

The Transient Lover

marginally prolific and probably mediocre musings

Friday, April 27, 2012

Derrida, Difference, and Intelligence(s): Accessible Theory and Its Necessity for Feminism

Jacques Derrida's (1978) work is central to understanding difference as feminists conceptualize it. As feminists, we need to not only to understand, but also to utilize this difference in order to create inclusive spaces and legislation. There is a dialectical relationship (Collins, 1990) between feminism and patriarchy, which Derrida (1978) helps us to understand (see fig. 1). I chose to illustrate this by satire on my personal blog last fall:

The Hazards of Post-Structuralism*

I was going to write about the hazards of post-structuralism tonight. But first, let me just start off by saying that I *love* theorizing. Explicating in detail abstract concepts in all of their conjectural glory grasps my attention like little else. That being said, I hate analyzing. I find the critical examination of pre-established fact or opinion to be quite boring, irksome at best, and seriously annoying at worst. This is probably because I feel that I am a very creative individual, who does not like being told what or how to think about something. Heck, I don't even know where I get half the stuff I come up with sometimes. (Just kidding! Usually I read things in peer reviewed anthologies, reputable blogs, or on [Snopes.com](#), and then formulate opinions and ideas based on what I've read. I know it sounds pretty visionary, but what can I say? When you've been in school as long as I have, you tend to develop this sort of happy talent for synthesizing what you've learned in fabulously magical ways.)

Anyway, I am in full cognizance of the fact that I just set up a structure in which theory and analysis are at opposite ends of a binary system. As Jacques Derrida, god among post-structuralists that he was, so kindly attempted to perform for the rest of us, this structure is flawed in that it is, in fact, a structure. Seeing as how theory and analysis typically tend to be in diametric opposition only in a small subset of the Humanities, I am aware that my deconstruction of them will only further add to any misconceptions that people may have about me being pretentious and having aspirations to academia. It's okay, though, I think I've self-actualized that statement. Almost. (Probably because I don't necessarily disagree with about 75% of it.)

Since my theory/analysis structure aims for fixity but is doomed to fall short anyway because That Is What Binary Systems Tend To Do With Alarming Regularity, I will now deconstruct what I call the Analysis-Theory Dichotomy. I'll illustrate this phenomenon in a linear fashion:



Basically, because analysis is boring and theory is awesome (bearing in mind that this structure was purposefully developed with the assumption that this is a societal norm rather than a personal opinion), and because nothing can be more boring than analysis or more awesome than theory, analysis and theory exist both as a part of this Analysis-Theory Dichotomy and independently of it. Which demonstrates the internal contradictions of this "fixed" structure, and how its fixity is actually an impossible goal. Anyway, I really don't expect anyone to really comprehend or care about my obviously prolific musings today. Which leads me back to my original topic: the hazards of post-structuralism. Post-structuralist deconstruction, though fascinating, can make one out to appear terribly grandiloquent, especially when applied to topics already deemed pretentious such as *theory* and *analysis*. Essentially, it has the potential to make you out to appear as a giant jerk.

And there it is. Hm. Maybe I'm not cut out for deconstruction. I think I really do make a much better satirist than analyst or theorist.

I realize that this blog post is a study in my own pretention. One might say that this blog post was my own “theory performativity” (Butler, 2004, 1990). I refer to this as such because while I did initially set out to write a satire, the ultimate result was a satiric piece drenched in so much theory that the theory completely obfuscates the original satire (Butler, 1999).

A Study in Why We Need Derrida:

Like most spaces, queer spaces are also gendered, classed, and racialized. In such spaces, exclusivity can become acceptable, normalized, and realized, and spaces that have such distinctions become re-inscribed with race-based difference (Tucker, 2009). This occurred in Cape Town, South Africa, a purportedly new, liberal queer space in the post-apartheid society, where such “alleged liberalism” actually helped justify racism (Tucker, 2009).

This is resultant of creating a distinction between the “colored queer men” and the “white queer patriachs,” and the acknowledgment of this difference, actually gave *more* power to the “white queer patriachs.” (Tucker, 2009). The way the distinction between the “white queer patriachs and the “colored queer men” gave more power to the “white queer patriachs” is a sort of fusion between Difference A and Difference B as outlined in “Derrida and Feminism: A Remembrance” (Grosz, 2005 (see fig. 2)). This is because the methodology for achieving the ultimate goal is informed by Difference B, but the theoretical framework for the methodology is informed by Difference A.

I have demonstrated this by substituting the words “white queer patriarch” for “theory” and “colored queer men” for “analysis” from the blog post above (Scrivani, 2011) in the example that follows.

Trigger warning - Substitutions create racism:

I was going to write about the hazards of post-structuralism tonight. But first, let me just start off by saying that I *love* **WHITE QUEER PATRIARCHS**. The fact that they make more money, have a sense of entitlement, and do not face racial discrimination is really cool. That being said, I hate **COLORED QUEER MEN**. I find the fact that they are discriminated against because of their skin tone totally their fault, genetically based, and completely valid. This is probably because I feel that I am a person who is allowed to feel these things, being white myself, and one who does not like being told what or how to think about something. Heck, I don't even know where I get half the stuff I come up with sometimes. (Just kidding! Usually I read things in peer reviewed anthologies, reputable blogs, or on Snopes.com, and then formulate opinions and ideas based on what I've read. I know it sounds pretty visionary, but what can I say? When you've been in school as long as I have, you tend to develop this sort of happy talent for synthesizing what you've learned in fabulously magical ways.)

Anyway, I am in full cognizance of the fact that I just set up a structure in which **WHITE QUEER PATRIARCHS** and **COLORED QUEER MEN** are at opposite ends of a binary system. As Jacques Derrida, god among post-structuralists that he was, so kindly attempted to perform for the rest of us, this structure is flawed in that it is, in fact, a structure. Seeing as how **WHITE QUEER PATRIARCHS** and **COLORED QUEER MEN** typically tend to be in diametric opposition only in a small area of the World, I am aware that my deconstruction of this binary will only further add to any misconceptions that people may have about me as being pretentious and having racist tendencies. Since my **WHITE QUEER PATRIARCH / COLORED QUEER MEN** structure aims for fixity but is doomed to fall short anyway because That Is What Binary Systems Tend To Do With Alarming Regularity, I will now deconstruct what I call the **COLORED QUEER MEN-WHITE QUEER PATRIARCH** Dichotomy. I'll illustrate this phenomenon in a linear fashion:



Basically, because **COLORED QUEER MEN** are boring and **WHITE QUEER PATRIARCHS** are awesome (bearing in mind that this structure was purposefully developed with the assumption that this is a societal norm rather than a personal opinion), and because nothing can be more boring than **COLORED QUEER MEN** or more awesome than **WHITE QUEER PATRIARCHS**, **COLORED QUEER MEN** and **WHITE QUEER PATRIARCHS** exist both as a part of this **COLORED QUEER MAN-WHITE QUEER PATRIARCH** Dichotomy and independently of it. Which demonstrates the internal contradictions of this “fixed” structure, and how its fixity is actually an impossible goal. Anyway, I really don't expect anyone to really comprehend or care about my obviously prolific musings today. Which leads me back to my original topic: the hazards of post-structuralism. Binary deconstruction can make one out to appear terribly asinine, especially when applied to topics that are racist such as **WHITE QUEER PATRIARCHS** and **COLORED QUEER MEN**. Essentially, it has the potential to make you out to appear as a giant jerk.

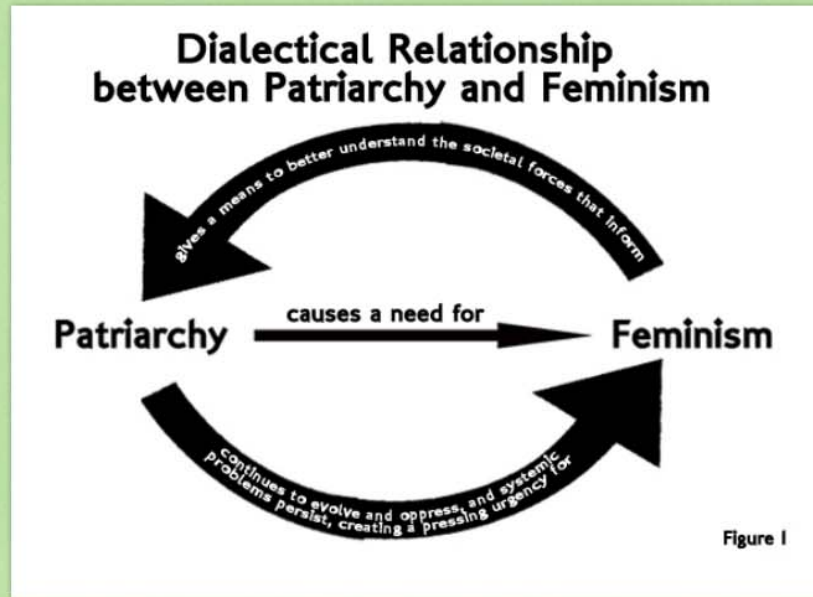
And there it is. Hm. Maybe I am cut out for deconstruction. I think I really do make a much better theorist than racist.

This was merely an exercise to demonstrate my point and drive Derrida's (1978) home.

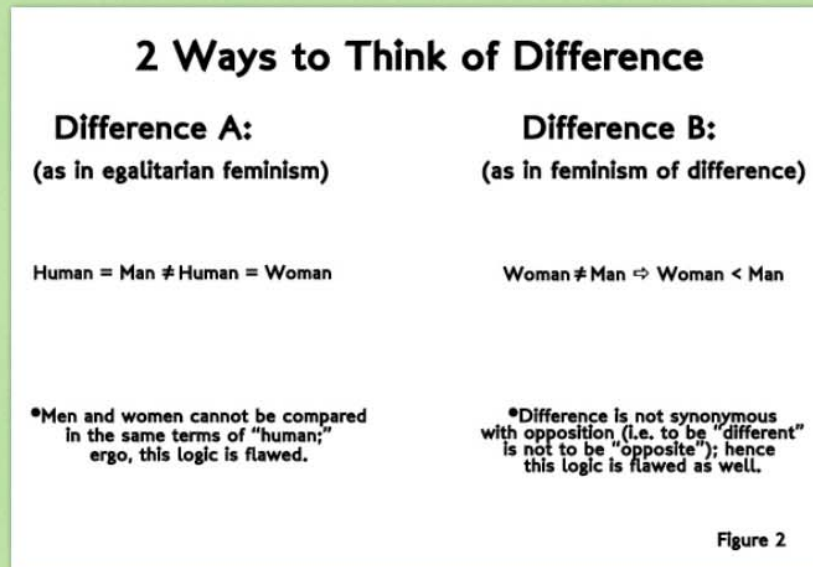
Bearing in mind that the binary structure devised an inherently racist commentary when I substituted “colored queer men” and “white queer patriachs” for “analysis” and “theory” respectively, Derrida's (1978) difference can be used to help us understand how the oppression works within this post-apartheid society, and help us to devise methods to rectify these injustices. This permeates the breadth of language's power in true Foucauldian (1990) fashion.

I understand that not everyone absorbs theory through written word, and that there are different ways to learn. There are different types of intelligence as well (Gardner, 2011.) According to Howard Gardner, there are nine different types of intelligences, and people who possess these different types of intelligence learn in different ways (Gardner, 2011). Those who are not inclined to verbal-linguistic intelligence often criticize theory as inaccessible to the masses, but it does not need to be so. For individuals who may be more visually inclined, I offer two diagrams that I have designed in Photoshop.

The first explains how patriarchy and feminism are interrelated, drawing on the dialectical relationship between oppression and activism outlined in "Toward a Politics of Empowerment" (Collins, 2000):



The second outlines the two ways feminists thought of difference prior to *Writing and Difference* (Derrida, 1978), according to Elizabeth Grosz in "Derrida and Feminism: A Remembrance" (Grosz, 2005):



As a feminist first, theorist second, it is of utmost importance to me that our theoretical concepts are accessible to the greatest amount of people. If not, how can we prevent exclusivity in our already marginalized spaces? We need to make sure that everyone is able to understand and synthesize our ideas, or they will not do any of us any good.

*edited from original blog post: <http://eminisms.blogspot.com/2011/09/hazards-of-post-structuralism.html>

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Posted by Em Scrivani at 3:19 PM