

**DERRIDEAN DECONSTRUCTION AND
FEMINISM:**

Exploring Aporias in Feminist Theory and Practice

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Abstract

This thesis examines the politics of deconstruction within the interdisciplinary field of Women's Studies and the question as to whether deconstruction has a politics, or can enhance the political goals of western feminism. This thesis argues that philosophy, and deconstruction in particular, is extremely useful for re-thinking feminist issues, especially around subjectivity and agency, but is not always seen to be so by some Australian feminists. As a result, Australian feminism, like feminism in other Anglophone countries, founded on the dichotomy of sameness-difference, has run out of theoretical and political steam. This thesis explores deconstruction within feminist debates and practices from the mid-1980s to present. In exploring both the contribution of deconstruction to rethinking difference and agency, and the failure on the part of most Australian women's studies programs to apply the full potential of deconstruction, an argument is put forward for the value of deconstruction as a way of rethinking the question of woman's subordination. While this is not a new area of study, this thesis focuses on the political efficacy of deconstruction, which is not always directly addressed in feminist texts.

The first three chapters focus on the ways deconstruction has been interpreted, often negatively, by Anglo feminists or feminists in the English speaking world. It identifies the central issues taken up by feminist critics of deconstruction; argues that confusion has arisen largely due to interpretative misunderstandings of Derrida's central tenets; and presents an elucidation of the radical potential of deconstruction for a feminist politics, especially in relation to female subjectivity.

The last two chapters turn their attention to the debates over the meaning of deconstruction and the ways deconstruction entered the academy in Australia through Women's Studies courses. They examine the specific discursive and institutional frameworks that aided or impeded the critical reception of new theoretical directions in Australia; argue that deconstruction entered Australian feminist discourse mainly in response to a dissatisfaction with the philosophy of Marxism/socialism; and detail major influences and theoretical works that made possible a more positive reception of deconstructive tenets within Australian feminism.

The thesis concludes with a brief discussion of the crosscurrents between Australian and international feminist philosophy and outlines how deconstruction might continue to advance feminist understandings of subjectivity and enhance feminist practice.

Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

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