case hospitality. At some point in this text, Derrida writes: "To approach these antinomies [of hospitality], we had opened [Pierre Klossowski's] *Roberte ce soir* (1953) and begun to read the *inevitable* manuscript called *The Laws of Hospitality*."[54] The manuscript is a text that the narrator in Klossowski's book finds in his uncle's house, and Derrida is moving between this manuscript inside Klossowski's novel and the concept and practice of hospitality.

The antinomies of hospitality Derrida refers to is the aporia of hospitality: that hospitality is at once conditional and unconditional. Derrida approaches this aporia of hospitality through various moves that take him through this "*inevitable*" text within another text. The inevitability is key here. Derrida is effectively claiming that we cannot deconstruct and understand the aporia of hospitality unless by way of this manuscript within Klossowski's novel. He finds in this manuscript an instance of hospitality, which is also exemplary – in fact, so exemplary that it is inevitable. The contingency or necessity of the example is a key issue when we move between the particular and the general by way of examples.

For someone working in political theory, the particular example chosen by Derrida also poses a problem. The example is a particular kind of text: a novel, and I then face the problem of how to move from literature to more "political" texts. Not only that, but if you are unfamiliar with Klossowski, as I am, you have no way to assess Derrida's claim that Klossowski and this text are exemplary. The issues here are two. First, how we move from one particular instance to another, from one example to another. That is only possible by way

[54] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 83.

of what they exemplify, and so the second issue emerges, which is how to establish the exemplarity of the examples. Each example – instance, case – must be one among others *and* must be a particularly good example – it must be exemplary.

Later in the same text, Derrida describes the problematic of the example in the form of "a sort of law:"

> We are also tied down to the strangeness of the approach we are attempting [i.e., deconstruction] by a sort of law. This law could also be described as a crossing of languages or codes. On one side, we pull things toward a general and abstract formalization, sometimes by interrogating "our" history, especially through literary or philosophical texts. On another side, some examples, among so many possible other ones, give us access to the field of urgent contemporary matters … But these urgent matters do not only bring the classical structures into the present. They interest us and we take a look at them at the points where they seem, as though of themselves, to deconstruct these inheritances or the prevailing interpretations of these inheritances.[55]

Derrida is moving between the abstract and general, our history, and particular examples. Here there is no mention of inevitability; on the contrary, the examples are merely "some examples, among so many possible other ones." Here examples are contingent, not necessary.

The example helps us move between the particular and the general. The example is both particular and general. It must be exemplary, and, in order to be exemplary, it must stand out. Only then can the example be a better example than other possible examples; only by standing out can the exemplary example better stand in for other possible examples and for the general that is being exemplified. At the same time, the example is one example among others, one instance among other instances that are the same, thus making possible a substitution among the chain of examples. These tensions between

[55] Derrida, 139. Cf also quote from "Force of Law" at the beginning.

the particular and the general, and between the exemplary status of an example and the example as just one among others – these tensions mark any example.

Examples are also marked by the Derridean infrastructures of supplementarity and iterability. An example is a supplement in the double sense of taking the place of what is exemplified and adding something to it. This is what Derrida refers to as supplementarity.[56] Since there is no hospitality in the abstract, but only contextual instances of hospitality, we can only approach hospitality through examples. The example is necessary and adds something to what is exemplified. If that is the case, it follows that the example does not just reflect the exemplified in a constative fashion, but performatively constitutes it. The example is both before and after the exemplified – that is why I wrote earlier that it is not clear what comes first: my example of Derrida's use of examples or his use of examples. Each example must, therefore, also be different, while at the same time we must be able to identify the examples as examples of the same. However, "the same" – what is exemplified – is constituted as such through the examples, and so we have the infrastructure of iterability: repetition through examples that are different.[57]

With these general remarks about examples in mind, I would now like to address one of the cases where Derrida considers the tensions in examples. This is his writings on Europe, in particular *The Other Heading*, which considers Europe as an example as well as examples of Europe.[58] Derrida is particularly interested in discourses on Europe that present Europe as chosen or as a "heading."[59] The danger of such discourses is that they present the example as necessary rather than contingent. This would close off the possibility of other examples and of Europe exemplifying other things, as if the identity of Europe was given.

Derrida challenges the idea of Europe as an example of rationality, universality, peace, progress and democracy. It is the idea of Europe as a vanguard, as if Europe were at the head of history, showing others the way

[56] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*.
[57] Derrida, *Limited Inc*.
[58] Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).
[59] For an excellent discussion of Derrida, exemplarity and chosenness, see Dana Hollander, *Exemplarity and Chosenness: Rosenzweig and Derrida on the Nation of Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

forward. One can find this view in philosophy, but one also finds it in political discourses. One example would be a certain discourse around the time of the second Iraq war, when Europe was represented as representative of peace, reason and secularism as opposed to a belligerent and backward USA. Derrida does not place himself outside Europe or outside those ideals of rationality, universality, and so on. On the contrary, he is speaking from Europe and from those ideals, but showing their contingency.

One of the examples Derrida considers in order to show the contingency of how we think of Europe is himself. He writes: "I am European, I am no doubt a European intellectual … But I am not, nor do I feel, European *in every part*, that is, European through and through. … I do not want to be and must not be European through and through, European *in every part*."[60] Derrida identifies with Europe, and he is usually identified with Europe, and as such he is an example of Europe. However, other examples of Europe are possible, and Derrida could himself be an example of something else. What would it mean, for instance, to take Habermas instead of Derrida as an example of European philosophy? Or to take Derrida as an example of a specifically French philosophy as distinct from a more general category of European philosophy? The list could go on because Derrida was not only European, but also Algerian, Jewish, atheist, French, Parisian, white, straight, male, and so on; and because Europe is much more than Derrida, for instance European philosophy is not only deconstruction or Continental philosophy, but also Critical Theory and analytic philosophy. If the identity of Europe is contingent, then it matters what examples we take to represent Europe, and whose examples they are. Rather than an ahistorical essence, Europe is a historically articulated identity. This is evident, for instance, in debates about the European Union and whether to mention a Christian heritage in its Constitution.

It is not only that the particular (Derrida) and the general (Europe) are more than one thing; "*what is proper to a culture is to not be identical to itself* […] self-difference, difference from itself."[61] This non-self-identity of what is exemplified (Europe, for example) is a result of the general structures identified above (supplementarity, iterability): what is exemplified is also an effect of the

[60] Derrida, *The Other Heading*, 82.
[61] Derrida, 9–10.

example, and so its identity is contingent and is part of an ongoing and open-ended negotiation.

To summarize, examples and the relationship between examples and what they exemplify are contingent. As a result, their relationship is articulatory. What is more, choosing the best example is not just a matter of choosing an example that merely reflects, in a neutral way, what is exemplified. Rather, using examples also has a normative dimension to it, as when different examples of Europe invoke different identities of Europe.

In order to capture the articulatory dimension of the example, I propose that we turn to Jason Glynos and David Howarth's notion of articulation, which they develop from Laclau and Mouffe's notion of articulation. Glynos and Howarth introduce articulation in the context of how to account for the relationship between the particular and the general. The question is "how to *identify* … or how we *name*" the general within the particular.[62] This is precisely the problematic of the example, and we should understand the use of examples as an articulatory practice. This is why identifying is also naming. Identifying is not just a matter of finding the general in the particular as if it were there just waiting for us to look in the right place. Identifying is a matter of naming; it is a performative practice of articulation. Glynos and Howarth also refer to this as "the gathering of heterogeneous elements under a name."[63] That is a useful way to consider the way in which we use examples. One gathers together examples of Europe, for instance, and the identity of Europe is constituted through this gathering together of examples, which articulates a contingent and singular identity of Europe. It is not only the general, the exemplified – here, Europe, but it could also be deconstruction, or hospitality – that is articulated in the process of gathering examples. The examples themselves are articulated as they are put – gathered! – into new relations with one another and with what they exemplify.

Glynos and Howarth's characterization of articulation in terms of contingency, singularity and modification neatly sums up the deconstructive

[62] Jason Glynos and David Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory* (London: Routledge, 2007), 178.
[63] Glynos and Howarth, 180.

approach I have argued for here.[64] Articulation is contingent because there is no underlying necessity to the relationship between example and what is exemplified; what is articulated is singular, because there are no two articulations of an example that are identical; and articulation modifies both the example and what is exemplified. This also applies to deconstructive readings: they are contingent, because we cannot simply follow a general rule; every deconstructive reading is singular; and every deconstructive reading modifies both the text (because it is an intervention) and deconstruction as a method.

[Irene Harvey's critique of Derrida on the example.]

We cannot not use examples when researching or writing. The structure of the example where something stands in for – that is, represents – something else is violent. We must constantly be on our guard when these relations are naturalized, for example when we take particular images of what it means to be European as given and beyond question. But this violent structure of the example is constitutive. It is not one we can choose. This also applies to method: if method is the road to knowledge about an (empirical or conceptual) object, it always takes place by way of example.

That is why Derrida's deconstruction always proceeds by way of readings of texts, or discourses, of Europe, hospitality, sovereignty, democracy, and so on. If there is no Europe, hospitality, and so on, *as such*, then all we have are discourses of Europe, hospitality, and so on. If there is no universal essence to democracy, for example, then we cannot analyze what democracy is in a strict sense, but must analyze what others say about it, what others call democracy, and what others do in the name of democracy. However – and this is important – "this fundamental reservation should not destroy the possibility and necessity of a serious and systematic study of the *references* to democracy, of the democratic *legacy*."[65] And so, when Derrida writes – in an exemplary fashion, I would argue – about democracy, he shifts back and forth between a general intuition and particular discourses about democracy, unfolds a more general deconstruction of democracy from there, and then once in a while relativizes it

[64] Glynos and Howarth, 179–80.
[65] Derrida, *Rogues*, 32.

by saying that he is only examining a particular discourse. That kind of back and forth between general and particular, by way of examples, seems to me the best we can hope for.

Deconstructive Casing

[Bent Flyvbjerg and Charles Ragin on casing in social science – some of the text to be integrated into section on the example.]

Conclusion

[…]

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