

‘Structure and Signs of Play’
Derrida/Deconstruction@50

A commemorative symposium



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This special volume of eSSays has been guest edited by **Pramod K. Nayar**.

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One day, perhaps, this century will be called Derridean...*

Pramod K. Nayar

One day, perhaps, this century will be called Derridean...

Jacques Derrida's terrifying legacy – a legacy is for the future, and the future, as Derrida himself cautioned us, is always an absolute 'monstrosity' (incidentally, the last word of his 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', the paper he delivered at the 1966 Baltimore Conference, a paper widely believed to have launched Deconstruction) hence terrifying – for those in the Social Sciences and Humanities has primarily to do with the development of a critical and conceptual vocabulary that is persistently iconoclastic, destabilizing and self-perpetuating. If we make even a short inventory out of this vocabulary, we come across *differance*, traces, phallogocentrism, play, *destinerrance*, *hostipitality*, *mondialisation*, *hauntology*, supplement, and strange new interpretations of friendship, teletechnology, archive, justice, forgiveness, sovereignty, promise, autoimmunity, among others.

Derrida's and Deconstruction's influence has been felt (gently, but most often as seismic shifts) in anthropology and other social sciences, gender studies, law, architecture, and of course philosophy and literary studies. The effect of inventive and subversive overhauling of stereotypes, discourses and institutions in Deconstruction have helped, one could say with some certainty, in the schools of thought and critical enterprises such as postcolonialism (Edward Said was a young attendee at the Baltimore Conference), New Historicism, cyberculture studies, critical animal studies, Human Rights, among others. The impact of the rigorous, open-ended, layered, destabilizing readings Deconstruction taught us to perform have resulted in politically edged interpretations of texts and discourses across these disciplines, and cannot be summed up in the space of

*Commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Baltimore Conference and Jacques Derrida's 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', the Department of English of the University of Hyderabad organized a one day Symposium, '**Structures and Signs of Play: Derrida/Deconstruction@50**' on 10th November 2016. All the papers but one from the Symposium have been redone for *eSocial Sciences*. Josy Joseph shared the presentation he made in MG University, Kerala, on the same theme, and kindly agreed allowed its publication. As editor of this section for *eSS*, Pramod K Nayar thanks K. Narayana Chandran, P Thirumal, Jibu Matthew, A Raghuramaraju and D Venkat Rao for their presentations at the Symposium, and Josy Joseph, separately, for his paper; Anna Kurian for enabling the Symposium in the first instance; and Padma Prakash of *eSS* for her enthusiastic response to a query regarding publication.

one short essay. Instead, it seizes upon a few elements of this legacy in so far as they are relevant to our present contexts.¹

I

Deconstructive vocabulary's single greatest contribution to critical thinking has been to rediscover the fissures within language, as Derrida set about unpacking the contradictions and violent disavowals that have marked concepts hitherto taken for granted (for instance, Literature, Justice, Enlightenment, Democracy or Human). In arguing a case for arche-violence, supplements, prostheses (of meaning), origins and traces, for instance, Derrida demonstrated how etymology itself might reveal to us the history of the concept, what it concealed in order to naturalize itself. By elaborating the need to unearth the hidden history of the concept, Derrida showed us that knowledge production is violent and as reliant on erasure and obfuscation as revelation and transparency.

In other words, Derrida's careful explication of words (which often drove sane members – there were some – of the Humanities profession demented because of what they saw as his pointless play) and concepts underscored the politics of knowledge production, of the role of institutions and censorship laws, of violence and the masking of violence in legitimizing knowledge. Thus, what Derrida would, in his first major speech in the English-speaking world term 'play', turned out to be a rigorous unravelling of histories of concepts, even of the concept of critique itself. Derrida showed us that concepts are acts of discursive violence, something we in the public university system in India today understand well, when questions of free speech, academic expression, dissent and critique are inextricably bound up with questions of institutional and professional autonomy, of the 'right to deconstruction' as part of the critical enterprise and versions of compulsory nationalism. Discursive violence is embodied, in the sense it enables the inflicting of material and symbolic violence upon persons: hence Deconstruction's insistence on reading textual referents and discourses.

II

Deconstruction's foremost legacy, in at least this reading of Derrida, 'belongs' to/in Literature.

'Deconstruction ... is a coming-to-terms with literature', Derrida proposed ('Deconstruction in America', cited in Attridge 1992: 1). In the interview 'This Strange Institution Called Literature' he would elaborate:

there is no text which is literary in *itself*. Literarity is not a natural essence, an intrinsic property of the text. It is the correlative of an intentional relation to the text, an intentional relation which integrates in itself, as a component or an intentional layer, the more or less implicit consciousness of rules which are conventional or institutional – social, in any case. (Attridge 1992: 44, emphasis in original)

Deconstruction responds to the 'singularity' of literature, of every text, but for an entirely different set of reasons and with an entirely different set of consequences, as Derrida

¹ For detailed studies of Derrida's, and Deconstruction's, legacies see Naas (2003), McQuilan (2007), Fagan (2007) et al.

shows us. Derrida is quick to suggest that a singularity of Literature is possible only through its insertion into a generality (of language, for example, which is repeatable across contexts). “The singularity of a work is what enables it to be repeated over and over in events that are never exactly the same”, writes Jonathan Culler (2005: 871) in a thoughtful essay on Derrida and Literature. This iteration/repetition should happen in the absence of an identifiable speaker, context or hearer.

The task of criticism then is to respond to this singularity, not as imitation or reproduction, but as a unique response (what Derrida calls ‘countersign’), which in turn would produce more such unique responses. Criticism has to be, then, as inventive as the text it explicates. Further, Derrida’s insistence on the repeatability of literature as ‘acts’ (as in staged performance) also suggests that when we read a literary text we not only participate in the event wherein the characters and incidents (lifeworlds) come into being, but also in *the event of the linguistic act* that brings the event into being. Derrida sees this as the performative aspect of literature, a “performativity at least analogous to that of promises, orders, or acts of constitution or legislation which do not only change language or which, in changing language, change more than language” (Attridge 1992b: 55). Such a performative act is inventive in the sense it uses generalities of language (which is the *same* language that has been around for some time), but prepares for the wholly Other to emerge in, say, a novel. That is, literary invention, as Derrida returning to the original sense of ‘inventio’ (which means, both make up and find that which is already there), argues, is an impossible invention: it has been there all along (in language) but also allows the Other to appear. Literature then *repeats* language to discover what has been there all along, and yet *performs* the *singular* event in which the Other can come. In Hillis Miller’s (2001: 70) gloss on this argument, he frames the singularity of Literature thus: ‘I can only let it [the Other] come, though that letting is itself a speech act of a peculiar kind, requiring the greatest genius with words’. This last, respecting the singularity of Literature in our own countersign, or singular reading, is a responsible response because it *invites the Other to appear*. And this is precisely why Literature is so important in Derrida’s legacy. Literature makes this demand on us, to continue with the task of responsible reading and critical discourse *even when the very grounds of discourse are cut away from under us with the Other’s arrival*. Preparing for the arrival of this absolute, irreducible Other of our thought – that is, what is radically dissimilar, foreign or strange to what we have known so far – is the task of Literature and by extension literary criticism. It is for this reason that Geoffrey Galt Harpham (1999) declares that ‘literature as a genre seems especially committed to an exploration of outsiderhood’. It enables us to hold the thought of the Other in our heads. The respect for singularity and generality of literature/language enables us to hold this thought of the singular Other. Derrida’s most significant contribution in terms of literary criticism would then be this: responsible reading that respects the singularity of a text so as to allow the Other, one who is completely different from us, from our present moment, to come. Such a legacy is, of course, a politically relevant one, for, Derrida’s reading tells us that we should always respond to the imminent arrival of the Other, that is: difference. For the purpose of recognizing the discriminatory (and not always discerning, as Derrida

reminded us in an early, controversial essay, 'Racism's Last Word', 1985) social and institutional mechanisms, of the operations of truth regimes and power structures even when they are 'in the name' of the disenfranchised, especially within the university or democratic state, we need Literature. Elsewhere he would explicitly link in a powerful passage, which, strangely for Derrida, sounds prescriptive, the institution of Literature to democracy:

Literature ... inscribed in conventions and institutions which ... secure in principle its *right to say everything*. Literature thus ties its destiny to a certain noncensure, to the space of democratic freedom (freedom of the press, freedom of speech, etc.). No democracy without literature, no literature without democracy ... The possibility of literature, the legitimization that a society gives it, the allaying of suspicion or terror with regard to it, all that goes together – politically – with the unlimited right to ask any question, to suspect all dogmatism, to analyze every presupposition, even those of the ethics or the politics of responsibility. (Derrida 1992a: 'Passions', 23)

Derrida is careful to direct attention to institutional mechanics that establish Literature or Literary Studies as a discipline, but points out that the right to say everything in Literature is possible only when there is a respect for this foundational freedom: which is itself a mark of democracy. He notes – and this is a key component of the legacy – that every presupposition, even of ethics and politics of responsibility (the hallmark of radical, emancipatory movements but also, oddly, of the state itself) can be, indeed, must be, questioned. Democracy, then, like Literature, is a space where nothing can be beyond question, even the question of what kind of democracy we 'inhabit', or seek.

III

Such a project of responsible reading as a response to the Other is Deconstruction. Deconstruction itself as a critical legacy (critical, as in essential for us, today) has a major role in academia even now. If Deconstruction is an unrelenting questioning of orthodoxy, dogma, hegemonic discourses and institutions, then this must take place in the University.

Everything that concerns the question and the history of truth, in its relation to the question of man, of what is proper to man, of human rights, of crimes against humanity, and so forth, all of this must in principle find its space of discussion without condition and without presupposition, its legitimate space of research and reevaluation, *in* the University and, within the University, above all in the Humanities. Not so that it may enclose itself there, but on the contrary so as to find the best access to a new public space transformed by new techniques of communication, information, archivization, and knowledge production. (emphasis in original)

Jacques Derrida in this passage from 'The Future of the Profession or the University without Condition' makes a case for the role of the Humanities and the University itself. The University, in short, must encourage and give place to the 'right to Deconstruction'. The 'right to Deconstruction' itself, as Derrida defined it, is "an unconditional right to ask critical questions not only to the history of the concept of man, but to the history even of the notion of critique, to the form and the authority of the question, to the

interrogative form of thought” (26). This task of deconstruction Derrida situates in the ‘new Humanities’, a task “beginning with the deconstruction of their own history and their own axioms” (26). He, later in this essay, spells it out. It would examine

- (i) ‘Traditional concepts of “what is proper to man”’;
- (ii) The history of democracy and the idea of sovereignty;
- (iii) The history of the profession and the professing professoriat;
- (iv) The history of literature, the history of the concept of literature;
- (v) The history of the distinction between performative and constative acts;
- (vi) The authority of the Humanities in the university. (51-5)

The key feature of the above Derrida list is its set of assumptions and critical agenda. By calling upon the Humanities and the University in general to examine their foundational axioms, he calls upon practitioners (the professoriat) to examine the role the Humanities have played, and continue to play, in exclusionary practices, in ‘fitting in’ with dominant ideologies, in the claims and counter-claims of authority.

This, effectively, is a call to an interrogative self-reflexivity. Derrida is careful to ensure that, while assigning a major role to the Humanities, he alerts us to the incipient dogmatization within the Humanities itself. Derrida cautions us that the Humanities needs to be aware of its own contradictions – such as the fascism of protests/protestors even as they protest against authoritarianism. Derrida’s emphasis in his concluding point on the ‘authority’ of the Humanities is a salutary warning: that the pursuit of heterodoxy cannot itself become a foundational dogma. Truth itself is at once relative and plural because what constitutes truth, whether in law or literature, is made visible when one explores the history of the concept of truth, the institutions that have defined it as such. The Humanities, which often carries the burden of pointing out dodgy essentialisms and hegemonic ideologies (such as, in the current context, nationalism or patriotism), can itself be trapped in its (hegemonizing) emphasis on ‘one critique’, whether that critique is Marxist or Conservative. Thus, when the Humanities pleads for plurality and greater participation in, say, University student elections, it has to be then prepared for Conservative victory at the hustings: it cannot then claim that, even with pluralism, the Conservatives cannot come to power. Such a disavowal in the name of safeguarding plurality would itself be a terrible orthodoxy.

IV

By demonstrating that every element of the binary is constituted by the other, Derrida demonstrated the futility of any emphasis on purity, lineage and singularity. Each is inhabited by its other: human/animal, man/woman, presence/absence, white/dark, modern/primitive, etc. This insistence upon the mutually constitutive state of all elements enables Derrida and his legacy to see contamination, contagion, infection and impurity as the non-deconstructible aspect of all existence, including the existence of thought. This resistance to singularity holds enormous political significance for us today, given the drive towards cultural, racial, national ‘purity’.

The codification of norms of national identity, the reverential hagiographies around particular figures to the exclusion of others reveal, in deconstructive readings,

the 'hauntology' (Derrida's famous neologism about haunting and its ontological significance) and spectropoetics of national identity – and this is a key legacy for us today. 'Between the life and death, nationalism has as its own proper space the experience of haunting. There is no nationalism without some ghost' (Derrida 1992b: 'Onto-Theology'). This legacy should alert us to the process of selection of 'suitable' ghosts which then define a 'pure' national lineage for us.

Deconstruction is marked by a persistent resistance to any idea of untainted lineage (of individuals, families, races or nations) because it demonstrates how the singular sign can only be constructed or understood in its relationality to, its inhabitation by and of, something else. The dominance of any sign or racial-national lineage is not, deconstruction tells us, due to its inherent significance or truth, but to regimes of power that have ascribed truth-values to it, and denied difference or other truth values. Singularity, then, is not a state of discerning truth, it is a state of discriminating truth regimes.

Derrida's work forces us to see academic enterprise, critical theory and interpretative strategies as not only linked to social factors – Marxist criticism does this as well – but as determining the scope and agenda of the very politics of the nation. By linking the right to critique and self-critique to democracy, Derrida proposes that the foundations of democracy lie in rigorous explication, interrogation and inquiry, all conducted with complete freedom and resistant to dogma, orthodoxy and fixity of meaning.

Derrida's numerous writings on response and responsibility, whether in terms of hospitality towards the Other or towards the text, are all, one could argue, directed at the future. The 'work to come' or 'democracy to come' in Derrida is affiliated to the 'promise'. A promise when fulfilled loses its valency and its potentiality as promise. It is a promise only so long as it is never fulfilled, but always *likely* to be fulfilled. But the emphasis in Derrida is that such a democratic promise, precisely because it (can) never arrive, must be worked at, worked towards. Thus, the task, he suggests, is to 'prepare for the democracy to come' (Derrida 1984: *Spectres of Marx*; 1994: *Politics of Friendship*; 2000: *Rogues*). This might entail, as he took pains to point out over these texts, coming to terms with the destructive and transformative potential at the heart of democracy.² There is a larger point to be considered in this connection, in terms of what Derrida claims for the 'work' of democracy and responsibility/response towards it.

When democracy shuts down, closes itself off as a way of (supposedly) ensuring that demos prevails, then it produces and replicates the very thing it hoped to erase. Derrida's work on autoimmunity as a political concept (articulated in *Rogues* and his essay 'Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides', in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, a volume devoted to Habermas and Derrida responding to 9/11) suggests that in order to preserve sovereign democratic states, these repress further differences, and the

² Derrida argues that democracy and sovereignty are mutually antithetical. Without sovereignty, the 'demos' would be usurped by some other power, ensuring that the rule of the demos (which is what democracy is) would never be achieved. In order to ensure the rule by the people, democracies then close themselves off, seeking to contain the very plurality of the demos that enabled the democracy in the first instance. See Beardsworth (1996), Thomson (2005), among others, for a discussion of Derrida and the political.

mechanism (immune system) designed to ward off external threats then turns inwards, fighting the body's own cohesion. Derrida writes:

[W]hat I call the autoimmune consists not only in harming or ruining oneself, indeed in destroying one's own protections, . . . committing suicide or threatening to do so, but, more seriously still, . . . in compromising the self, the *autos*—and thus ipseity. It consists not only in committing suicide but in compromising sui- or self-referentiality, the self or sui- of suicide itself. (2005: 45, emphasis in original)

Derrida's reading of autoimmunity has attracted considerable attention. Michael Naas writes:

autoimmunity is . . . a threat insofar as it compromises the immune system that protects the organism from external aggression, but as in the case of immunodepressants, a chance for an organism to open itself up to and accept something that is not properly its own, to the transplanted organ, the graft, in a word, to the other. Without certain forces of autoimmunity, we would reject organs and others essential to "our" survival—whether we are talking about an individual body, a community, or a nation-state. Hence there can be no community without autoimmunity, no protection of the safe and sound without a perilous opening of borders (2006: 25).

WJT Mitchell (2007) comments:

the nervous system can accelerate its learning process with self-conscious reflection, critique, the preservation of memory and history. Immunity is a form of cellular memory; the body learns by experience how to fight measles, and it doesn't forget. The most dangerous threat to the immune system, then, is amnesia, the forgetting of what it has learned... (284)

The immune system remembers an earlier attack, the contamination and the virus, and then *recalibrates itself for the future*. Thus, the strengthening of the immune system *demand*s the contamination. The sovereignty of the body, to be protected by the immune system, demands that this system be prepared, guarding the borders, precisely by inviting the foreign in. Sovereignty, even in a democracy, demands a welcoming of the Other or the outsider.

Thus, democracy is characterized by this impossible aporia of retaining sovereignty by closing off borders thereby rendering the community inside notionally homogeneous by denying plurality, and yet seeking plurality and multiplicity. When democracy seeks to protect itself, it fortifies itself against *difference*, in other words. Out of this denial, rejection and suppression emerges the threat. That is, it is the immune system of the democracy that in the process of suppressing difference, engenders the threat *from within*. This reading of the 'democracy to come' is a cautionary tale: when democracy, 'in the name of' defending itself turns against its citizens, or 'in the name of' national identity starts isolating groups who are 'different', or 'in the name of' nationalism begins to erase multiplicity of voices, debates, views and ideas, then democracy heads into an aporia. The threat to the democracy is first mounted by the state, 'in the name of' the very demos it has turned against and seeks to homogenize. Any responses to this

state-sponsored shutting down off plurality will then be read as ‘threats’ from within, i.e., an autoimmune threat. Even a call for greater multiplicity or an insistence on plural traditions, interpretive flexibility or open-ended discourses will, in a democracy that is threatened by the demos it ostensibly defends be seen as a threat. Deconstruction’s scrupulous insistence on open-endedness, multiplicity, the inherent instability of meaning offers us a frame in which to read such a ‘closure’ of debate and meaning in the contemporary.

Is there any *one* legacy of Jacques Derrida that people across the Humanities need to keep alive? If there is such a doxa (or a para-doxa, since Derrida himself would possibly see this singularity as unacceptable) that would be the doxa of constant vigilance. The constant vigilance is directed at processes of thought that seek to restrain, contain and purify, of attributing singular meanings at the cost of others, of presence, of believing in immanence and being rather than becoming, of assumptions of ‘self-evident truths’ without seeking to understand how these came to be instituted as ‘truths’. A refusal to be tied to supposedly self-evident categories or ideologies that then begin to acquire the status of dogma, would be another legacy Derrida’s works (which, as he reminded us, were not always his own, since he was voicing, responding to others, including responding to the future) leaves us. A third would be the responsibility to the Other, a responsibility that begins with careful reading of texts and ideas so as to be able to retain the Other in our heads.

Inheritance, wrote Derrida in *Specters of Marx*, is never a given, it is always a task. Fifty years after his epoch-defining (defying?) ‘Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’, we continue to debate the task he set us to perform. Like Joyce’s famous challenge to future critics, Derrida’s work continues to keep people of various ideological, disciplinary and political persuasions busy. The title of this essay is a play of course on Foucault’s claim that the century (the 20th) would one day be termed Deleuzean. However, if the continuous production of work around Derrida’s legacies is any index, the century and the future (which lasts forever, as the title of Louis Althusser’s autobiography put it, Althusser being Derrida’s teacher) are both Derridean.

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1

Two Forms of the Word, the Spoken and Written Derrida, Pre-Platonic Writing West and Speaking India

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Let me begin with a confession. Located within Indian academia it is difficult to get into the mainstream scholarship on Western philosophy in general and Jacques Derrida in particular. I therefore confine my discussion to his path-breaking essay, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' (2005), except to deviate, though infrequently, by referring to his *Of Grammatology* (1976). Standing at the gateway to his scholarship I plan to operate at the border between inside and outside Derrida, the latter consisting of pre-Platonic philosophy and India that defies centres. In this paper I frame this key essay that first identified the pervasive problem of logocentrism surrounding Western metaphysics. This framing I undertake by distinguishing two forms of the word, the word as spoken and as written, the latter falling within and the former outside the frame. I do not discuss the difference between the spoken word versus the written word in *Indian* philosophy as discussed by T. R. V. Murti (1996) or the relation between Derrida and Classical Indian Philosophy as discussed by H. G. Coward (1991). I am, on the other hand, interested in distinguishing the difference between pre-Platonic speech as dialogue/ debate and post-Platonic speech as writing. In the second section following this discussion, I will attempt to understand Derrida outside this frame by bringing into discussion ideas and instances from India. For instance, I highlight the variance between the indomitability of centres in post-Plato philosophising in the West and the Indian one where we have innumerable centres, managing which is unwieldy if not a mess.

Frame: While accepting the Biblical claim about the ontology of the word (that in the beginning was the Word), it is important to examine the form and nature of the word. The claim about the ontological status of the word is important to understand better the Platonic intervention in the history of Western thought. I want to use two claims made in *Of Grammatology*, one by Nietzsche and other by Derrida himself. Though not explicated, Derrida cites, at the beginning of his first chapter of his *Of Grammatology*, Nietzsche who wrote, "Socrates, he who does not write" (1994: 6). This is an important statement, however one that Derrida did not pursue in this book. Instead he goes on to discuss Plato and Aristotle (1994: 11; 15); Rousseau; Saussure; and Levi-Strauss on the relation between speech and writing. The other claim made by Derrida is that Nietzsche is the last Platonist. I want to make use of both these statements and highlight how Plato

brought about an enormous change by doctrinizing thought that was in a *dialogical* form. This transformation of dialogue, which is a form of speech, into writing is radical. This reveals the variance, difference, opposition between philosophising before and after Plato. So there are two phases. Phase one has Socrates who does not write but participates in a form of speech that is debate or dialogue. Phase two, where open ended dialogue is compressed and frozen by the written word. I want to claim that Derrida's primary preoccupation is with the second phase. And I want to use the first phase as a frame to the second phase.

In discussing the relation between speech and writing Derrida discusses Rousseau, Saussure and Levi-Strauss. He says of Rousseau that for him writing is "nothing but the representation of speech; it is *bizarre* that one gives more care to the determining of the *image* than to the *object*" (Derrida 1994: 36). He goes on to point out that for Rousseau "people forget that they learn to speak before they learn to write and the natural sequence is reversed" (37).

However, this positive attitude to speech and critical attitude to writing changes in Rousseau's *Confessions*, where, Derrida writes, Rousseau, "tries to explain how he became a writer" by describing "the passage to writing as the restoration, by a certain absence and by a sort of calculated effacement, of presence disappointed of itself in speech" (1994: 142). In this work, says Derrida, "Rousseau is suspicious also of the illusion of full and present speech, of the illusion of presence within a speech believed to be transparent and innocent" (1994: 140). He urges us to reread the *Essay on the Origin of Languages*. Having pointed out disappointments with speech, Rousseau, says Derrida, "considers writing as a dangerous-means, a menacing aid, the critical response to a situation of distress" (1994: 144). That is, "when speech fails to protect presence, writing becomes necessary.... This recourse is not only 'bizarre,' but dangerous. It is the addition of a technique, a sort of artificial and artful ruse to make speech present when it is actually absent. It is a violence done to the natural destiny of the language" (1994: 144).

The disappointment in the speech is further covered up by deploying the analogy of mother and wife. Rousseau claims that although there is no substitute for a mother's love, however, "it is better that the child should suck the breast of a healthy nurse rather than a petted mother" (Derrida: 1994: 145-146). Similarly, writing becomes a supplement to speech.¹ Thus claims Rousseau, "Therese [the wife is] ... needed [as] a successor to mamma" (Derrida 1994: 156-157).² Having explained the transformation from speech to writing in Rousseau, let us now turn to Derrida's discussion of Saussure.

¹Rousseau uses the same argument in his *Social Contract* where he first postulated a state-of-nature that is desirable; having postulated this he then goes on to show how it is no more possible to retain this state and in the conclusion he comforts the reader by saying that leaving the state-of-nature where there is only a natural liberty is substantially compensated in the contracted civil society, by civil liberty.

²Here there is the simultaneous use of 'supplement' and 'successor' while explaining the process from speech to writing or nature to civilisation. There is a difference between these two expressions but they are used as synonyms. I do not know whether this is the problem with the authors or their translators.

Saussure, points out Derrida, privileges speech over writing (1994: 30-31); he says of writing that it is a “garment of perversion and debauchery, a dress of corruption and disguise, a festival mask that must be exorcised, that is to say warded off, by the good word” (1994: 35). While Derrida endorses Saussure’s denouement of ‘classical linguists’ about their blind prejudice towards writing (1994: 39), he, however, “challeng[es] in the very name of the arbitrariness of the sign, the Saussurian definition of writing as ‘image’—hence as natural symbol of language.” (1994: 45). He claims how Saussure was “never able to think that writing was truly an ‘image,’ a ‘figuration,’ a ‘representation,’ of the spoken word, a symbol” (1994: 45). Derrida concludes that despite his ‘intention or motivation’ Saussure inherited ‘an entire uncritical tradition’ (1994: 46). Having made this allegation he now turns to Levi-Strauss.

Levi-Strauss considered the “passage from speech to writing as a *leap*, as the instantaneous crossing of a line of discontinuity: passage from fully oral language, pure of all writing — *pure*, innocent — to a language appending to itself its graphic ‘representation’ as an accessory signifier of a new type, opening a technique of oppression” (1994: 120). He identifies the ‘second wave of mediation’ where Levi-Strauss seeks to “neutralize the frontier between peoples without and with writing; not with regard to the use of writing, but with regard to what is supposed to be deducible from it, with regard to their historicity or non-historicity.” (1994: 128). For Levi-Strauss, says Derrida, to “recognize writing in speech, that is to say difference and the absence of speech, is to begin to think the lure” (1994: 139).

The reason why I discussed Derrida’s treatment of the relation between speech and writing in the writings of Rousseau, Saussure and Levi-Strauss is to show that he is preoccupied with writing and as he rightly points out in the case of Levi-Strauss, the “writing in speech” (1994: 139). In contrast, I highlight a mode of speech in the form of debate or dialogue in Plato. That is, despite the claims of those inside the debate, it remains ‘open’ as there exists no provision to close it off. Thought in a dialogical form was far more open with multiple interventions and interpretations. It is devoid of permanent centre. There may be a temporary winner in the dialogue but even this subsequently is open to further contestations, returns, revisits. In contrast, in the dialogue that is *written* by Plato, Socrates is a winner once for all. To reiterate, the scene would be different if the dialogue is *not* written down, it would have remained open despite claims by several. Before this change, the dialogue not only had several contestants but was available for *subsequent* contestations. This defies the possibility of a centre. That is, thought, not only had simultaneous centres contesting each other but also openings into the future.

All this changed because of Plato’s radical act of writing down the open-ended dialogue, in a frozen, written form. The written as a presence closed forever all these openings, each of which had innumerable possibilities. So, there is a subtle but significant difference between *the written as a presence* and its relation to possibilities and *the spoken as a presence* and its relation to possibilities. My contention is that there is a need to distinguish between the word in the spoken form and the word in the written form in order to identify the purview of logocentrism to understand this concept better.

This is important because the word is available in both forms. Derrida's reference, to the theories that he is critiquing as contesting logocentrism, or presencing, are largely where word is in the *written* form. In highlighting the continuity between Socrates and Plato and critiquing his metaphysics as laying the foundation for logocentrism we often do not notice the underlying changes in the format, namely, from dialogue to doctrine, or more specifically dialogues presented in a doctrine form. The question that is important is that what in Plato makes him the first metaphysician. Definitely not the content as he is only reporting, in a systematic manner the 'live' dialogues. Socrates and others in the dialogues spoke their views. In none of the dialogues, is there Plato. So, how does he become the first metaphysician in a tradition of which Nietzsche is the last one? The answer to this lies in distinguishing between the spoken word as a presence and the written word also as a presence. Plato characterised the latter as an indomitable presence. The claim that I am making is derived from Nietzsche's statement about Socrates and Derrida's claim about Nietzsche.

This new presencing that scuttled the open-endedness is then consolidated. In this move towards consolidation, Plato presented, to use a phrase that I used elsewhere in referring to Adi Samkara, a refrigerated account of thought. In this new format, Socrates claims that the human being's task is to passively and merely discover the already existing, everlasting and immutable forms. It is allowed to be contested within the free play but eventually lost, thus confirming and vindicating Socrates' claim. Instead of this claim being put to simultaneous (in the form of others contesting the point in the course of the debate within Socrates), and sequential (in the form of others contesting it *later*) the changed format allows this claim to be contested within the free play within the dialogue and then contested from outside by subsequent thinkers like Aristotle. Unlike in the pre-frozen, pre-doctrinaire situation, where thought is not closed, in the -frozen situation, one is forced to contest a closed or a final view. The temporality that underlies this frozen scene is where one has, one necessarily has to have, a closed and official position that you contest not from within but necessarily from the outside. By the logic of the position, one is left with contesting the existing centre and forced to institute another centre. Derrida brilliantly identifies this last point. This initial move by Plato forms the frame; without recalling this one cannot understand the nature and boundary of Derrida. Having set the frame let me in the following provide background to Derrida to highlight the importance of his essay.

Scene one: Derrida thus inhabits the inside of the frame, one of *writing*, outside of which lies not mere speech but a particular form of it, namely, debate or dialogue. In scene One, Plato and Plato's Socrates maintained that there is a divine order independent of human beings. The only task of human beings is to merely and passively discover that which is already there. Leo Strauss succinctly captures this when he says that traditional natural law which is "primarily and mainly an objective rule 'rule and measure', a binding order prior to, and independent of, the human will..." (1966: vii-viii). This leaves very little, in fact almost nothing, for human freedom and creativity. Subsequently, there have been attempts by Aristotle and Christianity to offer alternative but contesting centres. Despite differences, all of them in varying degrees, sought to privilege the transcendental reality. This convergence to locate centres came under the scanner of modern philosophy.

Scene two: A modern philosopher like Descartes sought to reject outright the transcendental that became a breeding ground for instituting centres.

Descartes formulated a new logic in his *Discourse on Method*, a logic of exclusion that sought to disinherit everything from the pre-modern including the classical transcendental. He sets out his normative scale, which is *cogito*, reason and certainty, and embarks on excluding, at the outset, others. These are: childhood (as it is the domain governed by appetite and teachers rather than reason, the latter he identifies as the domain of adults (1985: 117); language (1985: 113); history (for him the past is like travel, which takes us away from the present), oratory; poetry (poetry is the ‘gift of mind rather than fruits of study’ 1985: 114); moral writings of pagans (1985: 114); customs; evolutionary growth of societies (he rejects gradual growth of societies 1985: 116); he even rejects classical logic and mathematics as they are ‘mixed up with’ all sorts of things (1985: 119-120). The reality that modernity instituted is immanent. These moves give us a general idea of the project of disinheriting and excluding all those emerging from the pre-modern from the domain of modernity.

Scene three: Subsequent to modern philosophies’ attempt to disinherit the pre-modern, including transcendental from the classical, logical positivist found that ordinary language is full of non-referential words and they sought to eliminate metaphysical words, having earlier eliminated metaphysics, through the method of verification principle. This principle accepted only two kinds of statements, namely, analytical and synthetic statements. They proposed not only establishing the relation between word and object, but also insisting that a word refers to only or some specific set of objects. This is the route towards the project of artificial intelligence and passwords culture. When the anti-positivism in humanities was decentred through deconstruction, it surreptitiously re-camped in a different form in the departments of computer science and occupied our pockets in the form of mobile phones thus forming another centre. So, logical positivism is everywhere but we do not see it.

It is this new and disguised form of authority whose non-visibility that Derrida seems to highlight. This is not a theological or political authority that you know and can suffer, endure or even confront. This is a new form of oppression that is invisible. Foucault highlights one aspect of this in his work on power/knowledge. One way to understand Foucault’s thesis of how knowledge generated power is through the following example. Take an example of a village that had no school. And the most of the villagers will not be called illiterates. Imagine a new school in this village. Now this creates a new problem, that is, those who go to the school will be literates but designating those who don’t will pose a problem. It is not proper to call them illiterates; still, if we call them pre-literates then this new designation is temporally post to the arrival of literacy, but the designation is employed retrospectively. This retrospective designation, Foucault would call, is thrust on the people by arrival of literacy. This is how knowledge generates power and operated on people.

Derrida takes the discussion to the very site of logic and language, what he calls as logocentrism. A discussion of Derrida’s legacy without recalling the legacy that he inherited will fail to bring down his radical project that goes beyond Nietzsche who

declared that God is dead. So there are two phases of deconstruction. Phase one, the demolition of the fort of centre; phase two, of discourse as bricolage. The latter takes us back into the discourse that existed with Socrates.

Let me now discuss the major themes and claims in the Derrida's essay. Let me begin with structure. Derrida makes a subtle but a serious distinction between structure and centre and claims that the centre is more important than structure. This in a way lays the foundation for the demolition of structuralism. He is alerting us to the centre of the problem, or its opposite, its virtue is not in the structure but in the centre. If you concentrate, congregate or rally around the structure to demolish it then you are indulging in a negotiation with the surface that invariably fails or worse, may become counterproductive.

The centre of the structure, Derrida will argue, "permits the free play of its elements inside the total form" (2005: 352) As already pointed out above in the case of Plato, the centre of the structure controls but does allow free play between or amongst its elements, however, only inside the total form. Having conceded this much, thus making a right assessment of the strength and nature of what he is critiquing, Derrida goes on to make a big claim that a structure without a centre is 'unthinkable': "And even today the notion of structure lacking any centre represents the unthinkable itself" (2005: 352) He is thus claiming that the centre is more central than the overall structure. He says, "Thus it has always been thought that the centre, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality." (2005: 352) The important point that is to be noted here is, centre is not a part of structure, on the contrary, it is the centre that is unique, and governs the structure. So, structure does not govern its centre rather it is the centre that governs the structure.

At this moment he makes another interesting move, by employing a psychological move: anxiety. He says,

... on the basis of this certitude anxiety can be mastered, for anxiety is invariably the result of a certain mode of being implicated in the game, of being caught by the game, of being as it were at stake in the game from the outset. And again on the basis of what we call the centre (and which, because it can be either inside or outside, can also indifferently be called the origin or end, *arche* or *telos*), repetitions, substitutions, transformations, and permutations are always *taken* from the history of the meaning [*sens*] — that is, in a word, a history — whose origin may always be reawakened or whose end may always be anticipated in the form of presence (2005: 252-253).

Let us identify various ideas that are introduced, relations established, connections drawn, and conclusions arrived at. First, there is an anxiety. This anxiety is caused by the reader's unease with the situation and her or his inability to identify the problem that causes this anxiety. Similar to that of Freudian repression, the inability lies in the non-availability of the problem in a centralised mode. Just when one wants to complain that there is a 'problem' of rigidity supposedly imposed by the centre, one is confronted by the phenomena of free play that is allowed by the same centre. The presence of free play thus is an antidote to the complaint of rigidity. The range of free play consists of

repetitions, substitutions, transformations and permutations in the history of meaning. All these do not enable one to make a clear and total complaint about the cause of anxiety around the idea of the centre and structure. In a sense, these aspects of free play camouflage the politics of the centre. This camouflage does not enable the reader to easily address, or even identify, the problem. This generates the anxiety.

The deceptive variety that camouflages the centre makes a large claim that prevents one from seeing the centre's politics in Derrida's work when he introduces two other variables, namely, origin and telos. That the centre is not an artefact but has been present from the beginning and is therefore either natural or divine; and the tyranny of, or difficulties with, the centre have to be tolerated as they have a teleology. So the presencing by the centre through these strategies is not only from the inside but also from the outside. Inside can be in the beginning: there was the word or God, a transcendental being created the immanent world. Elucidating the different dimensions of the centre Derrida says,

the entire history of the concept of structure, before the rupture of which we are speaking, must be thought of as a series of substitutions of centre for centre, as a linked chain of determinations of the centre. Successively, and in a regulated fashion, the centre receives different forms or names. The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphysics and metonymies (2005: 353).

So, to reiterate, the centre is more central than the structure, thus there is a need to pay attention to centre rather than mere structure; each centre of a structure does permit free play of its elements however, inside the total form. Metaphysics managed these different presences through a series of camouflages is the root cause of anxiety.

Disclosing these camouflages and identifying the root of the problem as lying not with structure but with centre explains the movements of the centre or centres. Derrida first declares that we must realise that 'there was no centre'; centre 'should not be thought in the form of a being-present'; 'centre had no natural locus, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions come into play'. Thus, decentred or deconstructed, 'in the absence of a centre or origin, everything becomes discourse' Explaining the consequences of this he writes, when

... everything become discourse ... a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of difference. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely (2005: 354).

Tracing the beginning of this rupture he concedes that it

would be somewhat naive to refer to an event, a doctrine, or an author in order to designate this occurrence. It is no doubt part of the totality of an era, our own, but still it has always already begun to proclaim itself and begun to work (2005: 354).

He says probably the beginning are there in

Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics, the critique of the concepts of Being and truth, for which were substituted the concept of play, interpretation, and sign (sign without present truth); the Freudian critique of self-presence, that is, the critique of consciousness, of the subject, of self-identity and of self-proximity or self-possession; and, more radically, the Heideggerian destruction of metaphysics, of onto-theology, of the determination of being as presence (2005: 354).

Identifying the nature of this line of decentring and de-presenting, he points out:

But all these destructive discourses and all their analogues are trapped in a kind of circle. This circle is unique. It describes the form of the relation between the history of metaphysics and the destruction of the history of metaphysics (2005: 354).

I suggest that there is a need to distinguish two stages of the Derrida essay: the diagnostic and recommendatory. That is, the essay until now works towards brilliantly and ingeniously diagnosing the problem. Having accomplished this task successfully, Derrida now embarks on making recommendations for overcoming this problem. I am of the opinion that he falters here; he uses the mood belonging to the diagnosis as a bricolage, even at the second stage. In other words, already available and ready-made use of the earlier mood does not sit well to accomplishing the task that requires a different mood. Let me elaborate this by carefully identifying the following moves from his recommendations. I argue that not distinguishing these two stages, and not reading through the classification of the cluster of recommendations has serious implications to those who inhabit his legacy in different disciplines and cultures.

First, he says, "If one erases the radical difference between signifier and signified, it is the word 'signifier' itself which must be abandoned as a metaphysical concept." (2005: 355) What is important in this conditional statement is the idea of 'erasing': erasing the radical difference between signifier and signified. If this happens, Derrida says, then it is the word signifier itself that ought to be abandoned as a metaphysical concept. There is a difference between abandoning the word signifier and abandoning it as a metaphysical concept. If it is the former, then it can lapse into chaos or end up in what Umberto Eco calls 'overinterpretation'. However, if it is the latter then this consequence need not follow. Alternatively, Derrida is suggesting in this sentence the need to reject the relation between signifier and signified as rigid and authoritative, and yet save the project from relapsing into the predicament of 'anything goes' or chaos. That is, he is rejecting signifier as a metaphysical concept.

Second, he introduces the idea of 'erasure', and distinguishes 'two heterogeneous ways of erasing the difference between the signifier and the signified'. The classical way that 'consist in reducing or deriving the signifier' that is, 'ultimately in submitting the sign to thought'. He proposes another way, which 'consist[s] in putting into question the system in which the preceding reduction functioned' (2005: 355). That is, Derrida proposes an undermining of the very structure that he excavated, and which is operated by the centre. Illustrating how this is executed by Nietzsche, Freud and Heidegger he says that unlike the classical practice where the ones who destroyed the predecessor centre, congregate and thereby consolidate another centre, which becomes another oppressor. This is

exactly like one replacing the other . In contrast, these destroyers

destroy each other reciprocally — for example, Heidegger regarding Nietzsche, with as much lucidity and rigor as bad faith and misconstruction, as the last metaphysician, the last “Platonist”. One could do the same for Heidegger himself, for Freud, and for a number of others. And today no exercise is more widespread (2005: 356).

So there is a difference between what happened and what he proposes ought to happen; there is a diagnosis and a recommendation. If we do not read the recommendation with the Derrida mood of diagnosis, we tend to highlight the words like erasure, and do not realise that he is referring to erasing the metaphysical concept, and not erasure per se. For instance, as pointed out earlier, Derrida should not reject the relation between signifier and signified in the pre-metaphysical, pre-Platonic and Socratic dialogical discourse (that is governed by openness between and amongst various points that are in dialogue and in debate). These debates are not closed forever. Derrida is not rejecting any relation between signifier and signified but only rejecting this relation as absolute and total, and he concedes this relation as a functional relation. That is, destroying each other should not be taken as total destruction but rather as their destruction as absolutes. In other words, there is a need to distinguish reading them in isolation or as absolutes and reading them in conjunction with other concepts. If this is not done then there is a real danger where we receive the legacy of Derrida in different cultures exactly like the way that is repudiated by him, namely, the classical way where he himself becomes another centre.

At the end of the essay Derrida distinguishes two ‘interpretations of interpretations, of structure, of sign, of play’. One “seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile” (2005: 369). This is something like a relay race, where players change but not the stick that is passed from one to the other. The hand that hands over the stick to the next one is withdrawn but only after ensuring the successful continuation of race. Derrida is cautioning us not to be deceived by the discontinuity of the players but instead pay attention to the achieved continuity in the play. It is the continuing presencing that enables the race to progress through the stick where several players are used.

In contrast, the second mode of interpretation, Derrida goes to explain, “is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism” goes beyond the dream of ‘full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play” (2005: 369-370).³ Derrida acknowledges that Nietzsche showed the way to this kind of interpretation of interpretation.

Let me now make some general comments on this path-breaking essay. One, the essay while highlighting the centrality of the centre and unravelling the process of replacing one centre by another, focussed on one aspect of this trajectory. That is, a linear trajectory

³I have in another place discussed this obsession with origin and the end of the game while discussing the metaphysic of Vaddera Chandidas.

in the history of Western metaphysics: Nietzsche to Freud to Heidegger. Derrida fails to focus on another kind where there is a more active negotiation that borders on contesting or rejecting simultaneously each other. That is, he fails to account for the competing centres during Nietzsche or during Freud. Rather he seems to take each of these thinkers as monolithic. Thus in the case of Socrates prior to Plato, where Socrates' ideas are contesting and contested. This is the possibility of dialogue. It simultaneity decentres the impact of the centre. This is the format of the debate where two or more speakers and their ideas actively engage and contest each other. More importantly it remains open-ended. In the process, the truth is continuously negotiated through contestation. This simultaneous contestation of the thinkers eludes Derrida's attention. Having framed Derrida's concern within the written and outside the speech, and raised some critical points let me in the next section discuss a theme that falls outside the frame discussed above, namely themes from India.

II

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida quotes Rousseau who contrasted Orientals from French, English and German:

'Our [French, English, German] tongues are better suited to writing than speaking, and there is more pleasure in reading us than in listening to us. Oriental tongues, on the other hand, lose their life and warmth when they are written. The words do not convey the meaning: all the effectiveness is in the tone of voice [accents]. Judging the genius of the Orientals from their books is like painting a man's portrait from his corps (in Derrida 1994: 226, italics Derrida's).

So the Orient can fall outside the frame of those excel in writing, and according to the same argument, those who do not write do not have a history. The people of the Orient are those who speak and not write. Before I discuss those who speak but do not write, I propose that pre-Platonic thought was expressed in speaking, as debate or dialogue, which includes notably, Socrates and other prominent philosophers. They are thus in the company of the Indians. (I have elsewhere argued, against Akeel Bilgrami, that Gandhi is in the company of Christ and Socrates, who are from outside India. 2013.)

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak finds Derrida a better philosopher to launch her postcolonial critique. This choice of Pre-modern's differs from Edward Said's who in his *Orientalism* uses Foucault to launch his critique of Orientalism, particularly through Foucault's thesis on power/knowledge. Said admits at the outset that he "found it useful ... to employ ... Michel Foucault's notion of a discourse, as described by him in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and in *Discipline and Punish*, to identify Orientalism" (1979: 9). Spivak, though not directly referring to Said's use of Foucault, prefers Derrida as he is "less dangerous when understood than first world intellectuals masquerading as the absent nonrepresenter who lets the oppressed speak for themselves.". Spivak and Said are both inheritors of specific legacies – Foucauldian and Derridean poststructuralism – as they set about constructing postcolonial thought.

Let me now discuss the variance in the use of Derrida in the West and 'outside' it. I want to make a *bricolage* use of the legacy that Derrida inherits in order to save the

danger of Derrida's legacy in different cultures from relapsing into the predicament of the engineer. According to Derrida, for Levi-Strauss, *bricoleur* is someone who uses "the means at hand," that is, the

instruments he finds at his disposition around him, those who are already there, which had not been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used and to which one tries by trial and error to adopt them, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary, or to try several of them at once, even if their form and their origin are heterogeneous — and so forth (2005: 360).

Derrida goes on to argue that if "one calls *bricolage* the necessity of borrowing one's concepts from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined, it must be said that every discourse is *bricoleur*" (2005: 360).

That is, there is a possibility where we in India can use Derrida's writings as a *bricoleur*. Giving the nature and limitations of Derrida who operates within the written and not with the spoken, this use of Derrida in India will leave many aspects, particularly those that fall outside the written, outside his purview. So, when using him to liberate ourselves we need to be critically conscious of both these, namely, use him as a *bricoleur* and be conscious about the limitations that surround his scholarship. Here let me bring into the discussion three instances that provide a counter to Derrida who relentlessly sought to dismantle Western logocentrism.

One, there is a difference between deconstructing a centre and deconstructing an unwieldy phenomenon. In India today we also have a new phenomenon that is not a centre but something that is messy and unwieldy. This is a situation where you do not have rules but precedents. And decentres unmindfully are in the belief that they are defying rules. Indian society, despite several attempts to the contrary, largely remains less centred. Let me explain. I am not saying that there are no centres in India, there are but there remain large areas that remain outside the centre. That is, unlike in the West where there are clearly laid out centres and those who oppose, do so from the outside. In India on the other hand, there are not only many centres but also large domain of reality that falls outside the centres.

Unlike in the West, where modernity as a centre dismantled the pre-modern and removed it from the social domain, in India, pre-modern not only coexists with the modern, thus defying the modern canon but also posing a series of problems to this canon, and thereby decentering it. Though not in respect of centralised power, but in respect of the sheer volume and plural powers, the pre-modern is more in comparison to the modern in India. Modern cities in India are extensions of pre-modern villages; pre-modern voters sustain the success of democracy in India. (I have discussed this in my forthcoming work). Thus, the reality *outside* the centre is larger, though perhaps less powerful than what is inside the centre.

This voluminous pre-modern that lies outside the modern, i.e., unprocessed by modernity, made it possible for the rise of right-wing Indian politics, and precedes their

corresponding rise in the recent election in US. While India may lag behind America in modernity's success, with regard to the pre-modern, America lags behind India.

My second point proceeds from an autobiographical moment. I was invited some years ago to a seminar in Delhi organised by the Max Muller Bhavan. A participant from Germany told me about her wonderful trip to Punjab. She told me that she particularly found a sweet drink, yogurt (*lassi*), very tasty. She asked me to explain how it was made. I managed to tell her whatever I knew. I elaborated rather foolishly, and by way of compensating for my ignorance, that in India where they have to make large quantities of *lassi*, they use washing machines to make it. She was shocked. I tried to explain to her that they use brand-new machines to make the *lassi*! I recall this rather unpleasant incident to show that the Indian psyche is not only capable of following the manuals but also making use of that which is outside the manual. It is this outside of the manual, outside the centre that can pose some new and interesting questions to Derridas' radical attempt at decentring and deconstructing.⁴

Three, I bring into discussion Akeel Bilgrami's argument around Gandhi as an exemplar. This I do to bolster my argument about the non-written word. Bilgrami (2006) identifies the whole of Western morality as subscribing to rules and principles. In contrast to moral principles he finds an alternative, namely, moral *examples* who are more open-ended. In this context, he proposes Gandhi as proposing not a moral principle like in Western moral thinking, but as embodying an exemplar. (For a critique of Bilgrami for not considering Socrates and Christ as exemplars along with or before Gandhi, see my 2013).

I highlighted these three instances that fall outside the word as written, as not only to positively frame Derrida's logocentrism and presences but also to show the borders and limitation of his ingenious attempt to un-envelope the pervasive phenomena of Western metaphysics. Without this framing there is a problem of totalising the extent of this pervasive phenomena that might distort Derrida.

This brings us to the task of identifying the nature of Derrida's legacy for India. One, given the presence of large areas that do not have centres, a project like Derrida that operated against the centre as its goal post, it may not be useful or even proper to use him directly in India as seems to be the practice in liberal arts and social sciences disciplines in India. Ajay Skaria and Aishwary Kumar's use of post-modern theories to understand Gandhi and Ambedkar, respectively, are a few recent examples in this direction. This will add to the present practice in India, which is similar to that of making PDF files of a non-word document (that is different from PDF files of word document in use within the Western academics) or wanting to lay tiles in a muddy soil. It is equally true,

⁴At a different level there are attempts in the modern times where there have been radical moves to decentre interpretations. For instance, there have been several interpretations of Bhagad Gita as a text that positively promotes violence as Lord Krishna asks and instigates a reluctant Arjuna to fight war. This continued in the modern period particularly in the interpretation of Balagangadhara Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi's political Guru. Gandhi repudiated this entire hermeneutical tradition beginning from the classical times by claiming with textual evident that the text out rightly rejects violence and positively promotes non-violence. (See Raghuramraju 2016).

and pathetically so, that modern India has not produced good modern philosophical theories that are available readymade which can theorise modern Indian texts and social institutions and practices. Here it may be pointed out that modern India is complex as it contains the combination of a huge and voluminous pre-modern simultaneously existing with the modern. Theorising this strange and unique combination is indeed an arduous task. To come back to the lack of modern philosophical theories, this understandably, makes those from India to look at those like Derrida and his philosophy as a useful way to theorise and understand the Indian themes. I have argued elsewhere that this modern absence is the reason for Indians using theories from the West, rather than colonialism as held by many. (2009). That is, using the outside not because of colonialism but because of lack of internal resources. I have elsewhere argued the difference within the use of the outside by Indians like Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi. That is, outsider not only as an oppressor but on the contrary as an enabler (Raghuramraju, forthcoming). So one is stuck with lack and mismatch. The mismatch does not justify using Derrida as a *bricolage*, as bricolage makes sense against the overarching and oppressive presence of centres, which India seems to be lacking.

However, though not directly but indirectly, those like Derrida will be immensely useful to warn those from India against the dangers of allowing the India scene that seems to lack strong centres to become one in future. This will be a very good caution to circumvent the dangers in future. That is, the Western experience and the pervasive logocentrism can help Indians to avoid these possible developments. This demands a thorough understanding of Western philosophy that includes Derrida. This, at least in some cases, should be preceded by the understanding of Indian society and texts. Otherwise this can lead to more confusion.

Two, Derrida's legacy can be of paramount importance in understanding the modern institutions that India inherited both through and outside colonialism. Some of this was alluded to by Spivak. In this context one can also understand the complex and mutually manipulative relations in India between modern and traditional institutions, particularly, the way in which the latter have sought to reconfigure their nature and territory. Three, given the lack of modern philosophies in India, we can make a selective, reflective and judicious but not *bricolage* use of his deconstruction to understand better some centres and some deceptive and nascent centres in India. Four, we can understand better the relation between two forms of the word, the written and the spoken; the organised social institutions and unorganised, yet powerful and oppressive social institutions and practices.

Lastly, while Derrida's legacy may not directly find place in India, however, this is confined to his preoccupation that consists of his critique of logocentrism. Outside this negative domain, and with regard to those aspects that fall outside the logocentrism, that is in his positive programme, Indian texts and realities are nearer to him. So he belongs to India in this other and positive side. He might find a text like *The Mahabharata* with its polyphonic character less logocentric, and the centredless unwieldy and often messy Indian realities and practices, less oppressive. Or alternatively, these from India,

might make him see, at least relatively, advantages in logocentrism that he ingeniously unearthed and relentlessly sought to dismantle. This other side, the positive side to Derrida might get highlighted if you locate him within India, given the fact that located within the West naturally seems to have bolstered the negative side, that is, his critique of logocentrism.

I began by distinguishing two aspects of the word, the spoken and written; located Derrida's concern in his path-breaking essay in the transformation of the spoken in the form of open-ended dialogue into the written in Plato; also identified the contribution to this in the form of modernity and logical positivism. I discussed key ideas of his essay by distinguishing the diagnosis part from the recommendatory one. In the second section I used Rousseau's classification between those who speak and those who write, and discussed instances from those who are on the 'outside'. In the end I have identified the possible ways of inheriting Derrida in India and in other disciplines like liberal arts and social sciences.

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2

The Semiotics of a Symposium

Derrida, Baltimore and More*

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This paper is divided into three sections, distinct yet connected thematically to the 1966 Structuralist Symposium at Baltimore. The first section looks at Derrida's celebrated text, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' and its key arguments with the focus on the metaphoric idiom and figurations. The second section is about the other participants of the Symposium--or to adapt a theatrical/poststructuralist term--players other than Derrida and the nature of their interventions. After all, Derrida was the last speaker in a four-day Symposium. The third section is about the Baltimore Symposium as a whole, its pre- and after-lives, its semiotic over/under-texts, its symbolism, signifiers, ironies, paradoxes and absurdities.

I

Derrida's paper, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', though the last presentation in the entire symposium, later became its 'primary' event. Much has been said about its historic, path-breaking impact. I shall limit myself to its diction and figurative implications. Derrida's essay has as an epigraph, a quotation from Montaigne: "We need to interpret interpretations more than to interpret things," the relevance of which will be recognised only towards the end of the essay.

The text opens rather tentatively with a reference to an event: "Perhaps something has occurred in the history of the concept of the structure that could be called an 'event'" (Derrida 351) The word is put in italics in the first instance and used three times in as many sentences. Derrida adds that the exterior form of this event would be that of a 'rupture' and a 'redoubling', a figuration that is sustained throughout the essay. He then plunges into his most important argument -- that of the 'structurality of the structure', of the structure and the nature/position of the centre in/outside it. The pre-rupture history of the structure is described as a 'linked chain of determinations', which is summed up using the now famous phrase 'being as presence'. The event of rupture/disruption/redoubling/repetition came about when "the structurality of the structure had to begin to be thought, the moment when language invaded the universal problematic" (354).

*Text of the lecture delivered at the commemorative seminar (Deconstruction@50) on 20 October 2016 at the School of Letters, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala.

Invasion is a political term and brings to mind entire discourses, histories and narratives. The political idiom is continued in the next statement as well: “the absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and play of signification infinitely.” Thinking the structurality of the structure now gets another term, simple yet explicitly political-- decentering. Derrida identifies three historical/personal landmarks that contributed to this act of subversion -- Nietzsche, Freud and Heidegger. Derrida calls their discourses ‘destructive’ and notes that they are “trapped in a unique circle... (which) describes the form of the relation between the history of metaphysics and the destruction of the history of metaphysics.” However Derrida does not consider his method as ‘destructive’. During the discussion that followed his presentation and in response to a question from Jan Kott, he says: “I believe that I was quite explicit about the fact that nothing of what I said had a destructive meaning. Here or there, I have used the word deconstruction, which has nothing to do with destruction” (Macksey 2007: 270-271). But actually he does not use the word deconstruction anywhere in the text. Derrida’s usual method is to show how texts deconstruct themselves and the best example perhaps is what he does with Levi-Strauss in this essay. His lengthy critique of Levi-Strauss in particular and Structuralism in general, turned out to be fatal for the movement. It also subverted the very purpose of the Baltimore symposium, which is to celebrate its achievements. The beginning of Post-Structuralism is usually identified with this moment and ‘event’.

An important metaphoric argument that Derrida makes in the essay is the distinction between the engineer and the bricoleur. The engineer, Derrida argues, is a myth, a theological notion of totality and perfection, something like the idea of god. Whereas the bricoleur is the lesser mortal, the imperfect doer, who manages with the means (and tools) at hand. We are all bricoleurs, none of us are engineers. In fact, the engineer is only a myth produced by the bricoleur, and the distinction breaks down, “as soon as we cease to believe in such an engineer”(Derrida 1978: 360). Roland Barthes (who, at the Baltimore seminar, was still the Structuralist) would later talk about a similar ‘anti-theological’ perspective in his famous essay, ‘The Death of the Author’ (first published in 1967), a text that bears the distinct stamp of Derrida’s influence: “We know now that the text is not a line of words releasing a single theological meaning (the message of the author-God)” (Lodge 1988: 170). Also “by refusing to assign a ‘secret’, an ultimate meaning, to the text,... writing liberates... an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary...” (171). For Derrida though, the nature of the linguistic field (and thereby all writing) excludes totalisation because this field is in effect that of play. Play (jeu), a field of infinite substitutions, a movement of supplementarity, the disruption of presence. And to this notion of play, there could be two kinds of response. The first is the Rousseauistic mourning of a loss or absence. It is metaphysical, idealistic, nostalgic, negative and guilty. Levi-Strauss and other Structuralists betray an inclination to this approach. As against this, comes the second approach—the Nietzschean response which is joyous, affirmative, adventurous and indeterminate. Poststructuralism is usually identified with this response (369). There are thus two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. Hence the statement by Montaigne as epigraph. It is only

here in the last paragraph, while talking about the difference and irreducibility of the two interpretations, that Derrida rather casually introduces his all-important term *différance*. Derrida's essay concludes with the description of a monstrous birth: "Here there is a kind of question, let us still call it historical, whose *conception, formation, gestation, and labor* we are only catching a glimpse of today. I employ these words, I admit, with a glance toward the operations of childbearing—but also with a glance toward those who, in a society from which I do not exclude myself, turn their eyes away when faced by the as yet unnamable which is proclaiming itself and which can do so, as is necessary whenever a birth is in the offing, only under the species of the nonspecies, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity" (370). Twenty years later, speaking at another symposium on 'the states of theory', he would talk about the destiny of his monster child:

It is more and more often said that the Johns Hopkins colloquium was ... an event in which many things changed ... on the American scene ... What is now called "theory" in the country may even have an essential link with what is said to have happened there in 1966. I don't know what happened there What is certain is that something happened there which would have the value of a theoretical event, or of an event within theory, or more likely the advent of a new theoretical-institutional sense of "theory" ... --this something only came to light afterwards and is still becoming more and more clear today. ... Monsters cannot be announced. One cannot say: "Here are our monsters," without immediately turning the monsters into pets (Carroll 1990: 80).

The deconstructive childbirth should necessarily be a kind of rupture/doubling or a second coming. It's interesting to note that W B Yeats' famous poem about 'The Second Coming' ends with a similar image of a monstrous birth:

... somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun
Is moving its slow thighs ..
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born? (100)

Richard Macksey (Professor at the Humanities Center of the Johns Hopkins University), who presided over the Symposium and who gave both the 'Opening' and 'Closing' remarks also uses the lion image. His opening lecture had a curious, metaphoric title, 'Lions and Squares'. The latter term is from board games, particularly chess, and inspired by (or anticipating) Derrida's 'play'. He gives a lengthy analysis of 'the game model' which ends with Wittgenstein's concept of language-game (*Sprachspiel*). A statement by the philosopher is quoted: "If a lion could talk, we could not understand him", that is, the lion's perspective of life and the world. Macksey's opening remarks conclude with the hope that "the sessions ahead may reveal a few lions among us" as well as "reveal a little of the lion in each of us." (13-14). Macksey also had the last word in the Symposium. In his 'concluding remarks', while talking about the achievements of the Symposium,

he mentions Derrida (perhaps, a lion among the rest) in particular: “to consider such radical reappraisals of our assumptions as that advanced by Monsieur Derrida on this final day” (320).

II

Let’s now look at the participants and players of the Symposium other than Derrida. There were 15 colloquists and more than 100 participants from nine different countries. The Structuralist masters Claude Levi-Strauss and Roman Jakobson were conspicuous by their absence. Both were invited to the event but did not attend. Michael Foucault was also expected, but he too opted out. The French contingent had many stars, and probably Roland Barthes, the great Structuralist/Semiotician, was the most famous. He presented the paper ‘To Write: An Intransitive Verb’ (which is grounded in the Structuralist logic, method and idiom) as also took part in discussions occasionally. Jean Hyppolite was perhaps the oldest person in the hall. The senior Master, Foucault’s teacher and the greatest Hegelian around, was making his last academic appearance with another lecture on Hegel. He died soon after and the Book of the Conference was dedicated to his memory. Hyppolite also raised important objections to Derrida’s arguments in ‘Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’ and the heated debate the two had after its reading was certainly the first of numerous such debates and quarrels.

Jacques Lacan who later became a global celebrity, was making his first appearance in an American conference. His paper titled ‘Of Structure as an Inmixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject’ was short, but significant nevertheless. The symposium also gave him an interesting metaphor for the Unconscious and he talks about it vividly in the paper:

When I prepared this little talk for you, it was early in the morning. I could see Baltimore through the window and it was a very interesting moment because it was not quite daylight and a neon sign indicated to me every minute the change of time, and naturally there was heavy traffic, and I remarked to myself that exactly all I could see, except for some trees in the distance, was the result of thoughts, actively thinking thoughts, where the function played by the subjects was not completely obvious....”

Lacan then adds, “The best image to sum up the unconscious is Baltimore in the early morning (Macksey 2007: 189).

There were other European Structuralists as well including Tzvetan Todorov, Lucien Goldmann, Georges Poulet, Jean-Pierre Vernant and Charles Moraze. The host scholars at Johns Hopkins Baltimore included Richard Macksey, Rene Girard and Eugenio Donato. Paul De Man did not have any paper, but took part in the discussions, at times rather aggressively. Richard Schechner was an active participant who put several questions to the speakers, mostly from a theatrical perspective. Jan Kott too took part in the discussions, while Edward Said was one of the youngest attendees of the Symposium. Alan Bass, studying at Johns Hopkins at the time, was a leader of the Student Committee. He would later become a major translator of Derrida.

III

In 1970, when the 'Book of the Conference' was first published (in a case-bound edition) it used the very title of the seminar ('The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man') on the cover, along with an interesting subtitle ('The Structuralist Controversy') that the editors chose. Two years later when the book was brought out in a paperback edition, the subtitle was promoted as the main title, thereby marking the quarrel itself as (a historical event and) the most important part of the seminar. This is only one of the many ironies and paradoxes that the seminar contained. That a programme envisaged and projected as Structuralism's greatest triumph in America ended up as its very nemesis is perhaps the keenest. By the time Derrida read what was the last paper of the four-day exercise, Structuralism was all past (*passé*) and Post-Structuralism got officially inaugurated. Another great irony is that this famous decentering project of Derrida was announced in a newly opened 'centre', the Johns Hopkins Humanities Center. However neither the Centre nor the University could afford the huge expenses of this grand Symposium and therefore had to rely on a generous sponsorship grant (\$30,000) from the Ford Foundation. The radical journal *Telos* criticised this fact, calling attention to the interests and ideology of the Foundation as well as the dubious role it played during the Vietnam War. Feminists can easily point out the sexist hint in the title (*The Sciences of Man.*)

Moreover, the proposed objective of the Symposium—as reflected in the title—was not achieved. Richard Macksey admits this in his concluding remarks. While the plurality of critical languages were considered and acknowledged, the intention of constituting as a frame for discussion, the general methodology of the human sciences was defeated, mainly because many of the scholars did not agree upon a common critical terminology. Lacan and Goldmann even quarrelled over the term 'subject' (Macksey 2007: 121). The year 1966 had multiple significances historically and academically. For the Johns Hopkins University at Baltimore, it was the 90th anniversary of its inception. For the whole world, 1966 marks the 900th anniversary of the Battle of Hastings (fought on a single day in the very month of October in which the French army led by William, the Duke of Normandy, defeated the Anglo-Saxon army of King Harold). 14 October 1066 is marked in history as the day of the French conquest of the English-speaking world. The consequences of this historic event include the end of English aristocracy, the liberation of the Catholic Church in England, the massive exodus of the English elite and perhaps the most apparent and decisive one, the absolute transformation of the English language.

The Baltimore Symposium of 18-21 October 1966 is often considered as another attempted invasion (albeit intellectually) of the English-speaking world by the French. As David Lodge points out, it was here that "the American academic world experienced at first hand the challenge of the new ideas and methodologies in the humanities generated by European structuralism." He also calls Derrida's text as belonging to "a historic moment in the traffic of ideas between Europe and America" (107). Derrida's theory of deconstruction 'arrived' in America just at the right moment to attract the right kind of critics (Norris 1991: 91) and dominated the academic world for the next couple

of decades (the best example being the highly influential ‘Yale school’ of criticism with such important names as Paul De Man, Hillis Miller, Harold Bloom and Geoffrey Hartman). A prolific writer and speaker, Derrida travelled widely until his death in 2004 (also in October), disseminating ideas and arguments and impacting a number of disciplines and practices. Derrida’s critical language has certainly invaded the human sciences and changed their discourses forever.

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3

Ce qui arrive (réellement) **The Curious Relationship of the Word and the World, Against a Background of Discussing Deconstruction with Many Caveats**

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... I believe that every conceptual breakthrough amounts to transforming, that is to deforming, an accredited, authorized relationship between a word and a concept, between a trope and what one had every interest to consider to be an unshiftable primary sense, a proper, literal or current usage – Jacques Derrida, “The Time of a Thesis: Punctuations” 40-1.

Not surprisingly, introductions and companions to, and commentaries on, Jacques Derrida/Deconstruction, true to their subject matter, are unusually self-reflexive and self-conscious, if not narcissistic, and take a via *negativa* (the analogue with Apophatic theology lightheartedly indicates an impossibility in defining deconstruction akin to that of defining God!) in attempting to fulfil the task of exposition. They also showcase, by contagion, paradoxes and contradictions, and have an understandable overdose of caveats. This is due perhaps to the understanding that deconstruction is, with its ingrained self-applicability, conceptually *singular*, to use the adjectival form of one of Derrida’s favourite words – singularity. An endeavour to define deconstruction is said to be a semantic contradiction and goes against the very (anti-foundationalist) spirit of what the term tends to signify – a philosophical position, a concept, a school, a literary theory, a critical practice, a method of reading, or whatever it seeks to ‘pin down.’ According to Derrida, “Prefaces, along with forewords, introductions, preludes, preliminaries, preambles, prologues and prolegomena, have always been written, it seems, in view of their own self-effacement” (Derrida1981: 7). As for his own definitions (or strategic non-definitions), Derrida says: “I have often had occasion to define deconstruction as that which is – far from a theory, a school, a method, even a discourse, still less a technique that can be appropriated – at bottom *what happens or comes to pass [ce qui arrive]*” (1995: 17; emphasis as in the source). The crux of what actually happens – *ce qui arrive* – with deconstruction is mired in the cautionary elusiveness and self-reflexive illustrations of elucidatory enterprises and labyrinthine cautionary tales, probably

triggered by Derrida's own enigmatic, quasi-cryptic writing and contestations of "conventional semantic values" (Wolfeys 1998:3), both, more often than not, depriving the reader of a handle on the object. One may, however, for heuristic purposes, go against the caveats and cautions, stick one's neck out, and find a point of departure in one, if not the chief, of the principles of deconstruction – *a conceptual negotiability innate to any discourse, or a tension intrinsic to the concept* (or conceptual constants which Derrida calls *philosophemes*) *itself*. Derrida's examples for intra-conceptual tension popularly include 'the gift' and 'the center'.

The vocabulary of any language consists of a hierarchy of concepts. On the top of the hierarchy are what I call macro-concepts (for example, the concept of life, declared a humanist abstraction in the post-structuralist critical climate). These are generalized ideas whose particular manifestations are expressed using micro-concepts (e.g., a life of suffering). These micro-concepts are macro-concepts to concepts which are still lower in the hierarchy. In the example here, one might ask: what kind of suffering? The answer to the question (e.g., poverty, starvation, confinement, torture, or destitution) is the corresponding micro-concept to the macro-concept immediately above in the hierarchy. The lower one moves down the hierarchy, the more particular the reference becomes. Particular meanings, or ideas, recalled by the mind, are particularized ramifications or instantiations of the concepts. When one looks from the top of the hierarchy, one can see only abstractions. This is inevitable as these are abstracted from concrete, particular instances of what the concept signifies in experience. The macro-concept bears only an inadequate 'trace' of the particular experience. When one speaks of a macro-concept, the micro-concepts which are invoked have among them only what Ludwig Wittgenstein might have called a "family resemblance" (Familienähnlichkeit). Différance and the "play" (jeu) of signifiers are a story of such conceptual ramifications – ramifications that destabilize any putative generality.

Pedigrees and Descendants

The above narrative of deconstruction entails much. On the one hand, deconstruction has revealed an unsettling feature of language by which every statement is infused with an in-built instability, undecidability, and alogicality which compromise its truth-claims. Derrida has indeed driven a wedge of alogicality (or, logic of illogicality, if you will) into the Western philosophical tradition. His philosophical legacy, though it spans several disciplines and objects of study, I believe, rests primarily on his critique of *logocentrism* – "metaphysics of presence" – which, according to him, characterizes most of Western philosophical thought. The Johannine Gospel, written for a Greek audience, might serve as a point of reference for Derrida's own Graeco-Judaic intellectual pedigree. The Gospel famously opens as follows: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The Greek word for the Word is *Logos*. St John used it to establish the pre-existence of the Son in the Holy Trinity before Jesus's earthly mission: "As a designation of Christ, therefore, *Logos* is peculiarly felicitous because, (1) in Him are embodied all the treasures of the divine wisdom, the collective 'thought'

of God . . . ; and, (2) He is, from eternity, but especially in His incarnation, the utterance or expression of the Person, and ‘thought’ of deity. . . . In the Being, Person, and work of Christ Deity is told out” (Notes to the passage in the Scofield Reference Bible). Greek Logos means word, speech, knowledge, wisdom, thought, governing reason, organizing principle, and so on. Above all, in the Biblical sense, it signifies: 1) a thought or concept; and 2) the expression or utterance of thought. The word itself suggests an identity of thought/concept and the utterance of the thought, which guarantees a stable meaning. Derrida reveals a rupture between the two. His inversion and de-binarization of speech/writing as well as its near-replacement with the idea of “contamination” by the “other” (“nonsynonymous substitutions”; *Derrida Reader* 65) flows from such ruptured identities. Every thought, idea, or concept is contaminated by other thoughts, ideas, and concepts. That the signifier and the signified have only a gliding relationship – “chance meetings” (Wolfreys 1998:103) – has always been a feature of language and a condition of writing.

On the other hand, rather than articulating a ‘weakness’ in language, deconstruction celebrates its unlimited onto-semantic potential. The text renews itself across spaces and ages due to its ‘textuality.’ Many ‘worlds’ (even futuristic ones) are implicit in language, which are invoked when the reader meets the signifiers on the page. *Iterability*, Derrida’s polyglottal portmanteau term, describes the capacity of signs and texts to be repeated in new situations and to produce new meanings (“Signature Event Context”) in their “transactions.” The term encapsulates Sanskrit *itera* (other) and Latin *iterare* (to repeat). For instance, upon first reading the Biblical passage “For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath” (Matthew 25: 29), I, born in a Syrian Christian household in the left bastion of Kerala, thought, particularly in the light of the popular characterization of Jesus Christ as the first socialist, that it was a critique of acquisitive society and of the socio-economic condition in which the rich got richer and the poor, poorer. Educational psychology may find in the passage a metaphor for the additive character of learning. A passage signifies differently because of the relatability of the words to multiple contexts, with different implications for different life-worlds. This potential of language lies at the core of all possibilities of cross-cultural concretization of texts. Goneril and Regan appear to speak like Indian daughters (or daughters-in-law)! In other words, deconstruction affirms the capacity of language for creating unanticipated symmetries with auctorially unforeseen experiential worlds. Of course, whether signs without human intention constitute language at all is debatable – a question that pertains to the ontology of language. For instance, for Stephen Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels, this is only a semblance of language (728).

That deconstruction is not mere literary theory is implied in the elusiveness of the elucidatory endeavours alluded to at the beginning. In a sense, the history of literary theory is itself a narrative of changing relationships among four entities – language, text, the self, and the world. Two key tendencies of 20th century theory – linguistic/textual deconstruction and ideology-critique (a sub-type of what Paul Ricoeur, another French

philosopher, and Derrida's near-contemporary, terms the "hermeneutics of suspicion"¹ take off from two insights articulated by Friedrich Nietzsche, one of the demythologizers of modernity along with Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud. If Derrida is heir to the former, Foucault is one of the several intellectual descendants of the latter. The 'linguistic turn' can probably be traced back to the following statement of Nietzsche's, included in *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense* (1873). He asks:

What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms – in short, a sum of human relations which, poetically and rhetorically intensified, became transposed and adorned, and which after long usage by a people seem fixed, canonical and binding on them. Truths are illusions which one has forgotten are illusions, worn-out metaphors which have become powerless to affect the sense. (Nietzsche 1973: 46).

Derrida echoes Nietzsche when he discusses the figures of "the structure" and "the center": "The history of metaphysics . . . is the history of these metaphors and metonymies"; and Heidegger in the following sentence: "Its matrix . . . is the determination of Being as presence in all senses of the word" (Derrida 1978:279). The fixation, institutional, linguistic, philosophical and cultural, that Nietzsche mentions is the target of deconstruction, which reveals it to be the subject of lexico-conceptual *jeu*. Elsewhere, Nietzsche demonstrates how apparently neutral and rational concepts such as truth and morality were originally matters of political expediency, ruses contrived to serve the interests of particular groups. For instance, in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887) he showed how Judaeo-Christian ennoblement of values of meekness, humility, poverty, suffering, and piety was a craftily sublimated expression of slaves' *ressentiment* (often translated as 'resentment') against, and ideological revenge upon, their masters. That is why Nietzsche calls for a 'revaluation' of all values. The suspicion of much contemporary theory and criticism is directed, quite legitimately, at concealed ideologies. We shall briefly discuss the relationship between deconstruction and contestation of ideologies in the final section of this essay.

The Auto-Epiphany of Western Thought

In any case, deconstruction occupies a pertinent place in the history of the Occident's attempts at world-conceptualization.² The world-process is intricate, complex, multi-stranded, tantalizingly unwieldy, and often inscrutable. As such, for reasons of cognitive economy, the temptation to make sense of it using "single-entity tropes" has

¹"Hermeneutics of suspicion" (Ricoeur 34) is a mode of interpretation which aims to reveal disguised meanings: "This type of hermeneutics is animated by . . . a skepticism towards the given, and it is characterized by a distrust of the symbol as a dissimulation of the real" (6). Ricoeur contrasts this kind of hermeneutics with the "hermeneutics of faith," concerned with the "restoration" of meanings. He designates the demythologizers of modernity—Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud – "masters of suspicion," who "look upon the contents of consciousness as in some sense 'false'; all three aim to transcend this falsity through a reductive interpretation and critique" (6).

²For those who are interested in such a long history of Western world-theorizing endeavours, a key work is Richard Tarnas's *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas that have Shaped Our World View* (2010).

been quite strong in Western intellectual history. Ancient religion provided the earliest trope in the form of omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent deities. This propensity extends to modern concepts as diverse as Friedrich Hegel's Absolute Spirit, whose "outworking" or unfolding is both the progress of consciousness and of human history; Arthur Schopenhauer's Will (all striving); Henri Bergson's *élan vital* (vital impetus); Oswald Spengler's inner historical directionality of cultures, and Charles Darwin's natural selection, albeit with limited explanatory ambitions. One of the tendencies in this history has been the self-reflexive turn to the human subject, mental principles (à la Immanuel Kant) and cultural, linguistic, and representational schemata as the ground of world-theorization. Now where does deconstruction stand in this long history? Derrida and deconstruction may be argued as representing a climactic problematization of this history of world-theorizations. We shall briefly explore how. What language captures is only an abstract, limited in multiple senses, of the world process (the world in its broadest conceptions and in the largest ontological sense). The abstract is haunted by what it cannot capture, foresee, or limit, by the proliferent *excess* of the world-process, plurality of experience, shiftability of modes of being, the intricacies of many a *Lebenswelt* (reality as actually organized and experienced by an individual subject), and the world's extensive anastomosis in time, space, and consciousness. If we reckon only the word, we can see only the "differential fraying" in language. Deconstruction reveals the gaping gulf that opens between *world-conceptualization* (in language) and *world-excess* – an assertion of the latter against a whole self-assured history of the former. This 'hauntological' inevitability, whether acknowledged or not, is the *auto-epiphany* (if not an anti-epiphany) of Western thought, and, in this sense, deconstruction may be classed in the same category, though they belong to different domains of knowledge and despite internal differences, as Thomas Kuhn's "paradigm shift", Werner Heisenberg's "uncertainty principle", and Albert Einstein's "theory of relativity".

The Things-Work-on-Their-Own Bandwagon

Both structuralism and post-structuralism reveal another tendency in the aforementioned history. In the humanities in general, and in literary studies in particular, we increasingly notice a tendency to deny agency and to examine dynamic human reality in terms of impersonal systems and codes. Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of language, immediate precursor to Derrida's, is a modern example. Perhaps this is part of the (unconscious?) scientific aspirations of the humanities (conversely, the sciences might have humanistic aspirations), embedded in the anxieties of the discipline(s). Consider Terry Eagleton's summary of Formalism, which typifies the tendency:

The literary work was neither a vehicle for ideas, a reflection of social reality nor the incarnation of some transcendental truth: it was a material fact, whose functioning could be analysed rather as one could examine *a machine* [emphasis added]. It was made of words, not of objects or feelings, and it was a mistake to see it as the expression of an author's mind. Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, Osip Brik once airily remarked, would have been written even if Pushkin had not lived (2-3).

The 'things-work-on-their-own' bandwagon has been on the move for quite a few centuries of Western intellectual history across disciplines – religious studies, linguistics,

semiology, anthropology, literary criticism, and cultural theory. In fact, the tendency has been prevalent alongside its opposite in many epochs. The world emerged and goes on, on its own; there is no first cause or a prime mover. Language works on its own; there is no intention. We do not speak language; language speaks us. The text creates meanings on its own; the author is irrelevant. Discourse creates subjects; the question of subjectivity does not arise. Everything works on its own. Probably this was an offshoot of Deism³ and the “Disenchantment of the World” (Max Weber’s *Entzauberung der Welt*).⁴

Literary critics also became eager to deny the human agential dynamics underlying most phenomena. With this end in view, literary criticism borrowed avidly from other disciplines, linguistics (Ferdinand de Saussure) and anthropology (Claude Lévi-Strauss) in particular. Choice, intention, and agency were abandoned. Probably, this was the result of a disappointment with the soft, effeminate character, or image, of the discipline. In the form of structuralism, criticism began to be “concerned with structures, and more particularly with examining the general laws by which they work” (Eagleton 1996:82). Poems, myths, and other narratives came to be seen as structures. Food, clothing, kinship, language, and narrative were systems of signs. The humanities abandoned the human element: “The mind which does all this thinking is not that of the individual subject: myths think themselves through people, rather than vice versa. They have no origin in a particular consciousness, and no particular end in view” (Eagleton 1996: 90). Structural Marxism, which curiously combined the mechanistic logic with political engagement, also continued the legacy of de Saussure and Lévi-Strauss:

As far as a science of human societies goes, . . . individuals can be studied simply as the functions, or effects, of this or that social structure – as occupying a place in a mode of production, as a member of a specific social class, and so on. But this of course is not at all the way we actually experience ourselves. We tend to see ourselves rather as free, unified, autonomous, selfgenerating individuals; and unless we did so we would be incapable of playing our parts in social life. For [Louis] Althusser, what allows us to experience ourselves in this way is ideology (Eagleton 1996:149).

The latest entrant to the things-work-on-their-own network is the post-structuralist theory of textuality. “To write” is an intransitive verb. It has neither an object nor a subject; the author is ‘dead’.

³Deism restricted the deity to creation, and envisioned a universe that works on its own uniform and impersonal laws.

⁴Using a phrase borrowed from Friedrich Schiller, “Disenchantment of the World” (*Entzauberung der Welt*), Weber outlined a process which Western civilization had been experiencing for several millennia, and reached a highpoint with the scientific revolutions of modernity. In Weber’s work, the phrase denotes, on the one hand, a development within the domain of religion from magic to paths to salvation completely devoid of magic, and on the other, an understanding of the world’s occurrences increasingly by reference to natural forces, which are humanly controllable by rational calculation, physical laws, and mechanical principles than to magical and supernatural powers (Weber/Kalberg xxii-xxiii). The second of the two senses is what matters to the present discussion.

“Put a Pin in That Chap, Will You?” Deconstruction in Critical Practice

To the philosopher’s objection (à la Rodolphe Gasché’s⁵) that literary-critical use of deconstruction is not philosophical enough, the critic may respond by pointing out (rightly or otherwise) that what deconstruction seeks to identify in discourse – conceptual negotiability and/or intra-conceptual tension – has always been there. When ancient deconstructive thought as old as *pharmakon* (remedy, poison, and scapegoat) reaches Derrida post a Heideggerian detour of fundamental ontology (Being in itself – *das Sein* as opposed to *das Seiende* – precursor to the critique of “presence”) and several other unimmediate antecedents, what makes the movement momentous, at least to the literary critic, is the new reading – something which prompts J. Hillis Miller (1987) to describe deconstruction as “nothing more or less than good reading as such” (10), or reduce it to the rhetorical analysis of literary texts. Is deconstruction just another kind of ‘good’ reading? Is it like any other method of reading, like say Feminist, Marxist, Psychoanalytic, and Postcolonial ones? Each of them destabilizes a hermeneutic ground. It is easy to categorize Derrida alongside the other “masters of suspicion” whom Ricoeur lists. Derrida re-examines the fundamentals of thought, language, conceptualization, writing, and reading, and breaks up the critical ground, which was for long taken for granted. But can language as ground be considered on par with patriarchy, reason, truth, consciousness, epistemes? Perhaps Feminist, Marxist, Psychoanalytic, and Postcolonial criticisms may be deemed deconstructions of the respective discourses they contest. But Derridean interrogations, far from the exclusive impression their technicization conveys, plough the very ground of all knowledge and discourse, and involves a meta-engagement. Small wonder it has served as the conceptual fount, and perhaps a natural ally, of all critical contestations, despite the charge of it being ahistorical and apolitical.⁶ For literary criticism, deconstruction has been, among other things, a seductive invitation to unleash the protean energies of the text,⁷ a banner of revolt against the tyranny of closure. Origins, boundaries, axioms, protocols, and hermeneutic economies ceased to count. Its own advertising strategy presented the phenomenon as the *Poltergeist* (etymologically, rattling spirit) of literary criticism, a threateningly powerful force which departments of English had to reckon with. Deconstruction also legitimized an uncanonical idiom in which those who glamorously practised it could write about it. However, as Miller points out, Derrida and Paul de Man do not offer a method but provide us with “exemplary acts of reading” (Miller 1995: 80): “Deconstruction, like any method of interpretation, can

⁵See Gasché 22-57

⁶Deism Drucilla Cornell (1992) responds to the charge thus: “Derrida’s text leaves us with the infinite responsibility undecidability imposes on us. Undecidability in no way alleviates responsibility. The opposite is the case. We cannot be excused from our own role in history because we could not know so as to be reassured that we were ‘right’ in advance” (169).

⁷The title of this section is borrowed from the “Proteus” episode of James Joyce’s high-modernist magnum opus *Ulysses* (1922), where Stephen Dedalus probes “the inelucatable modality” of thought and experience through the visible and the audible. The Homeric title of the episode comes from the name of the slippery god of water bodies in Greek mythology, whose adjectival form has been repeatedly used as a metaphor for the slipperiness of language and deconstruction – their refusal to be pinned down.

only be exemplified, and the examples will of course all differ” (Miller 1995: 231). Let us look at a Derrida example. In ‘Ulysses Gramophone’, a piece to which Gasché grants the status of a philosophical text (“property of philosophy”), Derrida offers a non-linear reading of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. He shows how the book’s elements can coalesce in unconventional, non-linear ways to create meaning: Molly Bloom’s life-affirming “yes” in the interior monologue of the ‘Penelope’ episode, the coda of the book, is read as a belated response to her husband’s telephone call to Alexander Keyes in “Aeolus”. It may be argued that Derrida is able to link Leopold Bloom’s telephone call and Molly’s “yes” because *Ulysses* is a fragmentary text whose elements can coalesce in multiple ways (a cluster of dots which can be joined into several figures) and that this cannot happen with all texts. The text itself self-reflexively illustrates the possibility of creating meaning through making connections between its apparently unrelated parts. Where there is no logical connection, there could be a symbolic one. Within the linear narrative, when Martha Clifford, Leopold Bloom’s epistolary love-interest, makes a typographical error in her anonymous letter to him, he pursues its semantic possibilities to affirm the plenitude of the human world around in contrast to the poverty of the other world. She writes: “I called you naughty boy because *I do not like that other world* [instead of ‘word’; emphasis added]. Please tell me what is the real meaning of that word? [sic]” (Joyce 1984:5.244-6).⁸ Bloom responds to the error several pages later in the Prospect Cemetery, ironically also conveying Joyce’s ‘this-worldly’ religious attitudes: “There is another world after death named hell. I do not like that other world she wrote. No more do I. Plenty to see and hear and feel yet. Feel live warm beings near you. Let them sleep in their maggoty beds. They are not going to get me this innings. Warm beds: warm fullblooded life” (6.1001-5).

The self-consciously anticipative hermeneutic of *Ulysses* prevents an apparently invalid textual element from remaining invalid by hooking it elsewhere, thus providing an alternative validating logic. In a linear narrative, the elements follow one after the other (*nacheinander*). The reader needs to keep them mentally one next to the other (*nebeneinander*).⁹ The text is self-righting because it is self-writing. Owing to the intra-textual magnetism – the potential of the textual elements to club, to hook themselves elsewhere, and self-validate – we can say: ‘a text of genius makes no mistakes. Its errors are coalitional and are the portals of meaning’ (after Stephen’s psycho-biographical statement on Shakespeare: “A man of genius makes no mistakes. His errors are volitional and are the portals of discovery”; 9.228-9).

The most lauded of “Joyce effects” (the title of Derek Attridge’s work) consists in the change he ushered in our conception of language – particularly, his role in foregrounding the “plurisignificatory” character of the word. Perhaps, in a lighter vein, we can say:

⁸ In keeping with the tradition of using the Gabler edition of *Ulysses*, I have cited episode and line numbers instead of page numbers.

⁹ *Nacheinander* and *nebeneinander* are terms which feature in Stephen’s interior monologue in the “Proteus” episode, and are a reference to the German aesthetician Gottfried Ephraim Lessing’s work *Laocoön* (1766).

Had there been no Joyce, there would have been no Derrida – a mystical apostolic succession! This may be an exaggeration, but, as Julian Wolfreys observes, “What James Joyce may be said to represent for Derrida is a certain optimum mobilization of equivocity and undecidability, which Derrida acknowledges in ‘Two Words for Joyce’” (Wolfreys 1998:39). The two words in question are from *Finnegans Wake* (1939) – “He war” – which Derrida subjects to deconstructive analysis: “He [Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker] makes war” and “He was” (based on the German meaning of ‘war’). With its use of multiple languages, portmanteau words (in the manner of Lewis Carroll), puns and a thoroughly unconventional syntax, the *Wake* came in handy for Derrida. Joyce used puns and portmanteau words as a means of packing enormous masses of telegraphic allusions into a short space in the *Wake*:

... we grisly old Sykos [psychoanalysts] who have done our unsmiling bit on alices [young girls, also an allusion to Carroll’s Alice books] when they were yung [German word for young, also a reference to Carl Gustav Jung, who treated Joyce’s daughter] and easily freudened [frightened, and a reference to Sigmund Freud] in the penumbra of the procuring room and what oracular compression we have had to apply to them (115).

The pleasure of reading the book lies in the possibility of participating in its meaning-making dynamism. Reading becomes a kind of puzzle-solving.

The examples from Joyce given above illustrate two deconstructive features of texts. First, as the *Wake* passages show, an undermining of “mimetic correspondence” (Wolfreys 1998:17) by what Derrida would call “excesses” and “supplements.” As Christopher Norris (1988) puts it, “To deconstruct a text is to draw out conflicting logics of sense and implication, with the object of showing that the text never exactly means what it says or says what it means” (7). Second, as is the case with the *Ulysses* examples, they demonstrate how the apparently allogical intra-textual coalitions produce (or destabilize) meaning, which also points to the etymology of the word ‘text.’ The English word ‘text’ is derived from the Latin infinitive *texere*, which means ‘to weave.’ ‘Textus’ is the past participle form meaning ‘woven.’ Meaning and *différance* are a function of textual weaving and unweaving. As Wolfreys rightly points out, “meaning is context-dependent and the product of a structure rather than a discrete unit, and rather than there being any full meaning inherent in any one term” (41-2), and “rhetoric performs its own structure” (22).

What does deconstruction mean for literary research? If we go by Hillis Miller’s clarification “Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself” (Miller 1976:341), the following may appear to be the case. We know the finding in advance. What is singular about a particular deconstructive enterprise is merely the demonstration. The thrill lies in the process of discovering or revealing the ways in which the text has ‘dismantled itself.’ If this is the case, it is return of ‘deductive (syllogistic) reasoning’ in another form: All humans are mortal; Socrates is human; so he is mortal. Analogously, textual meaning is undecidable. This is true of work *x* (*x* = *The Aeneid*, *The Canterbury Tales*, *As You Like It*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Middlemarch*, *Women in Love*, *The Wasteland*, *One Hundred*

Years of Solitude. . .). This is where the self-deconstructive character of deconstruction becomes significant. Derrida illustrated this by an estranging inconsistent emphasis on his own “master-words” so that they did not “congeal” (Spivak 1974: lxxi). They become mere ‘figures.’ Deconstruction consciously takes a position against programmatic replication, and emphasizes irreducible singularity: “We cannot bring an idea of reading to a text ahead of its being read. The particularity of the text precludes the possibility of a theory or method of reading” (Wolfreys 1998: 50-1). Deconstruction is different every time we invoke it in relation to a text. As Wolfreys urges, “we have constantly to be on our guard against falling into those programmatic, conventional, institutionally approved modes of thought where everything is decided in advance, everything is planned and given some kind of anticipatory articulation, a strait jacket with which to welcome the guest” (190). The guest could be the text or deconstruction itself.

The redeeming feature of deconstruction is that it is a huge paradox. Fidelity to the rules of the game in practice undermines the theory of the game. Even as we recognize its ontological slipperiness, we cannot let go its terminology. Deconstruction has proven itself a vividly illustrative example of the ability of any idea to turn on itself. Its legacy lies (no pun intended) in this admirable paradox. That is why Geoffrey Bennington (1993) maintains that the only way of respecting Derrida’s thought is to betray it (316). The legacy of deconstruction for academia is a culture of perpetual (self-) questioning. It has provided a repertoire to approach the word and the world with scepticism. If, today, we unfortunately find that scepticism is mistaken for critical intelligence, fortunately the unwritten maxim itself is liable to such self-questioning.

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4

Derrida and Contemporary Media Understanding

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This intervention on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Jacques Derrida's 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' (1966) seeks to explore Derrida's less widely circulated meditation on varied cultural, political, aesthetic and ethical practices relating to contemporary media technologies. Derrida's thoughts on communication, I propose, straddle the hermeneutic of suspicion and also the hermeneutics of recovery. This article has five different parts to it and all of them seek to read Derrida not merely in relation to his philosophy of deconstruction but foreground his thoughts on media technology quite independently of his overarching explanatory framework. The first section deals with the near absence of Derrida in the discipline of Communication Studies, the second deals with Derrida as a media theorist, the third with Derrida as a fellow poststructuralist alongside Jean Baudrillard and Paul Virilio, the fourth with Derrida's pronouncements on teletechnologies, and the last section with the conversation that Derrida had with the philosopher Bernard Stiegler on technology, including media technologies, at large.

Communication Studies

I hope to provide a particular genealogy of Communication Studies. In the US, it arose as an inter-war discipline and came to address the rapid deterioration of public space alongside technological advances in industrial production and circulation of cultural-economic goods. Prior to the war years, there was a split between Mass Communications Departments and Speech Departments in American Universities.

In some sense, the split between Media Studies and Rhetorics was not of the philosophical kind. We could say that this division between Speech and Mass Communications Departments was based on a Cartesian mind and body distinction which was roughly translated as a division between the Humanities and Social Sciences, the subjective sciences vis-a-vis the objective sciences. The aspiration of the Mass Communications Departments was to become a full-fledged discipline within the objective social sciences. Unlike in Europe, where issues relating to public opinion and journalism were discussed within the frame of change, Mass Communications in the US was resolutely concerned with order and value consensus.

Speech was seen as an embodied form of communication and technological media was considered to be a disembodied form of communication. In this tradition, Speech was

regarded as intrinsically connected to thought and therefore distinctively human and impregnably rational. Body/Matter/technology were perceived as lacking the potential to transform itself but it could re-present thought in a less interiorized, delayed, and relayed and become the Other of thought. At a philosophical level, Communications Studies had the burden of reinforcing matter/body as a passive recipient of form and content. Hence, in that tradition of positivist empiricism, body/matter is treated as unthinking and therefore unbecoming substances or substances that are denied existence/being. Here again, Toronto scholars like Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan made a different contribution and addressed, in their own way, the issue of materiality of the medium and also to some extent the issue of ontology of objects. Until very recently, media scholars have rarely looked at the affective assemblage of people, machines, and discourses as producing a form of empiricism that cannot be adequately evaluated through the framework of a positivist social sciences. Affect Studies is yet to make inroads in the discipline of Communications. Despite this somewhat variegated inheritance of the discipline, the discipline still heavily displays an anthropocentric and phonocentric disposition.

In India, the discipline has largely an applicative understanding, from servicing what was known as a mixed economy to becoming an appendage to the neoliberal project, media has been designed in order to serve the interests of the powerful market located within the space of national, regional and local interests. For some obvious and not so obvious reasons, theory has been relegated to a few elite institutions. There is hardly any funding for theory-laden work while there is visible support for interventionist work like community radio, health communication and so on.

However, in the last decade or so, film study scholars have used interesting theoretical tools to understand popular culture in India. They mostly depend on Neo-Marxists like Louis Althusser, or Freudians like Jacques Lacan, or post-structuralists like Michel Foucault, but rarely Derrida. Cultural Studies, for some reason, has not particularly taken to Continental philosophy of this tradition. There seems to be three kinds of work in India (Marxist, Feminist, and Dalit) and they borrow heavily from a hermeneutic of suspicion rather than a hermeneutic of recovery. On the issue of support for French cinema, vis-à-vis the Hollywood commercial cinema, Derrida had argued in support of French cultural production. In this instance, we find Derrida affirming French cinematic production and therefore we find a hermeneutics of recovery being deployed. It is a heresy to say that Derrida is indulging in a complete hermeneutics of recovery because Derrida is happy to occupy both spaces at the same time. His non-philosophical reading of media appears to be a ceaseless movement from a hermeneutics of suspicion to a hermeneutics of recovery. This movement can be seen as a conversation between what is representable and what is not.

Derrida as a Media theorist

Derrida's sustained meditation on technologically mediated public media has come out as a conversation between him and Bernard Stiegler. This conversation was recorded live, and its transcript appears as *Echographies of Television* in 2002 (originally published in

French in 1996). In this text, the two philosophers offer numerous proposals regarding technology in general and teletechnologies in particular. The term Mediagological deserves some attention, because it is nowhere defined in the conversation (or the text) between Stiegler and Derrida. It is possible that Derrida did not want to use Medialogy because that would undermine his philosophy of the play of difference. It seems as though he wants to retain the productive ambiguity of the term; the contrariness that he sees as an inherent attribute of any concept, the sheer heterogeneity and facilitate the plenitude of meaning that it can give rise to. Derrida wants his analytical tools to be productive rather than be simply representative of an artifactual reality. In complete contrast with Derrida's philosophy of deconstruction in his Magnum opus, *De la grammatologie* (1967), the post war years saw an increasing aspiration towards developing a formal grammar in the American tradition of articulating the discipline of communication.

Derrida attributes contrariness to other comparable terms like communication and information. Contrariness would mean that media technologies work within a complex to and fro movement where they may serve dominant interests but also contain the possibility of destabilizing the prevailing and persisting structures precisely through the artifice of teletechnologies. These teletechnologies work to produce a seeming closure (artificiality) and finite ways of speaking. But the structure and content of the closure while remaining more open to serve powerful interests generally, do not foreclose instances where teletechnologies produce gestures which leap out of the irrepressible present and point towards an inassimilable and unknowable future. The radical uncertainty and the almost over-conformist, predictable nature of mainstream media makes the media institution an open ended one for Derrida.

From a reading of *Echographies*, one can discern a conversation about the process, products, and experiences of media technologies, and the two hermeneutics I have already mentioned. By a hermeneutics of suspicion, I mean, Derrida's efforts to draw attention to the false artificiality of the mediatic experience but encourages us to proceed without forsaking for ourselves these novel resources involving live Television (and the videocamera), even while continuing to be guarded about its obfuscations. By a hermeneutics of recovery, Derrida, I think, cautions us not to exaggerate the simulacrum or the artificiality of the teletechnologies, lest the theory of simulacrum lead people to believe that events like the Gulf war did not really happen. Elsewhere, Derrida suggests how the density of teletechnologies made way for the fall of Berlin and how it occasioned a future to open itself up. In such instances of destabilizing the order, media regimes transform themselves and disinherit their political present and reorder the present. Derrida affirms the journalistic media and power of teletechnologies to produce a recalcitrant reality, a reality that cannot be appropriated by a dominant political-economic ethnocentric reality.

But Derrida remains optimistic while being cautious about the hegemonic design of these media technologies and their damaging effects. About media time, he argues, one should be open about its dual possibilities. After all, information and communication offer heterogeneous possibilities. In that sense, they may not merely serve the dominant interests. These technologies may also open up another time, and this time alongside

the time of artifactuality, produces a gesture' that cannot be formatted, calculated or interpreted in a dominant manner. A gesture is unprogrammable and therefore inaugurates a time that speaks of the future. The way that media makes a presentation of the present goes through a dramatic shift. This is what happened with Gorbachev or the Berlin Wall. The presentation of the present changed and therefore the present changed as well.

Derrida takes extraordinary effort to anticipate such an anachronous time, a time which gives birth to a future, to a democracy to come. He says that there is no way one can hope to perceive a horizon of expectation to anticipate this anachronous time. He calls it an arid, non-horizontal expectation because once you determine the other in advance, the other becomes assimilable. Derrida suggests one needs to prepare for such a moment by instantiating a condition of what he calls "unconditional hospitality" where the Other need not be assimilated into ones' family, religion or constitution. This affirmative opening of the Other through the experience of a non-synchronous mediatic time allows for the Other to be accepted in its irreducible singularity or Otherness.

If one were to think of desires as existing in a chaomastic state, and through the institutions of state, economy, religion and family, these desires get regulated, Derrida seems to be saying is that the media technologies' openness to an anachronous time allows for such desires to be expressed. In other words, media technologies play an important role in regulating, expressing or eliminating desires. The rhythm of media serves to demonstrate differential intensities and affect towards bodies, ideas, and objects. The facilitating of an anachronous time is also about changing the rhythm of media and therefore displaying different kind of intensities towards bodies, ideas, and objects. The materiality of media is not confined to tangible objects. Like Jean-Luc Nancy, Gilles Deleuze and others including Derrida have held that non-tangible objects like feelings or ideas also have intensities, they have the power to move bodies and shape matter. (No wonder then that Deleuze coined the term 'desiring machine'.) What kind of desiring machines are these media technologies? Do they empty our beings or enrich our beings? Are media machines used for representation or production? Do they curtail desires or liberate desires from social and psychic repression? Derrida thinks they are capable of doing both but he is inclined to affirm their positive potentialities. The affirming of technics is important for Derrida and one can see a hermeneutics of recovery operating in the reading of the experience of media technologies.

Derrida, Media and Poststructuralists

Poststructuralists thinkers have generally been inattentive to the human experience of contemporary media technologies, but thinkers like Baudrillard, Virilio and Derrida are an exception. They have intellectually and philosophically invested in a supposedly 'non philosophical object and process' popularly known as information and teletechnologies. They have discussed ways of interpreting the obtrusive and unobtrusive manner through which media technologies colonize our objective, subjective and unconscious dimensions of being. They are concerned with situating the mediated image within an aesthetic, political and philosophical horizon. The situated context is inclusive of the

image that is generated, recorded and transmitted at an incredible speed and which possesses capacities for synthetically producing artifactuality.

For Baudrillard, institutions of mass media function as agents of representations and not communication. In a sense, the communicated object and the represented object are intervened by an imaginary that cannot be solely attributed to cognition, logic or reason. Baudrillard holds an extreme view on the role of imaginary in the construction of meaning. Reality, for Baudrillard, has been replaced by a mass media instantiated system of signs. These signs have their own codes and styles of encryption. Baudrillard has suggested that the images people watch on satellite television cannot but be a simulacrum and one can never have access to the real because mass media resort to playing with their self generated signs. At some level, simulation imitates the difference between the true from the false, the real from the imaginary. These simulated signs do not have referents and therefore they do not lend themselves to any dialogical and public reasoning. Baudrillard would qualify the peculiar (simulated) reality that constitutes the public sphere as distinct from an Arendt or a Habermasian formulation of that public space as a discursively constituted reality.

Virilio has focused on how from the nineteenth century onwards, speed has become central to organizing warfare, economy, transportation and communication. For Virilio, nineteenth century is characterized as a period where acceleration is more important than the application of brakes in economy, polity, culture, and warfare. The use of lasers, satellites, and other computer aided mechanisms facilitate messages to travel at the speed of light. He theorizes how speed threatens to flatten human capacity to think, perceive and critique the technological dissemination of images. Virilio prophesizes that these images affect and erode the human faculty and subjectivity. For him, people who control speed also control power and it is the most contemporary form of holding power. Almost taking a technophobic approach, Virilio proposes that the audience are determined by the image and that they lack power to appropriate the technological produced-ness of the image in terms of accessing, processing, retrieving of information. Audience tend to inhabit the technologically constructed time and their being remains appropriated by the techno-economic order.

Derrida has occupied a middle ground between these extreme positions. While Derrida would agree with Baudrillard that media technologies are products of a fictional fashioning and that it serves the interests of the powerful, his proposal (through his sustained meditation in *Echographies*) is that media technologies are equally capable of subverting the rhythm, space, pace and other elements that generate the experience of reality. Human situations are such that one cannot escape the historically boundedness of our experience of the world, but that does not mean there exist no ruptures. It means that these ruptures do destabilize historically bounded experiences.

In effect, media technology regimes are sometimes open to becoming nomadic rather than operating as a discernible coherent entity, and homogeneity does not always inform the content and structures of such an artifactuality. Technology, at times has the possibility of disclosing or constituting the other and the term nomadic has been coined by Deleuze to talk about agents (the insane, artists, and others) who exhibit aggressive

creativity and cannot be easily appropriated by structures of state, economy or culture. In other words, technology may (sometimes) work against giant structures like Global capitalism, nation-state or patriarchy.

Unlike Virilio, Derrida would not want to believe that every invention was related to acceleration and to a new experience of speed. Although speed has been inscribed into capitalism and that relates to a new relation between speech and action, for Derrida, the race over speech or action will not remain as a closed affair and teletechnologies will allow for mutation of its own structures. In an altogether different context relating to nuclear war, Derrida had given a paradoxical call where he said that a 'call to slow down is also a call to move quickly'. A tension between a philosophy of action is proposed vis-a-vis a philosophy of abstraction or reflection. It is suggestive of a violence associated with thought and abstraction. Media theory should adequately deal with the cultural process associated with the ethically laden world of media experience. Theory should conjoin action, representation with production and desire with social liberation.

Derrida and Teletechnologies

Derrida's meditation on the intralinguistic relation between speech and writing is more widely known rather than his somewhat less pronounced and supposedly 'not so profound' intramedial relationship between words and images. As mentioned earlier, the philosophy of deconstruction has been embraced more by Literary Studies scholars rather than Media Studies scholars. The concepts that Derrida put forward (like arche-writing, trace, Pharmakon, gramme) have quasi transcendental characteristics, but the categories he proposed for studying electronic communication (phonographies, spectrographies, teletechnologies, mediagological) is historically bound and belong to the realm of commercially run institutions.

It may be surmised that Derrida is looking forward to a post-hermeneutic moment where intellectual analysis cannot be done in isolation but has to occur alongside the affective location of being in this world. This non-Cartesian methodology of breaking the division between thinking and being, mind and body, cognition and affect informs the non-philosophical conditions of theorizing the artifactuality of teletechnologies. Derrida's substantive thesis revolves around the unlocking of the force of matter/technology and the interweaving the force of thought with that of matter, thus leading to a demonstration of the *fuzziness* of the compartmentalization between matter and thought, body and mind, unconscious and consciousness.

There are two kinds of difference that Derrida is keen to examine with relation to teletechnologies. First, he examines the quantitative difference between writing and electronic production (Radio, Television, Cinema, Cyber-media). Electronically mediated images and texts are even more difficult to control because of its technological constructedness and the speed of its transmission through global, cyber-mediated networks. Unlike writing and print publishing of nineteenth century, the speed of teletechnologies is disproportionate to the process of human thinking and therefore it hampers critical engagement. Secondly, Derrida cites a qualitative difference between writing and electronic communication, a structural difference between the two. Where

writing records an enunciation, a televised image records the act along with what is enunciated. It gives the impression that it relays a pure presence, the presence of the body as well, and this presence is recorded by the sophisticated repetition machine.

The history of (technology of) writing has been associated with recording enunciations. Texts have the properties of being read without the presence of the person who has written or compiled the enunciations. For Derrida, the technology of writing and printing did not possess the capacity to carry the embodied act associated with enunciation. Act involves the body of the person, body displays an affective rationality very different from reflective rationality, and media personalities like Arnab Goswami tend to work with an affective surplus. Teletechnologies through 'live Television', allow people to watch the composition, recomposition and decomposition of the bodies of actors, agents, and subjects. The absence of bodies informs the technology of writing and the presence of bodies dictates the flow of images through electronic and satellite TV. It is entirely a different matter as to what kind of bodies are allowed inside the repetition machine, how certain bodily presentations are preferred and how certain forms of speaking are privileged over others. In that sense, artifactuality does not just confine itself to manipulation of thinking but also of acting, when it combines enunciation with the bodily act, it produces the experience of 'pure presence'. Following Aristotle, Derrida has always held that there cannot be an unmediated form of presence and therefore, the supposedly 'pure presence', enabled by the artifactuality of the technologies, has to be deconstructed. Indeed, Derrida believes that while media appropriate our gaze, the audience has the ability to re-appropriate that gaze and he refers to this subversive negotiation as expropriation.

First, let me give an example for media's capacity to constitute its own space and time. In the mid-1980s, an exemplary form of national belonging was achieved in most parts of mainland India through the satellite telecast of the mythological serial, Ramanand Sagar's *Ramayana*. Some political commentators argue that this serial ushered the BJP in as a major political force for the first time in postcolonial history. The experience of this serial has not been singularly studied for the kind of Hindu religiosity and forms of communality that it engineered. Again, this serial had modest ratings in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu where the anti-Brahmin movement held sway in the decades before and after Independence.

The processes of teletechnologies escape our attention. Subjects, agents, and consumers get caught in the homogenous time and space that these technologies create. The media time is calculated, formatted, and constrained. This time of the media works to satisfy and legitimize forces and interests. The 'national' is one such privileged interest. The space of the national is privileged over other spaces and within the space of the national, foreigners and immigrants are treated as the other. This national is always ethnocentric and it coexists with the interests of the market. The immigrant who has come to seek a livelihood is made to feel that the European nations have no role to play in his country's economic problems. Derrida has raised concerns with the way that the media construct the immigrant vis-a-vis the national citizen. Like Alan Badiou, he has argued for equal entitlement for the immigrant, mostly the Muslim immigrant. In our

country, we are yet to see any political leader or known intellectual coming in support of the Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants and their presence on the media is nearly absent. As Arvind Rajagopal has argued, the English media have displayed secular credentials but the language media has rarely hidden their hegemonic Hindu identity.

Very often, national television images seek to portray a form of national belonging tied to a homogenous space time, this striving for a smooth and silent space is a fantasy for any national cultural ideology. Anything that appears to rupture this technologically constructed national belonging is designated as noise and destroys the unattainable 'pure presence'. For instance, in several states belonging to North East India, Korean televisual material constitutes the ideal form and content. Young people from states like Nagaland and Mizoram tend to identify with the modern, Christian, popular and trendy Televised images that are disseminated through global networks. Many North East communities like Nagas, Kukis, Mizos, and others have their community spread out across the national borders and they inhabit a cultural geography that cuts across national boundaries. It is therefore impossible to realize the fantasy of 'pure presence' in non-mainland India. It is in that spirit that Mizos from the Myanmar border listen to more cable-based music originating from Aizawl, capital of Mizoram, in the federal state of India, than Burmese sponsored music. Border communities have their own transnational dynamic that differs from the time and space of nation-state. Borderland communities occupy a liminal space that transcend national space and homogenous time. It ties in neatly with Derrida's formulation that teletechnologies do not respect (always) a logocentric, national time and space.

For Derrida, the discussion on media technologies serves two purposes. Firstly, he addresses media technology to a broader concept and history of technology *per se*. Secondly, it directs deconstruction to the technical or industrial production of presence rather the philosophical or logocentric construction of presence. This industrial production of mediatic presence is what he terms as artifactuality or actuality or 'mediatic liveness'.

Derrida, while characterizing the teletechnologies as a set of institutions, professions, industries, practices and conventions, seeks to peg the artificial character of the produced-ness of the event with disaggregating its structure, limits, and possibilities. For instance, teletechnologies work with the limits of the camera, the urgency to organize the elements so as to fit news/journalistic genre, the restraint on the length of the story, the ideological and professional affinity of journalists and also the affiliating organizations. The controversy surrounding the videos of the JNU student leader Umar Khalid that described him as a Muslim terrorist was of the kind that questioned the professional norms, technologically (false) constructedness and the mediatic liveness of the image.

Derrida thinks that this artificial process of gathering, selecting and disseminating does not always distort the mediatic event. For Derrida, the event is already riven by spacing, absence and relationality, tending towards the fact that any event can never be complete in itself. It is only interpretation that tends towards the experience of wholeness or

completeness. But for Derrida interpretation cannot guarantee completeness. A general characteristic of these teletechnologies has been the deluge of representational forms and systems of communication where the spoken word survives without the speaker.

In one of the public obituaries that I recently attended of the legendary Carnatic musician Balamuralikrishana, his friends and disciples, apart from paying tributes to the maestro also mentioned how his absence can be contained and his music perpetuated by the sophisticated forms of contemporary technology that is available for recording and dissemination. They felt that the spectral presence outlives organic presence and the memory of the organic gets blurred with the memory of the technic. Balamuralikrishna's voice will outlive his finite body and the ageing of his voice will enter a phase with each technical invention that is generated to disseminate his music. The art of the memory of Carnatic music will be interrupted and the technic will animate the organic *memory* of his admirers and disciples in the future.

Stiegler and Derrida on the history and philosophy of technology:

Stiegler and Derrida are historians and philosophers of technology and they foreground a broader concept and a history of technology. The Greek word 'tekne' has been used to describe the means other than life itself, which helps to make things appear. It is something that intervenes between the material called clay and the product called pot. In a simplistic manner, the transformation of matter into form and content requires tekne. It is based on the assumption that matter has potential to transform itself, become something else, appear as a recognizable thing. How does the materiality of media translate itself into a recognizable form /content?

Pushing that formulation to its logical end, these two philosophers would agree that it was tekne which made possible (accidentally), the invention of man. The history of life was punctuated with this moment or passage but prior to that passage, life journeyed forth without it being described as human or animal, nature or culture. After the *homo sapien* became bipedal, the hand acted on the environment in a way that thought became possible. Thus began the connection with hand, tool, thought, language and speech. The hand that made tools and produced signs was already a hand that wrote without the aid of the pen. The writing that precedes speech still remain the most complex species inheritance.

Stiegler and Derrida separately affirm the work of the paleo-anthropologist André Leroi-Gourhan who sought to study the art and communication of France as it existed eleven thousand years ago. Amongst other things, Leroi-Gourhan proposed that the brain did not evolve on its own, bipedalism had initiated certain structural changes and this had consequences for the increase of brain volume in the hominids. The role of bipedalism in the "invention of the human" at a particular juncture was precisely due to the hominids ability to use tools or technics. For instance, going by Leroi-Gourhan's work, when *homo sapiens* became bipedal, the hand became free and developed tools and these tools were used to give form to inorganic matter. This action on the environment, through the use of tools, seems to have created an enlargement of the brain and therefore of thought and still later of speech centres. This approach provides

a non-anthropological account of the emergence of the human and also a non-ordinary origin of the human- it was action and the experience of action that led to the invention of the human. But the important point to be noted is that the exterior (action) shapes the interior (thought). In that sense, thought or consciousness is a product of the structural changes initiated by bipedalism. Bipedalism allowed the face to become free of the feeding and manipulative functions, thereby facilitating the structural specializations for the development of speech. Leroi-Gourhan made technology as entry point for understanding human cultures and suggested that technical activities as reflective of instrumental, communicative, symbolic and culturally orientated.

Following Leroi-Gourhan, Stiegler proceeds to formulate the question relating to technics and the invention of human as one of being co-determinative. It is co-determinative in the sense that the technic invented human and humans invented the technic, each being responsible for the other. It is for this reason that Heidegger gives extraordinary importance to the role of hand in the making of the human. The hand is not merely seen as important because of its tool making capacities but also because of its capacities as a signing, gesturing organ. It is a precursor to the mind.

Drawing upon and elaborating Leroi-Gourhan's work, both Stiegler and Derrida propose a technical history of memory. Plato had already made a division between internal memory and memory based on technics like writing, painting and so on. For Plato, the authentic internal memory associated with speech will be displaced onto external aids like writing. Stiegler and Derrida fiercely contest the compartmentalization of memory into the living and the dead. In Derrida's writing on Plato's *Pharmakon*, the living memory is referred to as anamnesis and the memory of the dead (through books, paintings, cave art and other such expressions) is referred to as hypomnesis. Derrida essentially says that it is difficult to consider the living memory as distinct from the memory of the dead and therefore it is impossible to separate the two.

Following the logic of Derrida in positing a technical history of media, Stiegler coins the term 'Grammatisation' to describe the role of technic in preserving the memory and experience of the authentic being. For Stiegler, Plato's abstract thought process associated with forms, cannot be experienced without the external aid of writing. So writing for Stiegler, is memory of a different kind but memory nevertheless, which is required for understanding the truth of the being.

So, there are two important issues pertaining to the origin of thought or logos: Firstly, thought or the interior is a product of action on the environment triggered through the aid of technic. Secondly, becoming human is described as a process of exteriorization. In his work *Technics and Time* (1998), Stiegler explores a history of time as epiphylogenesis, a preservation in technical objects of epigenetic experience, an experience that supposedly escapes biological evolution and human consciousness.

This preservation of epigenetic experience may be available in cave paintings, language (speech and writing) and it is not clear how they appear in modern technologies like cinema and digital media. At times, technology in the form of epigenetic trace,

discloses the uninterpretable and the non-conceptual spheres of our species. But for Derrida and Stiegler, the extent such an epigenetic experience can be disclosed in the later ideogram, pictography, phonetic literacy, painting and more recently photography including computer generated images is a question they grapple with. For Derrida, this would constitute fantasmatic material and our capacities for producing such fantasmatic material has incredibly increased with teletechnologies.

Archaeological anthropologists have interpreted cave paintings in Africa as an exercise in world-making by pre-historic man to interpret the world afresh or anew. In one of the cave paintings that had the image of hunters chasing animals and the weapons that were used, the archaeologist also found images of bodies that did not confirm to the archaeological remains. Worldmaking presupposes consecrating new objects and ideas and new forms of associations and relationalities. In that sense, art has been used not merely to reflect the world but to transform and provide an opening to a possibility of future(s). Art for them, then, had the capacity to draw them into a world of spiritual experience, an experience of spirituality minus the attendant scriptures, rituals and doctrines.

On understanding photographic image as a form of spectrography, Stiegler differs with Derrida. Stiegler does not fully agree with Derrida's insistence that photography has to be viewed as spectral traces. He brings Roland Barthes' understanding of intimate photographs as a form of an emanation, as inciting a tactile presence not received as a spectral artifact. It looks like when one is talking about the reception of the image in terms of seeing, the image as such may just be a trace but when one is examining the tactile nature of its reception, then the photograph does seem to connote an absolute referent.

Conclusion

Canonical Media Studies have remained faithful to the dominant disposition, to the referential, documentary, visible and graphical world. Among other things, there is a need to rejuvenate a spectral understanding of the mediatic experience. Jacques Derrida's writings on the media offer a way forward to explore the fantasmatic, chaotic cyber-mediated everyday world that we inhabit. To inherit from the dead, to be what we are, is at once a conversation between affirming and questioning the species and civilizational heritage. Media technology may be seen as an inexorable repository of the past and it attends to a many presence and announces future in ways that are not easily predictable. Along with Deleuze and the new materialists, Communication Studies, in order to gain cultural, political and pedagogic relevance should inherit and ethically claim Derrida as one of the most important thinkers of our times.

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5

Playing into Derrida's Hands A Teacher's Report on 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences'

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Traveller, there are no roads. The road is created as we walk it.

— Antonio Machado

No one teaches Derrida in either sense. If anything, we play into Derrida's hands in a delectable sense while discussing his classic 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences'. For the exercise, as readers find it, is both manipulative and exploitative as are all fun and games involving language. This seems rather exceptional for English in India, when Derrida reaches us in belated translation from the French, and disseminated by some of us across a multitude of languages and dialects in an Indian classroom, across predictably wide gulfs of incomprehension, ours and others'. The translation of this difference is perhaps what students in a class understand as play in their variously interpreted cultures. This article will gather some moments and patterns of discussion and discovery in an English classroom where young readers figure out how or why they are apt to play into Derrida's hands. It will also briefly reflect on monstrosity, the last word of Derrida's essay and what it was meant to suggest for readers through the 50 years of its progress. The courses to which the author refers now and then are "Just Reading," "Literary Criticism and Theory-II," and "Writers at Play"— all IV Semester MA courses he has been teaching at the UoH over 20 years or so.

I shall begin with the two assumptions that generally guide my teaching at advanced levels. First, even for the most accomplished readers, texts play insistently upon their vanities and professions of faith rather than make for the ideal conditions and values that ought to affect them as readers. In simple terms, no text ever changed or challenged the world completely for readers whose history of reading, far too deeply subliminal and complicatedly private to gauge, has already determined the world they would have made or transformed by the texts they read. (How else would you account for the homicide across the world by believers who religiously read the scriptures?) Second, texts that take this assumption to be axiomatic (like the most powerfully complex texts like Derrida's) cannily set their own protocols for reading. Caught unawares, the most naïve

and unsuspecting among us play into the hands of theorists, mostly with surprising gains and life-long confidence in negotiating grimmer and grimmer texts.¹

‘Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’ (SS&P) and my English classes

The courses where I have read SS&P with M. A. students are mainly three: a core/compulsory four-credit ‘Literary Criticism & Theory’ course, and two electives at the III or IV semester called ‘Writers at Play: Fun and Games in Literature’, and ‘Just Reading’. The compulsory survey reads texts in criticism and theory of the mid- and late twentieth century. Derrida appears there among the canonical English writers and critics, major representatives of movements, styles, and ideologies. The contrast in style and address is striking, for translation from the French is what translation does in English. Derrida makes my students think for example, why playing in French might be far more serious than playing in English. (No one ever thought words would be this serious when you played with them after Derrida.)² In the electives, however, SS&P is often cited in parts and drawn upon to illustrate a method, a style, a strategy, or someone’s ‘take’ on a time-worn theory or stance. Very rarely do students focus here on Derrida sharply to the total exclusion of other critics or positions. In other words, SS&P is selectively read in order to follow an argument or logically support a method such as *bricolage*. As a matter of fact, students are fascinated by the idea of *bricolage* which they somehow interpret to their advantage as little ‘theorists’ who are happy to work with odds and ends and so position themselves on the margins of larger playing fields of expert theorists. In the Fun and Games course students love Derrida playing on and off ‘centre,’ his making and unmaking structures by destabilizing them even as they begin to stabilize in our thinking. Cross-referencing this to Jorge Luis Borges, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Lewis Carroll, Emily Dickinson, William Blake, Raja Rao, or Stevie Smith saves them a few steps in their assigned reading and writing. The Just Reading course samples unusual texts (short and long) where SS&P’s digressions and asides compare favourably with philosophically probing texts that talk to/ among themselves: Gertrude Stein, William Gass, and a less known but enormously fascinating entry in a writer’s diary called ‘Myself Upon This Earth’ by William Saroyan. I have often marvelled at the

¹ “Playing into someone’s hands” means to end up doing what your opponent wants you to do, or having to do things unwittingly to your opponent’s advantage rather than yours. The adversarial implication in this phrase is not to be taken seriously although powerful rhetorical manoeuvres are undoubtedly agonistic. That readers often tend to lose this game is a foregone conclusion in theory; the more *suspicious* they are as readers, the more adept they become in losing gracefully.

² We have not quite seen or heard about the perils of imagining monolingual Anglo-American communities reading theorists like Derrida, although in *The Monolingualism of the Other* he suggests that language does not merely name and convey meanings but it *calls* us as speakers/addressees: “Like the hospitality of the host even before any invitation, language summons when summoned. Like a charge, it remains to be given, it remains only on this condition: by still remaining to be given” (67). I cannot imagine what *charge* Derrida’s language commands in its English translation— what *charge* it is given or taken in a monolingualist English transaction within a class rich in Indian linguistic traditions.

resourcefulness of our better students in answering an exam question on the play on just reading and Derrida's SS&P. Inevitably they understand this to be an invitation to ponder what we seem to be reading when we read a paper like SS&P— texts in tandem or in dialogue; writers in conference; the worlds so made by them; or just ourselves; and how just might our just readings be. Just so?

Real Questions

Two details of class behaviour strike me to be extraordinary when students exercise their minds differently— especially while reading texts like SS&P. First, no student ever seeks simple information/ mere clarification of details while discussing Derrida. Second, they seem to feel a sudden sense of having grown up, or having realized the urgency to respond maturely to ideas and topics at hand. In short, I have found few texts more challenging and motivating at once, more exacting and provoking scholarly insights than SS&P. Stages of growth in reading (beyond comprehension) among students have fascinated me always as a teacher. Reading SS&P, students shed scales of adolescence as it were. They graduate into responsible partners in a search when questions begin to sound deeper and more probing, particularly about language and how inadequately they have perceived it. This self-discovery is somewhat elegiac as well, both in the celebratory and revealing senses. As Joan Didion once put it, “when we mourn our losses we also mourn, for better or for worse, ourselves. As we were. As we are no longer. As we will one day not be at all.” The innocence we (our students) have lost *after* SS&P is not a bad thing at all. It is good to cherish such innocence however because Derrida's SS&P is itself an elegy of sorts on the masters of pre-Structural and the Structural he has outgrown, but has not quite either. At the heart of Derrida's elegy is a philosophy of mourning (after) —loss of selves you once were, selves now hardly reclaimable or restorative.³ It is all about relationships when a writer from the past enters conversing.⁴

SSP and Difference

In each of these courses, as I have indicated, SS&P is a different text, its *difference* brought home to students by the hourly-altering angles and approaches from which, or within which, a class looks at a problem, or depending upon the persistence of questions the class puts to it. Week by week, we seem to turn our conceptual kaleidoscope for newer and newer figures and patterns. “The quality and fecundity of a discourse,” cautions Derrida in SS&P, “are perhaps measured by the critical rigor with which this relation to the history of metaphysics and to inherited concepts is thought. Here it is a question both of a critical relation to the language of the social sciences and a critical responsibility of the discourse itself. It is a question,” adds Derrida, “of explicitly and systematically posing the problem of the status of a discourse which borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself” (93).

³ I quote Joan Didion from Megan Mayhew Bergman's column in *The Paris Review*.

⁴ This indeed is the gist and pith of another course I have often given, “Reading Relations”. As far as I can recall, the idea and inspiration for this work are Bernard Sharratt and his eponymous book.

As often as I can, I underline for students Derrida's "inherited concepts", "resources", and "heritage", and where/ how we position our immediate texts and ourselves vis-à-vis what we take to be our inherited conceptual resources and heritage. Given that all of us bring along completely different histories of reading, nothing remains static or centrist as *the* text before us. The following questions, with appropriate modifications, now seem natural for the class to consider. What is SS&P good *for* in reading texts and their worlds in this course? How illustrative are the passages of SS&P in thinking through relations involving new concepts and old habits of assimilating them? How closely aligned or how divergent are the discourses of the *human* and *social* sciences? Suppose we read SS&P only (or chiefly) in the light of Derrida's epigraph from Montaigne (*We need to interpret interpretations more than to interpret things*) what do we read *in* Derrida, and how open they think the key terms of his title to be amenable to interpretation?

Another word is in order about 'the histories of reading' of which we are ineluctable bearers. It has been remarked of the intellectuals who had fled Nazi Germany and migrated to the US institutions during the 1950s that they were not so much inventing new disciplines for the American universities as crossing borders and closing gaps in 'disciplining' their understanding of religion. The best example cited is that of Joachim Wach (1898– 1955) who could not study religion without looking up those shelves marked history, psychology, sociology, phenomenology, etc. while consulting his own phenomenal *bibliographical* self whose history of reading afforded him glimpses of not only the West's others outside its social borders but of the innumerable others inside the West's borders. No wonder Derrida is fascinated by Lévi-Strauss's ethnography because of the history of the great ethnologist's reading including the histories of individual and tribal myths.

Mapping Wilderness

There are occasions when the readers of SS&P go back to passages (or feel it necessary to revisit interim assumptions) regarding the paper's key terms: *structure*, *sign*, and *play*. This is rather exasperating for students because they feel as though they have been asked to map some wilderness with hardly any marking tools at their disposal. Take for example, such clauses as "that the center is, paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside* it" (90) or the following elaboration of this paradox, "The center is at the centre of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality *has its center elsewhere*. The center is not the center. The concept of centered structure— although it represents coherence itself, the condition of the *epistēmē* as philosophy or science— is contradictorily coherent" (90). It is perhaps unreasonable to expect young students to hold and withhold ideas of centre and periphery before they are allowed even provisional fixity of these terms in their comprehension. I am not sure, again, that the parenthetical concession granting the "centered structure" absolute *coherence* is accurately translated. I do however remind students that SS&P always seems to raise for me the question (for Derrida as well as for his readers) of coherence itself. Do we seek and find coherence in what we are reading? Or is coherence inherent,

and always there for us to recognize, in what we are reading? What is coherent, or emerges as coherent, in our reading? (My ‘Just Reading’ classes have returned to this question while confronting texts— as varied as *The Waste Land* and *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveller*— addressed directly to readers.)

Now *totality* raises as many troublesome questions for students as does *coherence*. Since totality has its centre elsewhere, the prevarication of what belongs to what other makes for some ambiguity. The point simply, as I put it to the class, is to disavow the centre whenever a structure (including an institution or its vocal presence) begins to act centrally or assume an absolute centrality. I am of course rather ingenuous to be sure because students must after all write papers and exams and I ought to correct and mark them assuming centrality. But they have certainly no difficulty once the sting of prevarication is taken off the passage. For the organization of any structure, centre is a provisional compulsion but having fulfilled its purpose, the structure might well wither away leaving the centre now to be elsewhere. Of course there is no dearth of examples students recall from our earlier discussions. While reading Virginia Woolf’s Time Passes section of *To the Lighthouse*, I urge them to think about time, consciousness, and the live body that recognizes the scientific clock. Woolf, like Derrida here, might have been alerting us to consider what orients the structure of consciousness by centralizing it as *Time* in its *passing*, where as in time’s *movement*, consciousness registers *our* passing rather than *Time’s*. This is Upanishadic wisdom as well: it is not time passing but it is human consciousness recording passing progressively toward the end of being. Having signified once, the transcendental signifier must move on to other things awaiting signification. Imagine an endless queue, waiting to be served.⁵

If the class has reached at least this far, the wilderness they have been trying to map is not so much about *structure*, *sign*, and *play* as about the *voices* in the wilderness we call *language*. Haven’t we missed a very crucial comment of Derrida’s when he discusses “the concept of play” (99)? We have, indeed. What could be more transparent and direct in the whole of this essay than Derrida’s description of “the nature of the field— that is, language and a finite language— excludes totalization” (99)? This gives me an excellent opportunity to disabuse the class of their imprecise if entirely obsolescent notions of language (and their concomitant instrumentalisms) purveyed by our Structuralized Language classes. A completely nonessentialist view of language is hard for them to command overnight but the class could now begin to see how silly we might be in supposing that all of us spoke the same language *in extremis*; and further, see how language erects a permanent barricade between the states and writers even in the most monolingual regimes.⁶ Given that contradiction and difference are assumed

⁵ We have of course heard something closely resembling this in Kenneth Burke. “Let us try again,” begins an overture in his *Rhetoric of Motives*. “A direct hit is not likely here. The best one can do is to try different approaches toward the same centre whenever the opportunity offers” (137).

⁶ The best single chapter on this subject is Karol Janicki’s in *Language Misconceived* entitled “Viewing and Studying Language in a Nonessentialist Way.” The problem with essentialism is like the bad habits one picks up in adolescence— easier to recognize but harder to give up entirely.

when we begin to speak, the Whitmanian assertion “I am large, I contain multitudes” was not spoken in the usual imperialistic hubris of modern America but in the unusual American spirit of linguistic/cultural pluralism celebrating difference and diversity, singing the people into a nation. For this philological imperative is neither old nor new; it has remained insistently real and true for all philologists and poets who know that the relations between the social and the individual is never closed or complete. People argue and agree. Meanings that may so emerge are all we have. And we ignore this philological imperative at our peril.

If someone in the class remembers that it was W. B. Yeats, a poet from the first British colony, who lamented that “the centre cannot hold,” I do not have anything more to add except read out Derrida’s passage on play once again: “The field is in effect that of *play*, [...] that is to say, because instead of being too large, there is something missing from [the field]: a centre which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions. [...] One cannot determine the centre and exhaust totalization because the sign which replaces the centre, which supplements it, taking the centre’s place in its absence — this sign is added, occurs as a surplus, as a *supplement*” (99). In short, in order to appreciate this contradictory logic, one must get rid of an essentialism that insists that words have singular meanings and they point toward one direction no matter where they are found and who uses them. Not only Derrida but anyone in the business of language can only watch when the play begins, and how it proceeds, especially when we try to close off play, restrict or control it, imagining a centre. How easily do we play into Derrida’s (or into his language’s) hands when we entertain centrist notions and coherent structures. Are we saddened or embarrassed by this discovery? If we are, says Derrida, we are in Rousseau’s company (“the saddened, *negative*, nostalgic, guilty...”). If we are not, we are on the other side with Nietzsche (“the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin...”) (102).

Reading readers reading...

I haven’t quite figured out myself what I have learnt by watching students wrestle with giants larger than themselves, trying to lemon-squeeze ‘meaning’ where possibly none exists. Derrida is by far the best text I have had in a class however that tantalizes students in right proportion for attending to rhetorical manoeuvres interspersed with commentary and critique. It is easy for me then to encourage a class *not* to read texts for what they are/ what they seem to be saying (which though important, cannot be the be-all and the end-all of our reading) but *how* the class understands them to be saying this, that or the other. Reading differently in this manner slows down their dash for quick results, and while attention to details (emphatic words / phrases; coordination, subordination, and sequencing of clauses; repetitions and revisions; parenthetical asides and hedging, etc.) obliges them to be guarded in responses and cautious in judgements. In other words, nothing pleases me more than watching students turn their attention on themselves *as readers*. They are self-conscious rather than self-reflexive inexpertly at first, but then they begin to notice that SS&P is besides other things an account of someone turning an acute and sensitive reader of masterful readers as diverse as Montaigne, Lévi-Strauss, Nietzsche, Mauss, Rousseau, Genette and others. All reading, in this loose sense of

having to work with bare hands and following tracks by hints and guesses, is *bricolage* upon which Derrida charmingly speculates at some length. And what splendid lessons does he leave for us in the end! “Lévi-Strauss will always remain faithful to this double intention [.]” comments Derrida, “to preserve as an instrument something whose truth value he criticizes” (95). This, surely, the class could take home to guide them along with their day’s assignment. The simplest, and perhaps the most discriminatingly drawn, nature-culture distinction Derrida draws while reading Lévi-Strauss’s *Elementary Structures* owes its point to reading a *reader* rather than a text. For the cultural part of the incest taboo is also naturally comprehended when they learn (from a casual observation I once made) that incest flourishes where the roads are bad. The ‘scandal’ so called is scandalous only when no circumstantial logic (which no text delivers on a platter) underpins the nature-culture logic Lévi-Strauss presents. The next step for young readers is still shorter. They need not go very far in realizing that “language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique” (94), much like the spirit that informs my epigraph from Antonio Machado.

Writing in “Passions: ‘An Oblique Suffering’,” Derrida insists that “to *play a role* wherever it may be, one must at the same time be inscribed in the logic of ritual and, precisely so as to perform properly in it, to avoid mistakes and transgressions, one must to some extent be able to analyse it. One must understand its norms and interpret the rules of its functioning. Between the actor and the analyst, whatever the distance or differences may be, the boundary therefore appears uncertain. And always permeable. It must be even crossed at some point not only for there to be analysis at all but also for behaviour to be appropriate and ritualized normally” (16). This, I take it, is Derrida’s best account of himself in the role of a reader, of his role in reading himself as well. Reading SS&P, if students practise this art unawares, as ritualistically as Derrida fancies it, they have won hands down. If nothing else, they would have learnt that they couldn’t possibly let their cognitive selves to go on sabbatical when Derrida reads his masters

Simplicities

Getting used to Derrida’s ‘simplicities’ if one has enough patience with his ‘complexities’ is a lesson in itself. Students of English are used to such turns and counterturns by developing, rather instinctively, a fascination for Keats’s *negative capability*— the capacity of a creative writer to negate in own self all purely personal conceptions, prejudices, habitual ways of seeing things, etc., and so be able to perceive and describe the reality of a different order.⁷ In any case they understand ‘play’ as something

⁷ At this point, I often remind students of a piece of advice Richard Hoggart offers young readers of cultural theory. “It is useful to read (in more than one sense),” remarks Hoggart, “the whole thing right through at least twice, in a condition of ‘negative capability’, suspended attentiveness, not straining for any kind of articulated response; reading but not skimming. An expressive, not instrumental or operational, reading; a search for what Weber called ‘empathic understanding’; and all the time in the knowledge that such a work is a form of play, a fiction, a carnival of sorts, an ‘imaginary garden’ (though with real toads in it), a contraption” (180). It is a pity that Hoggart (a perfect guide through much of our theoretical fog) is rarely found among suggested readings for a course in Criticism and Theory.

undecidable because it is advantageous to leave it undecided. (Does it really matter that the tree on a stage in Becket is a cross, or an emblem of conduct, a highway sign, or mere stage-prop upon which the eternally patient, the eternally suffering lean?) Finally, when students reach one of the most lucid summations in SS&P, all revelation is theirs (as in a Frost poem):

There are thus two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology— in other words, throughout his entire history— has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and end of play. The second interpretation of interpretation, to which Nietzsche pointed the way, does not seek in ethnography, as Lévi-Strauss does, the ‘the inspiration of a new humanism’ ... (102).

Even those young readers by whom this distinction is likely to go past with no evident puzzlement cannot but recognize some *presence* in one and some *absence* in the other, but neither assuredly there or here forever. Play ensures that mindless exercises in the human or the social sciences do not last long; if they do, as they seem to be doing from time to time in our own schools of learning, *humanism* earns a bad name. (It already has, besides *humanities*, in my experience.) Derrida’s approbation of the Nietzschean adventure, mystery and romance is hard to miss especially when he frowns at the Rousseauistic pursuit— all sadness, nostalgia, guilt, and negativity. Derrida’s distinction, as Ian Almond has noted, is “between the dull, penitent, monologic dreariness of the rabbi, which seeks to *end* play, and the thrill-seeking, adventurous hermeneutics of the poet which desires to play on, which never wants to stop playing” (79).

Derrida’s Choice?

And yet, we cannot be sure that Derrida chooses the Nietzschean against the Rousseauistic. “I do not believe,” he says, “that today there is any question of *choosing*” (102) and it is unclear to us what complexities might be involved in plain interpretive choices. We ought not to miss here *différence*, the celebrated French word upon which so much depends if we are reading Derrida in English and are reminded by his annotators that it puns on the senses of to *differ* and *defer*. How long might our students be lodged precariously, as Derrida says, “in a region ... where ... we must first try to conceive of the common ground, and the *différence* of this irreducible difference” (102)? As long, I guess, as they get used to innumerable Derridean *spells and spills* where etymologies and word-histories make up for forensic analysis and logical conclusions. Here again *play*’s the thing. If they are willing to play into Derrida’s hands (and not into his smart interpreters’), they will be able to see how a *spell* is both incantatory and magical, and *spill* an overflow and uncontrolled spread (semantic and structural) involving fun and games with language. This is the ultimate spell/spill of *différence* as well when they realize that unless play becomes second nature, they still are apt to suspect that the centre holds, and it does not alter when alteration finds. What spell weaves as illusion,

the spill *unweaves* as reality, neither of which could be seen as plain difference or limited deference. The hardest part for anyone to see while reading Derrida is to appreciate this weird logic, a point Denis Donoghue had made so well many years ago. “There are other philosophers who like using both hands [,]” observes Donoghue: “on the one hand, and yet on the other. Derrida uses both to say the same thing: no[w] the situation is neither this nor that but the play between them. And he says this in a spirit of post-Nietzschean tragic joy, pitting the mind against itself for the energy the pitting engenders” (159).

Two, among other immediately unrecognizable lessons students are sure to benefit from by playing into Derrida’s hands are the facility with which they begin to read texts relationally; and the ‘suspicion’ with which they begin to engage texts. In the courses called “Reading Relations” and “Just Reading” what they experience as most rewarding are the innumerable relations (social, interpretive, human, collaborative and even adversarial...) to which reading commits them. While this is perhaps easier to assume in any course, I have often wondered how ‘suspicious’ our young readers tend to become after sampling Derrida’s passages in SS&P. As Paul Ricoeur has noted in *Freud and Philosophy*, both suspicion and faith are legitimate in affective hermeneutics. While the former rips masks off a text to reveal its real face, the latter reforms, reshapes and affords clearer views of it in roomy explicatory light. I cannot be sure, however, that all readings by students I have had the patience to consider in these courses were ‘suspicious’ in the most helpfully benign sense, but Derrida certainly has been great help for my class to reconsider its work as *finishing* rather than finished. I presume that it was Derrida’s consistent effort in SS&P to show us this difference— what it means to take Lévi-Strauss, for example, primarily as already read and done with, and what it might take to re-read Lévi-Strauss all over, all afresh, playing handy-dandy with absences and presences of the now and ever.

Co-existence with the monstrous...

Like critical forebodings of which readers remain in puzzled awe, does SS&P continue to be the “terrifying form of monstrosity” (103) that Derrida called it in 1966? If Derrida’s paper 50 years ago rang apocalyptic bells, calling his *monstrosity* “a birth ... in the offspring, only under the species of the nonspecies, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form...” (103), his ideas of the monster since then seem to have sounded less minatory or hortatory. In Maurice Blanchot’s ‘Literature and the Right to Death’ (which Derrida is likely to have recalled in writing his “monstrosity”), we are told that “Ordinary language is not necessarily clear, it does not always say what it says; misunderstanding is also one of its paths.” While so much is now a commonplace, Derrida is likely to have borrowed Blanchot’s analogy of the two-faced word-monster: “[Misunderstanding] is inevitable. Every time we speak,” observes Blanchot, “we make words into monsters with two faces, one being reality, physical presence, and the other meaning, ideal absence” (59). Blanchot’s essay is dated 1949.

In 1990 Derrida conceded that “Monsters cannot be announced. One cannot say: ‘Here are our monsters,’ without immediately turning the monsters into pets” (“Some Statements and Truisms...” 80). More helpfully in 1992, as though in expiation of an old sin of monstrosity apropos SS&P, Derrida told his interviewer that a monster is

“a composite figure of heterogeneous organisms that are grafted onto each other. This graft, the hybridization, this composition that puts heterogeneous bodies together may be called a monster” (Derrida 1995 ‘Passages’, 385). Of course the monster now seems less abhorrent, albeit still as rather unfriendly as a person with whom one has had a terrible tiff. The “monstrosity” of SS&P will always strike one as its most singular tenor, its pronounced address as it were, because Derrida’s reading of Lévi-Strauss is unqualifiedly an “event” he calls “a rupture, the disruption” (91) that will still remain relentless as his motive and method. No lessons are lasting in this exercise; lessons learnt are soon unlearnt. No harm if, at least for a time, “the disruption of presence” is not immediately seen as “play,” but like the monstrous, one gets used to an unfamiliar and awkward object in our presence over time. The abnormal writing of grafts and cuts will seem less odd, the Derridean turns less abrupt and unpredictable, when the writing *shows* (demonstrates) as a monster will, in time. When it does, as in SS&P, “as soon as one perceives a monster in a monster, one begins to domesticate it, one begins [...] to compare it to the norms, to analyze it, consequently to master whatever could be terrifying in this figure of the monster” (Derrida 1995 ‘Passages’ 386). That perhaps might even augur well because the readers will begin to see how such a “monstrosity” as Derrida’s SS&P releases them from the routine insularities of thought and feeling to which some of them are inured. That is the time for the teacher to take leave of the class.⁸

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⁸ I am tempted to believe that Geryon, the monster of Dante’s *Inferno*, had crossed Derrida’s mind, at least once, in writing the last sentence of SS&P. Geryon is perhaps the ultimate emblem of fraudulent conduct in western mythology. But Dante’s Geryon, as S. Hammerschlag’s penetrating analysis of this episode shows, is indispensable for the poet in his infernal interlude. He must ride on Geryon’s back (as Derrida must court the monstrosity of his interpretive foray) to plumb the depths— metaphorically, to resort to deception and mendacity to get at the truth which appears sometimes in false guise. The apocalyptic suggestions of this passage in Derrida, again, are not lost on students who recall W. B. Yeats’s rough beast in ‘The Second Coming’.

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