# Anthropology and the Invention of Deconstruction: A Brief Survey

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> The crucial step—which is simultaneously ethical and theoreti-
> cal—is that of remaining true to the implications of our assump-
> tions of culture.

> Roy Wagner, *The Invention of Culture*

Since the mid-1980s, anthropologists have more aggressively articu-
lated their unique place in the burgeoning field of "postmodern" discourses.[1]
In turn, the disciplinary subject of anthropology has increasingly become its
own analytic object *sous rature*, under erasure. Yet despite this auto-
deconstruction, or perhaps because of it, there has been surprisingly little
examination of deconstruction by anthropologists. Equally striking and no
less surprising, at least from an "outsider's" perspective, is the fact that
Jacques Derrida's name and work rarely appears in the anthropological
literature concerned with the deconstruction of culture. It is not, of course,
that Derrida is the signified truth of deconstruction. But as the thinker who
coined the word and applied it most widely, one would expect to find his name
scattered across the literature.[2] However, anthropologists tend to cite each
other as their own sources on deconstruction, an incestuous practice where
inadequate readings find the currency they do not deserve.

It is not my intent to provide a definitive account of deconstruction and
its relationship to anthropology, even assuming that were possible, but simply
to incite debate on a topic that deserves more careful consideration. In what
follows, I will underscore and briefly survey some of the places where
deconstruction is directly or indirectly addressed by anthropologists, with
particular emphasis on the "invention of culture" literature; critically evalu-
ate this work, noting how and where I think it succeeds and/or fails; indicate
where a better appreciation of Derrida's work can help resolve some
hesitations about the deconstruction of culture; and finally, delimit the

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politics of disciplinarity and what I am calling the anthropological invention of deconstruction.

Contrary to popular opinion, the deconstruction of metaphysics (or "logocentrism" and its offshoots) is not just the reversal or displacement of binaries, but is also the double affirmation ("yes, yes") of that oppositional structure (cf. Dufresne 1993). "In order for the 'yes, yes' to take place on both sides," Derrida suggests, "it must occur in two languages at once... [T]here has to be a Babelian situation" (1985:125). Perhaps more than anyone, anthropologists are keenly aware of the "Babelian" task of translation that defines ethnographic work. In *The Invention of Culture*, Roy Wagner thus writes:

> The only way a researcher could possibly go about the job of creating a relation between such entities [i.e., cultures] would be to simultaneously *know* both of them... Thus gradually, in the course of fieldwork, he himself [sic] becomes the link between cultures through his living in both of them... "Culture" in this sense draws an invisible equal sign between the knower (who comes to know himself) and the known (who are a community of knowers). (1981:4)

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For Derrida, affirmation can be understood in this way as the simultaneity of a "relation between such entities;" indeed, affirmation is possible only when sufficient attention is paid to that X which makes and unmakes the 'no-man's-land' between languages, logics, cultures, and so on. Derrida famously calls this X *différance* (among many other things) and argues that it is not a word, concept, name, or method (1973:130; 1989:4). In *Dissemination* he writes: "It is the 'between,' whether it names fusion or separation, that thus carries all the force of the operation" (1981:220). For his part, Wagner not only points out that anthropologists must "become the link between cultures" if they are to span the cultural divide, but that the "strangeness" and "in-between" character of the anthropologist *is* culture, and that culture *is* invention (1981:10,35). For this reason we can see how the "in-between" space of cultural invention resonates with the "between" space of deconstructive *différance*.

Despite these connections that crystallize with Wagner, a rigorous understanding of affirmation and *différance* is precisely what is missing from most accounts of deconstruction in anthropology today. For if it were, scholars would at least hesitate before they pronounced deconstruction a

nihilistic project of debunking. But this is certainly the impression one gets from even the most cursory examination of deconstruction as it appears in the anthropological literature. For example, Jocelyn Linnekin writes:

> Taking in multiple, contingent points of view is sometimes referred to as "decentering" and is a kindred project to "deconstruction," the undermining and "destabilization" of dominant, authoritative categories and assumptions. (1991a:3)

Although this definition is partly true, Derrida argues that it is just not good enough to undermine categories in a first phase of deconstruction: "to remain in this phase," he states, "is still to operate of and from within the deconstructed system" (1981a:42). Rather, a second, affirmative, or "proper" phase (Margolis 1985:150) of deconstruction must be attempted at the same time, a phase that acknowledges the necessity of analytic constructions even as we destabilize them. Consequently, Derrida very clearly states that deconstruction "goes through some radical questioning, but is not questioning in the final analysis" (1987:20).

To the extent that critics (as well as many supporters) still fail to comprehend Derrida's affirmative "double science" (Derrida 1981a:41), deconstruction risks being read as a wholly negative operation. For instance, it is often understood in the same narrow way that Steven Tyler reads "postmodernism"—namely, as part of "the congeries of negativities that end the modern epoch" (1987:3). This is unfortunate, since Tyler's often flamboyant characterization of this "end" is less appropriate for Derrida than, say, for Jean Baudrillard, where indeed "The prison [house of language] has become an amusement park, an autopoetic hall of mirrors" (Tyler 1987:5); or where, following Michael Taussig, the signifier is not simply open, but *empty* (1992:79). It is only by completely ignoring the affirmative phase of deconstruction, by mistaking Derrida for Baudrillard, that Tyler invents a Derrida who proposes what he cryptically calls "a downward, decompositional movement toward the dark, erergic, pathematic, passionate realm of the moonlike aleatory consciousness," (1987:49); or again, a Derrida who advocates "a decompositional, downward movement that... is universalized in the unconscious itself" (1987:56).

Tyler's engagement with Derrida's work is admittedly interesting, but mainly because it is so provocatively idiosyncratic and defiant. At times one gets the impression that he is gleefully playing a game of intellectual one-upmanship with Derrida, perhaps trying to raise him from the abyssal depths

of "the unconscious itself;" a place, incidentally, far from Derrida's way of thinking. As a result, his chapter on Derrida in *The Unspeakable* often gets bogged down in exactly the sort of scholarly pyrotechnics that characterize the worst excesses of deconstructive work—and which sometimes gets dignified with the title of "literary."[3]

His quite peculiar (mis)reading of Derrida is captured by the following passage, where he suggests that:

> Derrida disconnects the sign from the substance... and we are left with a ceaseless shifting of signs without substance or form whose name is language and whose text is the last metaphysical survivor.
>
> One could say that the object of postmodernism is to write the last chapter which would be the final slaying of the metaphysical beast, the deconstruction and overcoming of language, but this we cannot do so long as we write alphabetically. We can only overcome language be means of a writing that is not analytic. (1987:26)

In fact, Derrida treats this "ceaseless shifting of signs" as unavoidable, what he calls the "necessity of an interminable analysis" (1981a:42). Now, this necessity refers to the first, negative, or "shallow" phase of deconstruction that we have already encountered: the ceaseless overturning of binaries. While Tyler correctly recognizes this first phase, he fails to "develop," as Gasché puts it, "a sense of what deconstruction is to achieve" (1987:3; 1986). Consequently, it becomes easy to see why Tyler thinks of Derrida's deconstruction as a purely negative, "downward" operation.

Like Tyler, Derrida also wants to produce a writing that is "not analytic" or metaphysical. Yet in no way does he advocate, as Tyler suggests, the supposed end or "slaying" of that "metaphysical beast." Similarly, Derrida does not struggle "to escape from the net of the alpha-matrix," as Tyler puts it (1987:37; 1992). On the contrary, Derrida argues that deconstruction "is not an exit, it cannot be compared to a passage beyond or a lapsing, even to a 'liquidation'" (1991:97). He instead argues that metaphysical structures (i.e. institutions or conventions) must be affirmed even in their displacement—perhaps especially so—since without them there would be no possibility for deconstruction or the systems of representation, communication, translation, and so on, upon which everything feeds. Derrida does

not, in other words, declare the apocalyptic end of all things in the endless play with texts. As Wagner (1981:51) recognizes:

> [W]ithout the conventional distinctions that orient the actor in his
> [sic] world, that tell him who he is and what he may do and so give
> his acts a conventional masking and a conventional motivation,
> invention would be impossible.

For similar reasons, many conclude that deconstruction is a 'parasitical' practice that always requires a constructed host (cf. Rorty 1982:108; Caputo 1989:24).

Tyler's thinking about deconstruction provides a helpful foil against which I have situated Derrida's work. But, leaving aside Tyler's criticism that Derrida "misconstrues" and "errs" at every other turn, there remains the arguably more serious charge that Derrida the textualist "evades responsibility in the manner of a bureaucrat" (Tyler, 1987:46). For while Tyler takes this charge in yet another idiosyncratic direction—one in which Derrida becomes an "arch-conservative" and "crypto-positivist"—his particular view of Derrida as irresponsible and apolitical has great currency in anthropology. This view stems, no doubt, from criticisms already popularized by such writers as Michel Foucault, Edward Said, and Terry Eagleton. As well, it may be the result of deconstruction's close affiliation with the politically ambivalent and compromised works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and Paul de Man.

Among anthropologists, however, the troubling politics of deconstruction have surfaced more insistently around Allan Hanson's (1989) controversial analysis of Maori culture in "The Making of the Maori." Hanson demonstrates that the ancient tales told by the Maori about their origins were influenced by contact with Europeans long ago; that, in effect, the history of the Maori was "always already" contaminated by an outside influence. Consequently, the presumed authenticity of their history (as unique, singular, internal) was questioned, and in its place was left a colourful quilt-work implicating both Maori and European in the joint venture of cultural construction.

Hanson's article could not have appeared at a more volatile time. The Maori were then attempting to gain certain rights (and property) that had been systematically denied them by the ruling government. Some critics thus argued that Hanson had unethically sided with the government who could now use his arguments to dismiss Maori claims as "merely" invented ones.

"The tender point," Linnekin submits, "appears to be the analytic deconstruction of authenticity when applied to cultural representations asserted by indigenous people," (1991a:446). Elsewhere she adds:

> The criticisms that some anthropologists have levelled at Hanson's article point inevitably to the conclusion that deconstruction is politically correct when it is applied to colonial concepts, narrative, and representations, but is politically incorrect when applied to discourse authored by indigenous people. Whether the theory of culture construction makes for better explanations is thus subordinated to the political issue of whose discourse is being decentered. (Linnekin, 1991b:8)

Hanson's deconstruction, however, does not simply target "discourse authored by indigenous people," but also (and simultaneously) the analytic categories which make and unmake such exclusionary and violent designations as, for example, "indigenous people." In this respect Hanson follows Derrida, but also Linnekin and Richard Handler. Handler (1988:195) argues that "if the processes of displaying, framing, interpreting culture are themselves part of culture, they cannot be bounded and controlled in the same moment in which they bound and control whatever it is that they constitute as a cultural object."

Although Handler disavows any connection with deconstruction,[4] his point is well-taken and relevant here. Deconstruction does not accept as unproblematic any ideal, original, deep structure somehow 'set apart' as an analytic category (i.e., 'culture'), first, because this ideal is itself a product (or representation) of metaphysical speculation, and second, because language itself cannot be thought outside this fabricated structure. There is, therefore, no exit, (dis)solution, moral imperative or injunction that would make this complicity between our language and its world vanish. "For what such simplistic injunctions [to the contrary] overlook," Taussig (1992:52) argues, "is precisely our profound entanglement and indeed self-constituting implication in that screen of interpretation." In other words, since "It is becoming clear that anthropologists too are inventors of culture" (Hanson 1989:890), we must realize that "they are never in a neutral relationship to the society of which they purport to convey a measure of understanding" (Fabian 1990:xv). Handler has summarized this point:

> [A]nthropologists construct the 'cultures' they study in similar fashion [as nationalists], by describing the cultural substance or

social facts that will establish the existence of the cultures they enclose within the cover of their monographs. (1986:4)

Having recognized the complicity inherent to any ethnographic (or communicative) practice, some postmodern anthropologists have begun, as Taussig urges, "the long overdue task of refunctioning Anthropology as a First World pursuit" (1992:51). Yet Taussig, may not appreciate the extent to which an anthropology turned on its head still "operates from within the deconstructed system." It is not sufficient to "commence the long overdue discovering of the New World in place of its invention" (1992:52). Rather it is the status of authenticity itself that is under erasure and not just its contested designation(s). As Kenneth Little rightly suggests, a "parodic anthropology" cannot advocate a "simple reversal" of opposition, but must perform "an inversion of this dyad that dissolves an 'original' binary identity" (1991a:87).

In a commonly misunderstood passage, Derrida rejects the possibility of moving outside metaphysics, claiming instead that "there is nothing outside the text" (1976:158).[5] His point is not quite as non-sensical as it has often been made to appear. Actually, Wagner makes a similar point when he argues that "Our symbols do not relate to an external 'reality' at all; at most they refer to other symbolizations, which we perceive as reality" (1981:42).[6] In Hanson's terms, both Derrida and Wagner are arguing that "cultural inventions acquire authenticity in the eyes of members of society because the invention of culture is no extraordinary occurrence but an activity of the same sort as the normal, everyday process of social life" (1989:899). In other words, there is *nothing* outside that everyday process which might guarantee the truth of authenticity. As a result, since *everything* in-the-world is constructed or invented, and therefore inherently textual or re-presented, Linnekin is right when she insists that "authenticity in this light is a red herring" (1991a:5). As Little thus argues, we have to *analyze* our role in the reproduction of "the romantic rhetoric we share with the subjects of our analysis... [W]e need a deconstructive analysis of the everyday world that questions our/their commonsense categories as we/they describe them" (1991b:251).

If, then, deconstruction is "global" (Linnekin, 1991a:9), it is only because there is nothing outside the text, "globe," or context (Wagner 1981:37) that could categorically resist this deconstructive force. This is because the imagined "real" cultural differences between us and them, Self and Other, analyst and analyzed—although politically powerful (Taussig

1992:113)—are "*always in the position of the signifier*" (Derrida 1976:73, his emphasis). For the death of God first announced (or recognized) by Nietzsche also implicated the death of universal truth, of a singular reality structured around an ultimate signified (or master narrative). Consequently, and as Taussig suggests, this "delineates that reality as masked and inherently deceptive, real and unreal at one and the same time—in short a thoroughly nervous Nervous system" (1992:113). It delineates, that is, something like Little's "funny edge of things," (1991a:87) or Derrida's "double chiasmatic invagination of edges," (1992:238) both of which necessitate the deconstructive "double science" of Taussig's "ordered disorder, the exception *and* the rule" (1992:2). For this edge marks the boundary of a differance that *exceeds* Law, Order, and System—even as it *concedes* its complicit power (Taussig 1992:115). Taussig puts it this way:

> [T]he crucial point is that this is not so much a system as a Nervous System. As such it resists structuralist machinery... if only because the system is composed of and requires copies that are not copies. There is a fateful power for deceit and confusion at the heart of mimesis, and yet mimesis lies at the heart of the world. (1992:174)

In passing, it is worth noting that Taussig's "Nervous System"—a Benjaminian "chronic state of emergency" that evokes a "positionless position" (1992:13)— is not unlike Derrida's "double science" with its equally nervous and contaminating "Law of the law" (1992:221-52). And both, to which we could add Little's "double movement" (1991a:77), are not entirely unconnected to Johannes Fabian's performative ethnography in *Power and Performance*— at least to the limited extent that none of these operations can "be pinned down as a position for or against the powers that be" (Fabian 1990:263).

In each case, the "funny" edge of deconstructive *différance* radically confounds the logical law of non-contradiction, a law which conditions the separation between the West and its invented Rest. Consequently, the "producers of invention are often outsiders (including anthropologists) and insiders" (Hanson 1989:899; cf. Clifford 1986b:19). In fact, as Timothy Mitchell demonstrates, it is often impossible to tell the difference between inside and outside:

> Where everything occurs as a trace of what precedes and follows it, nothing is determined as the original. Nothing stands apart from

> what resembles or differs, as the simple, self-identical original, the
> way a real world is thought to stand outside the exhibition. There
> is no hierarchical order of the imitator and the imitated... Every-
> thing both imitates and is imitated. (1988:61; cf. Clifford
> 1986a:118)

Given this Derridean insight, we can no longer claim that this world—the so-
called "First"—is really first or even second, any more than we can privilege,
as Linnekin finally does, the "ontological status" of some chronologically
prior world (1991a:9-10). More precisely, we can and sometimes do privilege
such status, but only by re-investing our faith in some metaphysical commu-
nity (as in Rorty) that is originary, natural, and above all *practical.* In its most
extreme expression, this can even delude us into thinking—as it does Dorinne
Kondo (1990:302-4)—that deconstruction can help us regain the "nodal
points" of our lost humanistic past. Yet the return to onto(theo)logy never
entails a deconstructive stance, but always a pre-judicial or even *ethnocentric*
one.[7]

It is easy to fall back into metaphysical language at certain critical
junctures. For example, both Taussig and Mitchell maintain the myth not of
the privileged West, but of the rest as a natural, even unconscious, site of
montaged distractedness (Taussig 1992:44) and proto-deconstructive sensi-
bility (Mitchell 1988:146-54). Here truth is merely moved offshore, like illicit
income, at a safe and seductive distance in the realm of the Other. Kondo,
Little, and Fabian falter in similar ways: Kondo by privileging the Japanese
language over English as that which more closely approximates the truth of
multiple, shifting, crafted subjectivity (1990:26-33); Little by privileging the
process and "pragmatics of a dialogue" over and above meaning and theory
(1991b:90); and Fabian by privileging the hard "reality" of a "political
praxis" (1990:18).[8]

Interestingly, Fabian does not follow through with the more radical
implications of his move from "informative to performative" ethnography
(1990:18), in part because he implicitly rejects both Mitchell's "world-as-
exhibition" and Derrida's "nothing outside the text" (and its corresponding
expression in Wagner's work). Indeed, Fabian contradicts himself. He
attempts, for instance, to reject the idea that everything is performance
(1990:13) while still claiming that: "There was no stage that would have
signalled that the action takes place in a world apart from 'real life,' no curtain
enforcing that separation, not even a clear distinction between actors and

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audience" (1990:258). Similarly, he rejects the idea that there is a "preexisting text" (1990:266) to the performance even while admitting that there is an "omnipresent intelligence network in which every citizen of the country is caught" (1990:288, 264). Yet, in Derrida's language, it is this very "network" which operates as an "origin which is non-originary" (1981:221), a *textual network* that conditions the power and performance. So, performativity is not at all reducible to the presence of voice, praxis, or metaphysical "coevalness" that we find in Fabian and others.

The crux of the problem is not just that deconstruction can appear politically incorrect and must, therefore, be rejected or limited somehow, but that the realm of the 'political' has not yet been sufficiently deconstructed. Despite the sort of theoretical sophistication that characterizes much recent anthropology, 'politics' remains a taboo subject, if not an essentialist category. The importance of this point cannot be underestimated, since it lies at the heart of the current misreading of deconstruction in anthropology and beyond. In a convincing essay on deconstruction and politics, Bill Readings demonstrates that "the force of deconstruction is the extent to which it forces a rethinking of the terms of the political" (1989:225). "This is why," Geoffrey Bennington suggests, "it has been possible to believe that deconstruction was incapable of thinking the political and the social, and that it was far *too* political to be an honest philosophy" (1993:238). Far from suggesting the apolitical naivety or political nastiness of deconstruction, we begin to encounter here the broad shape of a deconstructive responsibility—one that Tyler and many others miss or regard as a late appendage of Derrida's work (Rabinow 1986:242). In an interview with Jean-Luc Nancy, Derrida states that:

> This deconstruction (we should once again remind those who do not want to read) is neither negative nor nihilistic; it is not even a pious nihilism, as I have heard said. A concept (that is to say also an experience) of responsibility comes at this price. We have not finished paying for it. I am talking about a responsibility that is not deaf to the injunction to thought. As you said one day, there is a duty in deconstruction. There has to be, if there is such a thing as duty. ...I believe there is no responsibility, no ethico-political decision, that must not pass through the proofs of the incalculable or the undecidable [i.e., *différance*]. Otherwise everything would

be reducible to a calculation, program, causality, and, at best, "hypothetical imperative." (1991:107-8)

Or again, in what is perhaps the clearest response to his critics, Derrida states: "as I have often had to insist, [deconstruction] is not a discursive or theoretical affair, but a practico-political one, and it is always produced within the structures (somewhat quickly and summarily) said to be institutional" (1987a:508).

Such responsibility is not reducible to a singular project, position, perspective, or politics,[9] but always to an affirmation of the effects of *différance* that live on through multiplication (as repetition, mimesis, iteration) beyond the control of institutionalized reason. As Taussig puts it:

What we do with that radical uncertainty is the measure not only of our ability to resist the appeal for closure, but also of our ability to prise open history's closure with the lever of its utterly terrible incompleteness. (1992:161)

Moreover, this ability (or *response*-ability) is not really in keeping with the sort of belated (though half-hearted) apology for the unforeseen effect of deconstruction that we later find with Hanson (1991:450). In this context we need to recall, as Fabian remarks, that "*anything* may become a pretext [for repression]. Oppressive powers have ways to make any show fit to wear," (1990:xv). By affirming the unavoidable rupture of reason in the confusion of exception and rule, subject and object, anthropology and Other, a deconstructive "responsibility" never demands the establishment of any particular *politics of deconstruction*—which, in any case, would at that point cease to be deconstructive—but only the displacement and affirmation of what *passes as* Politics, Law, Order, Structure, and so on. And this Hanson did very well, if responsibly.

What many anthropologists often try to limit, avoid, or reject in their partial use of, or reference to, deconstruction is precisely their responsibility to that which is impossible to the system of institutionalized reason. In other words, some cannot issue the affirmative "yes, yes" to that very nervous conjunction of Self and its repressed Others. And thus they do not, in turn, seriously problematize the closed discipline that is 'Anthropology.' On the contrary, a very narrow conception of what passes for anthropology is typically spared, exempt from its own timely deconstruction and erasure. Indeed, it is the self-preservative *politics of anthropology* which demand the

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invention of a tamed, disciplined, and journalistic conception of deconstruction; a politics or pre-judice that works in advance to disarm the kind of careful self-analysis that upsets traditional boundaries and convictions.

All of this is made perfectly clear in the aftermath of Hanson's Maori article, especially where Hanson reminds us that the *systematic misunderstanding* of his deconstructive article was not really propelled by the popular press, as some suggest, but by moonlighting academics in their journalistic mode as critical reviewers (1991:449-50). It was not, then, "just a matter of arcane discourse escaping the confines of the academy, where it [was] misunderstood by the general public" (1991:449). Hanson's article (which appeared in a scholarly journal) was rather misconstrued by anthropologists who used the occasion to further their own political agenda against the deconstruction of culture literature. And thus we have to ask: Who is to 'blame' for the subsequent fiasco, and what were the issues at stake in its sensational representation in newspapers? What these critics fail to appreciate is the extent to which Hanson's deconstruction exposed a rich process of cultural construction that implicates *both* sides of the debate and, in effect, *all claims* to a privileged position based on primal authenticity. And even though neither side can assume the position of Truth, it does not follow from Hanson's article that the Maori do not deserve concessions from the government. If anything, what Hanson implicitly calls for is a dialogue that recognizes the complicit *mutuality* (or, if you prefer, impossibility) of their respective "positions."

If the Maori case demonstrates the unfortunate and sometimes tragic effects of what Handler calls the nationalism of the discipline of anthropology, it also exposes its more comical side as well—as in H. B. Levine's earnest *reductio ad absurdum* that, I think radically missed its intended target. In the wake of the Hanson controversy, Levine states incredulously that "it seems possible to now draw the puzzling conclusion that anthropology is inventing, not only Maori culture, but the backlash itself" (1991:446). Far from exposing the invention of culture literature as absurd, Levine unwittingly captures the absurd truth of his own position as defender of the faith, protector of disciplinarity. For what Levine, the unsuspecting straight-man in this story, fails to recognize is exactly the "puzzling" truth of anthropology *as* a kind of ideology. Of course, not everyone can nor will get the joke; as Nietzsche liked to say, we need ears to hear such things. Perhaps, though, that Levine and some others fail to hear the joke only confirms that they are lost deep within the belly of the metaphysical beast they call 'Anthropology.'

But I am certainly not suggesting that ideology is tied to anthropology alone. For clearly such ideology pervades the entire university structure—and largely for the same reasons. It needs to be stressed, though, that we have not therefore come to the 'end' of anthropology or the university, any more than we have magically reached the 'end' of history—whatever these ends are supposed to mean. As George Marcus puts it, "We're not talking about the breakup of anthropology, but the reconception of its central concepts" (in Wilford 1990:C12). I have argued that this will require, as Derrida puts it, the "double responsibility" (1987:18) of displacing *and* affirming institutional boundaries—a task "that does not," again following Marcus, "just leave everything in ruins."

In this essay I have suggested that Derrida's brand of deconstruction has often been misread as a negative operation without any real appreciation of its "affirmative" phase. Armed with this important point, I turned to Wagner's and Tyler's work against which I compared and contrasted aspects of Derrida's work. I then explored some areas in the invention of culture literature that has directly or indirectly applied deconstructive insights. Although uniquely sophisticated in its approach to invention in (or as) culture, this literature was unable to reconcile what it takes to be the negative politics of its own deconstructive impulse. I proposed, however, that it is not the "politics of deconstruction" that must be addressed by anthropology today, but the essentialist category of politics that makes and unmakes its own boundaries as a discipline. The pre-judicial resistance to deconstruction is read in this light as a political manoeuvre to save the discipline so conceived from erasure. By turning to Hanson's article, I placed the "politics of anthropology" in relief and argued for a deconstructive 'responsibility' that thinks through these deep problems which, alas, will not disappear overnight. Finally, though, my attempt here was not meant as a comprehensive survey of either anthropology or deconstruction, but as a brief survey, if feeble gesture, towards this worthwhile project.

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## NOTES

**2.** Paul Rabinow (1988:355-64) mentions that Michel Foucault and Michel de Certeau are missing from the now canonical work of postmodern anthropology, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, by Marcus and Fischer. As the editor of a "theme issue" in the journal *Cultural Anthropology* (at a time when Marcus presided as the general Editor), Rabinow explicitly dedicated the issue to the memory of the two overlooked French thinkers. In this way, Rabinow has Marcus make indirect though quite public amends for his oversight. Rabinow does not seem to mind, however, that Derrida's name is also registered only in passing in that book, or that de Certeau alone (of these three) is at least included in its bibliography.

**3.** In an unpublished essay delivered at a recent meeting of The American Anthropological Association (AAA), Tyler (1992) discusses the "literariness" of experimental writing, unpacking its political challenge to representation as well as its "urge to clean up and purify society" by controlling representation (11-14). But once again it is hard to orient oneself to Tyler's bizarre and haphazard thinking which must itself, surely, be experimental. Also, part of his critique of Derrida is implicitly repeated here as he claims that we still invest too much in "the book" and its textuality. But here, as in *The Unspeakable*, his utopic vision of an oral/pictorial world is not only familiar (Havelock, Ong, McLuhan, etc.), and unconvincing.

**4.** In a personal communication with the author.

**5.** In the original French, "Il n'y a pas de hors-texte," more literally translated as "there is no outside-the-text."

**6.** Interested readers might tie these threads to the "irrealism" of Nelson Goodman in *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978) and elsewhere.

**7.** Linnekin gets herself into more trouble by introducing efficacy into the equation: "Whether global deconstruction at some point ceases to be a theoretical advance also remains open to debate" (1991:9). The notion of "some point" is arbitrary and so is the idea of "theoretical advance;" thus the "open" debate begins to sound suspiciously closed. Like the object of its analysis, it seems that the subject of anthropology must protect itself from the erasure of deconstruction. Hence the authority of anthropology is called upon to adjudicate the open point of any future advance (or retreat).

**8.** On realism Fabian later writes: "In my view, moving in several directions at once is the only realistic way to deal with the complex context from which *Le pouvoir se mange entier* emerged (even though to invoke realism is certain to rub deconstructivists [sic] the wrong way)" (1990:263). He's right - for here truth is maintained in the reality of a multiple world; thus the task is to find the pieces of truth that make up the whole, inter-disciplinary truth. But the essence of logocentrism is hardly questioned here, only the game plan.

**9.** In their influential essay "The Postmodernist Turn in Anthropology: Cautions From A Feminist Perspective," Frances E. Mascia-Lees, Patricia Sharpe, and Colleen Ballerino Cohen argue that "postmodern theorizing can be understood as socially constructed itself... [and] may work to preserve the privileged position of Western white males" (1989:16). In turn they argue that "feminist theory differs from postmodernism in that it acknowledges

its grounding in politics" (1989:20). Yet it is exactly the dogma of a politics, especially one based on the assumption of a singular feminist perspective and a universal conception of "woman," that deconstruction at least tries to problematize. In other words, it seems to me that the authors here are insensitive to the play of *différance* that characterizes Derrida's work. Failing this "responsibility," they simply reverse accepted positions, remain within the strict economy of oppression, and worst of all, become its ideological advocates. If so, this is surely not a very *thoughtful* solution to some very difficult problems.

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