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re-face to Derrida: Tryst with the Copula

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Abstract

In this essay I wish to “introduce” Derrida by giving a preface to his philosophy. But Derrida’s entire contention rests on the premise that philosophy can only be prefaced since it lacks an original face or meaning. Since his own work is a *preface* to philosophy, the preface that I intend to give is twice-removed from the original preface that Derrida offers readers. Briefly this is Derrida’s tryst with the copula: the copula or the connector, something that is not taken seriously but is in fact the basis of construction of meaning. What is the copula? Historically, it is a philosophical expression of various marginal groups that were not taken into consideration. In the context of Spivak’s preface to Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*, my preface is one level further removed from reality. What is philosophy “ultimately” except a tryst with the preface (that connects the reader with the author) or the copula! Can we take hard-line positions both at the methodological level and in how we interpret data – this is the Derridean paradox, that we can’t take such positions without being aware that they’re *positions*. The copula in its shifting state as floating signifier plays the role of a Zen master constantly teasing meaning trapped in cages of words that we attribute to situations. The discourses of humanities and social sciences are replete with examples of over-meanings by which I mean that research scholars tend to take positions that are absolute and use those positions to interpret reality. Things mean more than what they actually could be because we impose our positions on them without claiming that they’re positions. To be aware of the class, race, gender and other biases inherent in our positions liberates the text from the clutches of *totality* and opens to meaning the doors of *infinity*.

Key Words

Deconstruction, philosophy, difference, copula, otherness.

**Pre-face to a Preface
(or) What Comes
Before the Face**

This part of the article plays on the metaphor of the “face” as both appearance and something we need as a basis to find a deeper truth; therefore, the “face” is real to the extent that it is there while simultaneously acting as a means to discover something more than what meets the eye. In any research study are we looking for what is obvious or if we are looking for something deeper, do those depths exist outside our preconceptions of the truth! In unequal situations the truths are bound to be unequal because what is true for those in positions of power is not true for the marginalized and the excluded.

They have asked me for a preface.
Short, they said, only a few words,
but ones that will open vistas.

Impreface – (Octavio Paz 1991, 530)

India a nation! What an apotheosis! Last comer to the drab nineteenth-century sisterhood! Waddling in at this hour of the world to take her seat! She, whose only peer was the Holy Roman Empire, she shall rank with Guatemala and Belgium perhaps! Fielding mocked again. And Aziz in an awful rage danced his way and that, not knowing what to do, and cried: “Down with the English anyhow. That’s certain. Clear out, you fellows, double quick, I say... we shall drive every blasted Englishman into the sea, and then”--he rode against him furiously--“and then,” he concluded, half kissing him, “you and I shall be friends.”

“Why can’t we be friends now?” said the other, holding him affectionately. It’s what I want. It’s what you want.”

But the horses didn’t want it--they swerved apart; the earth didn’t want it, sending up rocks through which riders must pass single file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the Guest House, that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw Mau beneath: they didn’t want it, they said in their hundred voices, “No, not yet,” and the sky said, “No, not there.”

WEYBRIDGE, 1924

E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (Forster 1984, 317)

In 1924, Forster felt that the friendship between Fielding an Englishman, and Aziz a citizen of the empire was not feasible. The *passage* to India exists in *not* being there, since it’s a one-way passage that Vasco Da Gama discovered to the East, a passage leading to eventual exploitation of the colonies. The place Weybridge and the year, 1924, are offered as personal testimony to the author’s presence in opening the book to history. As the historian Panikkar points out in *Asia and Western Dominance*, the basis of European ethics was an exclusion of the colonial other based on “the principle that the doctrines of international law did not apply outside Europe, that what would be barbarism in London or

Paris is civilized conduct in Peking... and that European nations had no moral obligations in dealing with Asian peoples... was part of the accepted creed of Europe's relations with Asia" (Panikkar 1959, 35). European morality does not apply in dealing with third world peoples. It does not apply in how the United States in its foreign policy deals with the Middle East and it does not apply in how western politicians, scholars and journalists imagine the "communities" of non-western others. The problem is at two levels: in how western methodologies form the basis of our understanding of the text and how colonial discourses continue to shape our perceptions of the world. Therefore, it is important for the purpose of the novel that Aziz cannot accept Fielding's friendship, since it's a friendship rooted in a situation of inequality. The passage is an event that belongs to the future in an entirely different political situation.

In the above context, what makes the "friendship" (assuming that such a symbiotic relationship exists between an author and a translator) between a first world male writer (the author) and a third world woman writer (as the translator) a possibility in 1976, the year of publication of the English version of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*? Is the space of the preface, a space in which a third world writer engenders a fiction of a fiction (if writing *is* fiction, an imitation, while fiction itself is *not* an imitation but a construction of reality, a philosophy of writing as a philosophy of the fictionality of philosophy—the ungrounding of the essence)? To what extent is the preface "real"? Is all reality a preface to an essence that does not exist and philosophy a celebration of the preface or the *Impreface* as the title of Octavio Paz's poem goes? In Forster's terms, a preface would be a "passage" that could not have been imagined as a genuine bond of friendship in the year 1924. In 1976, a French philosopher, a Sephardic Jew born in Algiers, is prefaced by an Indian woman (Gayatri Spivak)—the preface as a timely, postcolonial gesture! As Spivak pre-faces herself at the end of her Translator's Preface to *Of Grammatology*:

The first part of this book, 'Writing before the Letter,' sketches in broad outlines *Now I insert my text within his and move you on, situating here* a theoretical matrix. It indicates certain significant historical moments, and proposes *My name*: certain critical concepts. *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*. These critical concepts are put to the test *the places of this work: Iowa city, (New Delhi-Dacca-Calcutta), Boston, Nice, Providence, Iowa City*, in the second part, 'Nature, Culture, Writing.' *Its time: July, 1970-October, 1975*. This part may be called illustrative. (Derrida 1976, lxxxvii)

Jacques Derrida—who is J.D.??? James Dean--Rebel without a cause! (J)ames Bal(D)win- black American author of *Go Tell It On The mountain*—inscribing the voice of the teller on the rocks! (J)ohnson (D)r. Age of D.J.—Doctor Johnson! (J)a(d)e—stone. In the arrangement of the letters of the name, new names are possible which de-identify (where one loses track of the preceding order of letters) the older ones. Thus, a trace¹ is left.

¹ The trace is the leftover, the taken-for-granted or the crumbs seen around the text. Essentially, they mean "nothing." But *other*-wise, they're the basis of the construction of meaning.

Spivak / India / woman / third world / colored / translator / East / preface is a trace to Derrida / Jew / white male / author / West / philosopher / Face etc. There is a geographical space that separates Iowa City from the city of New Delhi and within / out of this space is a historical passage that Forster dramatizes in his novel. Fielding can be attracted to Aziz though Aziz could reciprocate Fielding's intensity with suspicion. Historians are all too eager to congratulate themselves for arriving at factual descriptions of life-worlds. The literary artist in the Nietzschean spirit of looking at margins rather than the mainstream works with a problematized reality. This is why Forster gives the novel an ending whose beginnings are in the future – a genuinely postcolonial society. History is a passage into the future. *The passage that is history is a derangement of names/spaces, where authors and translators exchange roles and genders to confound their own positions as readers.* The point of the derangement is that all positions are rooted in a definite time-frame; to be aware of the time-frame makes one aware of the possibility of social and political change. The making of history cannot be the goal of the historian; the goal of the historian is to bring to light the passages through which one moves caught between ideas and identities.

Translation, in the above terms of derangement, is power without the "authority" of the author, the hermeneutical power that views *prejudice* in terms of point of view as one of the significant bases of writing. To write is to bring the personal at table of the political; what is written is a source of discovering a point of view or a prejudice that the author is carefully attempting to conceal. All writing becomes an acknowledgement of one's prejudices. If the Derridean position is that the friendship between an author and a translator (as the other) is one of alterity and difference, then translation acquires the dubious "identity" of "philosophy" and the "preface" becomes a self-ef-facing metaphor of writing. A preface to a translation is itself a gesture of reading, enabling the reader to translate authority in her own terms. In metaphorical terms, the year 1976 can be read as a paradigm-shift and a history of Western philosophy cannot henceforth be written as "history" except through an attempt to isolate essence (a metaphysical assumption); all philosophers are translators pointing to the essence (that *is* in *not-being* there), while essentializing what is a viewpoint. The passage, the hymen or the copula is a central metaphor where the "West" as identity makes space for the political *difference* of nations; an identity that in the event of deconstructing itself brings out an *other* concealed at the being of the self. The act of instituting deconstruction as a philosophy of writing is an event whereby the text is deinstitutionalized from its traditional character of being the original "face" of meaning to a series of prefaces.

To the question whether there is a final reality, the deconstructionist would have an evasive (rather than a positivistic) "no!" But, to the question whether there is a social and political reality, the deconstructionist would reply in the affirmative. What if Nietzsche was the name of the son of a farmer belonging to the so-called lower castes in colonial India? Would the name "Nietzsche" still have the historical significance that we associate with

They're metaphysical in their inessentiality; they're also what makes metaphysics a field of knowledge founded on the otherness of the other.

the philosopher? Historicity (Nietzsche) and possibility (What if... Nietzsche) are never oppositional terms where one is the truth and the other is an idea toyed upon by poets and fiction-writers. Historicity is a possibility generated within a social and political arena. Does that mean that all proper names are possibilities with never a “real” or an “essential” one? In his dedication of the lecture *Scepters of Marx* to Chris Hani the assassinated black South African Marxist leader, Derrida defies the idea of deconstruction as the unending plurality of names.

One name for another, a part for the whole: the historic violence of Apartheid can always be treated as a metonymy. In its past as well as in its present. By diverse paths (condensation, displacement, expression, or representation), one can always decipher through its singularity so many other kinds of violence going on in the world. At once part, cause, effect, example, what is happening there translates what *takes place* here, always here, wherever one is and wherever one looks, closest to home. Infinite responsibility, therefore, no rest allowed for any form of good conscience.

But one should never speak of the assassination of a man as a figure, not even an exemplary figure in the logic of an emblem, a rhetoric of the flag or of martyrdom. A man’s life, as unique as his death, will always be more than a paradigm and something other than a symbol. And this is precisely what a proper name should always name.

And yet. And yet, keeping this in mind and having recourse to a common noun, I recall that it is a **communist** as such, a **communist** as **communist**, whom a Polish emigrant and his accomplices, all the assassins of Chris Hani, put to death a few days ago, April 10th. The assassins themselves proclaimed that they were out to get a communist. They were trying to interrupt negotiations and sabotage an ongoing democratization. This popular hero of the resistance against Apartheid became dangerous and suddenly intolerable, it seems, at the moment in which, having decided to devote himself once again to a minority Communist Party riddled with contradictions, he gave up important responsibilities in the ANC and perhaps any official political or even governmental role he might one day have held in a country free of Apartheid.

Allow me to salute the memory of Chris Hani and to dedicate this lecture to him. (Derrida 1994, xv-xvi).

Chris Hani cannot be confused with the names of Alexander, Caesar, Genghis Khan or Ed Fabus. It has an entirely different kind of historicity associated with it rooted in a history that is both “necessary” and one that transcends the field of signs. When a person gives himself up for a certain cause, which in this case is to resist Apartheid, his name is automatically bound with the kind of person that he was and probably *is* in the popular imagination. As Derrida notes in the dedication: “a man’s life, as unique as his death, will always be more than a paradigm and something other than a symbol.” The Derridean point

History as the *Fall* of the Sign

is that there is an existential reality in the way one lives one's life, the kinds of choices one is willing to make and the goals and visions that one voluntarily embraces.

This part of the article deals with the idea of history as a sign within a field of signs. Just as there are no essential truths, the histories constructed on those truths are equally fictitious.

Husserl in his *Ideas I* offers a “paradox... that the *element which makes up the life of phenomenology as of all eidetical science is ‘fiction’* that fiction is the source whence the knowledge of ‘eternal truths’ draws its sustenance” (Husserl 1972, 184). In saying that fiction is a source of eternal truths, the ideas to which objects look forth², Husserl opens himself to a Derridean reading. The “paradox” instead of seeking resolution undermines the basis of its linearity, which is to tell the truth in a direct fashion. We have the paradox of discovering “the knowledge of ‘eternal truths’” in the appearance of “truths” that one finds in fiction. This would be a position where ideas are the basis of fiction or that ideas could be nothing else but fiction.

History is the *fall* of the sign from being the transcendental--the word--to the literal, i.e., words, the prefacial character (the makeup, face-lift or the visuality of writing), an aesthetics of the face, the faciality of the word “eternal” that is the death of metaphysics³, a sign of the birth of deconstruction. Hence the slogan, Derrida is Spivak. Derrida is ~~not~~ Derrida. The translator is the author and the author is not the translator. Truth is not *the* truth, just as the face is a preface.

The copula is not an ahistorical being outside the history of beings or the signs/science of writing but a cultural discourse interpreted differently in various times and spaces. There was never a universal copula, only a *differant* one; as Derrida asserts in *Speech and Phenomena* the “movement of differance is not something that happens to a transcendental subject; it produces a subject” (Derrida 1973, 82). If the knowledge of ideas is a knowledge of differance, where the subject far from being the sole producer of language is subjected to the copula or the sign, the letter ‘a’ of differ(a)nce that makes a difference both in terms of temporality as well as context “is no longer simply a concept, but the possibility of conceptuality” (Derrida 1973, 141).

The problematic of the copula, problematic - owing to its existence in a state of dispersal, puts the signs *post*-structuralism or *post*-modernism or *post*-colonialism – a series of “posts” mailed without a ‘proper’ destination in view - under the strain of merging into a single label with overlapping differances while consistently mocking a notion of essence. The positionality of the copula suffered historical subjection and “If the word ‘history’ did not carry with it the theme of a final repression of differance, we could say that differences alone could be ‘historical’ through and through and from the start” (Derrida 1973, 141). If a history of differance is simultaneously a differance of history that negates itself without

² A pun on the word ideas since fiction is also a play with ideas while ideas are the Platonic “original” beings from which objects draw their appearance.

³ The “death of metaphysics” is an alternate reading based on the deconstruction of “everyday” language pretending to be objective and realistic.

pretending to arrive at a synthesis in a dialectical manner, then the origin of phenomena in speech is a fiction of the origin of the word “origin,” the foundation of patriarchy⁴.

The apotheosis of the face is best observed in Edmund Husserl’s 1910 lecture presented before the Vienna Cultural Society entitled “Philosophy and the Crisis of European Humanity.” The central theme of Husserl’s essay is the importance of the European “body” that is in a state of crisis. This body is not just a physical body like any other but something that has evolved and is unique to European culture and history; this unique European body, which is more than a body is a cultural icon that needs to be preserved against possible annihilation. One way of overcoming the crisis is by acknowledging the uniqueness of the body both on a scientific as well as a humanistic level.

There is something unique here that is recognized in us (Europeans) by all human groups, too, something that quite apart from all considerations of utility, becomes a motive for them to Europeanize themselves even in their unbroken will to spiritual self-preservation; whereas we, if we understand ourselves properly, would never Indianize ourselves, for example. I mean that we feel (and in spite of all obscurity this feeling is properly legitimate) that an entelechy is inborn in our European civilization which holds sway throughout all the changing shapes of Europe and accords to them the sense of a development toward an ideal shape of life and being as an eternal pole... The spiritual telos of European humanity, in which the particular telos of particular nations and of individual men is contained, lies in the infinite, is an infinite idea toward which, in concealment, the whole spiritual becoming aims, so to speak. (Husserl 1970, 275)

The European would never Indianize himself. However, the Indian could Europeanize himself and that would be “legitimate” because the “spiritual telos of European humanity, in which the particular telos of particular nations and of individual men is contained, lies in the infinite.” What about the spiritual telos of the Indian – is it of any consequence at all! The idea of Europe as the center of civilization is a one-sided one because it justifies every imaginable western atrocity in the colonies until the twentieth century. Alternative to what Husserl proposes in the discovery of the so-called spirit of Europe that could solve the crisis of European humanity and probably the rest of the world, how would one phrase a question such as “the future or telos of deconstruction” or “After deconstruction, what?” Such a question would signature (in a dangerous manner) its own death. The same phrase can be re-posed as “after what, deconstruction?” or “Deconstruction, what after?” Or “what deconstruction after” or “what the copula” and if not “what,” then what? This would mean less a parody of Husserl’s seriousness and more a Nietzschean undermining of the so-called Europeanization of the world, a grand project of self-determinism or

⁴ Patriarchy is the other word for origin. It is the basis of history and epistemology. A fiction of the “origin of the word origin” is also a fiction of the “origin of the word patriarchy” or even a fiction of patriarchy itself. A fiction is both a form of construction and what Barthes refers to as “mythologies” that constitute modern reality.

autoeroticism that fears/avoids the encounter of the self with the other and perpetuates a body of words as a substitute to the reality of the encounter⁵.

If the European body/spirit is a metaphysics of rights and wrongs⁶ (with ultimately a right purpose in mind) other than a game of prefaces, then the voice acquires predominance over writing as it can identify itself as itself⁷ (beyond which all signs are only de/signs meant to disrupt the self from the supreme point of its knowledge). Who is a European or what is a body or humanity or telos, words that Husserl barely defines, in the anticipation that the voice of the speaker has communicated to the Vienna audience all that could possibly be implied in the spirit of the lecture existing beyond the domain of signs⁸. The copula as an aspect of the voice that the audience can grasp without needing to be shown the signs is a masturbatory climax⁹, where the other presumably identifies itself with the desire of the self in a wholehearted manner indispensable in order for one to be thoroughly Europeanized.

The statement that the death of metaphysics is the birth of deconstruction is a passage of the self into an awareness of selfhood since metaphysics is identified in its reality as a monster that the warriors of deconstruction (if deconstruction is visualized as a strategy meant to upset traditional structures) have brought to an end; and now we arrive at the beginning of post-history (thanks to deconstruction) with an entirely novel telos in view. What makes the defining of metaphysics an act of metaphysics is that we can talk about one abstraction only by using another set of abstractions. An abstraction by its very nature is incapable of a concrete manifestation. As Derrida says: “There is no such thing as a ‘metaphysical name.’ The ‘metaphysical’ is a certain determination or direction taken by a sequence or ‘chain.’ It cannot as such be opposed by a concept but rather by a process of textual labor and a different sort of articulation” (Derrida 1981, 6). The rigidity of metaphysics can be confronted through “a process of textual labor and a different sort of articulation.” A close reading of the text that can identify the spaces between words as the source of meaning would enable “a different sort of articulation,” where marginal and

⁵ What is “Western Metaphysics” but “knowledge” itself, since in Derridean terms “to know” would be to see in terms of “speech” as the center and “writing” as the external or the outside.

⁶ What Derrida calls “oppositions” where good is opposed to evil, man to woman etc.

⁷ This is the narcissistic dimension of knowledge that celebrates its own coming of age without any concern for the other who makes the knowledge possible. For instance, the fact that colonialism made possible the Industrial Revolution in Europe, a fact that historical texts of the period rarely have taken seriously.

⁸ Husserl sees no need to define terms because his “voice” (literally the sincerity in the tone of his voice as well as the voice as a pre-existing domain of knowledge) has already communicated a certain kind of mood to the audience.

⁹ The metaphor of masturbation refers to a narcissistic point where the self sees the other as none but itself. The project of Europeanization is akin to the masturbatory climax.

excluded voices are able to express their difference¹⁰. In equating philosophy with writing Derrida turns philosophers into writers employing all the strategies that writing demands in order to express a point of view. In presupposing that they were something other than writers using signs, philosophy and philosophers fell into the trap of having to listen to their own voice in the hope of finding an ulterior self.

The alternation of the identities of translator and author is an event that takes place between the preface of a translation and a text of deconstruction that declares bankruptcy before it is raided for money¹¹. The money that is here referred to is both meaning as well as presence meant to fulfill the reader's expectations of finding an unalterable expression of the author's intention. Bankruptcy is the state-of-economy of a text that must be ruptured in order to be understood¹². The violence of the sign is a way of encountering metaphysics, the virgin male who must be seduced¹³ in order to disrupt the stagnation of the body politic. Discourse is the economy within which language functions and as Derrida puts it in "Violence and Metaphysics," "Discourse, therefore, if it is originally violent, can only *do itself violence*, can only negate itself in order to affirm itself, make war upon the war which institutes it without ever *being able* to reappropriate this negativity, to the extent that it is discourse" (Derrida 2002, 130)

Whether the violence of metaphysics can be countered using the metaphysics of violence (just as the Greek word "pharmakon" means both poison as well as remedy depending on which sense of the term you intend to emphasize) is a question that could be restated as whether the philosopher can counter the writer because the former looks for an essence in language and the latter shows that no essential meaning is possible in the use of words. The philosophy of writing/medicine is the basis to deconstructing the writing of philosophy/poison. Writers and philosophers are not so much contraries since writing is a metaphor

¹⁰ An extraordinary way of rephrasing the statement into a question would be: can deconstruction exist in the absence of metaphysics? Is there a positive deconstruction that can be used for reconstructing an alternate order of things other than a negative destruction that critiques the present state of affairs? A "serious-minded" deconstructionist would deconstruct the question itself as a binary opposition and essential as well as metaphysical. In my opinion, there is a deconstruction that is simultaneously *self*-destruction and *other*-construction. In the rejection of one's authority as male, heterosexual, etc. one begins to see the possibility of the other. One sees the otherness of oneself and the limitation of the goal of *oneness*.

¹¹ The idea of the text as economy is an interesting metaphor since every time one seriously wishes to find "knowledge" or the "voice" or "money" or "meaning" the text seems vacuous or bankrupt.

¹² Meaning is not something that already exists within the text. The text is "ruptured" before it is understood. Meaning is forced out of the text. Here, "violence" is a metaphor of "theft" where the reader steals from the author a meaning that does not belong to either of them.

¹³ The text (the woman) seduces the reader in order to disclose an alternate economy, a different reading or an *other* reading. The text as Derrida points out in the above quote "can only negate itself in order to affirm itself." The discourse of the self is also the discourse of the other. Plato can be "read" or "misread" to make possible a different kind of meaning.

that philosophy cannot evade in the name of being a discipline (writing is the name of the other, the “inter” that falls between disciplines (inter[-]disciplinary)—interred: philosophy as the burial-ground of meaning; writing as the un-disciplining or ungrounding of the inter / copula / thing / phallus—or the destruction of the tomb); philosophy as a metaphor of forgetfulness; it is sleep, dream, death or reality. “Exhibiting, denuding, undressing, unveiling: the familiar acrobatics of the metaphor of the truth. And one just as well could say the metaphor of metaphor, the truth of truth, the truth of metaphor” (Derrida 1987, 415). If metaphor is the cure that kills, violence is a metaphor that exhibits, denudes, undresses and unveils the truth of violence.

In saying that reality can be known through differance, Derrida places a “mental” block on philosophy (literally a block on the Cartesian notion of the Mind as a source of knowledge) that ignored the copula-tionary aspect of knowledge which makes all constructions of meaning fragile, ambivalent and disputable in the face of the whimsicality of words. Language is a *copulation* of body and soul, word and sense, voice and silence, nature and culture, appearance and reality etc. The passage or the copula between the one and the other is neither a given (the relation of the preface to the face, the author to the translator or the philosopher to the writer) nor a sign unique to language (an essence beneath the arbitrary). The author differs/defers from the translator. One is the differer (the standard bearer of meaning who claims his uniqueness), while the *other* is the deferred (she escapes being fixed in the present and either recedes into the past or remains in the future).

Another metaphor of the copula is the accent, i.e., the differance underlying speech; it is both writing as deception that masks the innocence of origin as well as the Nietzschean laughter (Christ - the essence - never laughs while Zarathustra - the difference - laughs) that defies the very origin. The sign becomes a metaphor of the sign and the sign “metaphor” is in turn a sign metaphorizing the other. Derrida (de-read-ah!) is a change of accent (accent defies gender); the name of the man is an accent on the sign that threatens the security of possession which is the basis of identity. The generation of signs occurs in the field of the *t/race* where copulas or passages are spilt all over the text. In the dispersal of laughter the text is liberated from metaphysical constraints while language becomes funny and accent is the source of differential amusement. If the copula is the essence of deconstruction, it is an essence that cannot sustain its own metaphysicality and in the process paves the way for the discourse of laughter.

Another name (definition) of differance is the movement/moment of the copula. The only way of recognizing the moment is not through its fixity but in its state-of-movement. The essence must learn to coexist with differance just as simultaneity and dispersal exist in the moment/movement. “On the one hand, this negation, as reaffirmation, can seem to double bolt the logocentric impasse of European domesticity (and India in this regard is not the absolute other of Europe). But on the other hand, it is also what, working on the *open* edge of this interiority or intimacy, *lets* [laisse] passage, *lets the other be*” (Derrida 1995,

**The Copula i.e.
Woman i.e. Style**

78). There is a name but there is a passage that undermines the essence of the name¹⁴; the name is both the affirmation of the essence and also the letting be of the other being. The word “play” is both the name of the essence as well as play that cannot be essential in any possible sense. Colonialism is the name of the passage between England and India, but the appendage “post” of post-colonialism (the hyphen is the passage) is the play—it is the story of his-story or fiction that is a stranger to truth; it is woman as style.

Derrida turns marginalization and exclusion from a source of disprivilege to one of empowerment. Thus he uses Nietzsche’s Beyond Good and Evil as a basis to creatively misread Nietzsche’s misogyny and thus arrive at a notion of woman as style in a subversive manner.

It is impossible to dissociate the questions of art, style and truth from the question of the woman. (Derrida 1978, 71)

In order to understand Derrida’s tryst with the copula it is important to understand Derrida’s tryst with woman. Woman as metaphor is central to the philosophy of deconstruction. Is it possible that without “woman,” deconstruction would be a homoerotic philosophy in quest of sameness of essence finding resolution in essentiality or the father in fatherhood? Derridean metaphysics is the metaphysics of the playful woman, the woman that dances on the borderline of discourse, the woman that is style similar to the style that is woman; the woman who prefers writing to speech, who prefers metaphor to “fact” and the fringe to the center¹⁵. The politics of undermining the center is connected to reading from the fringe; power has to be acquired in order to be dismantled and this is possible when women recognize themselves as a group. What *literally* follows is: women never had / do not / cannot have a voice in the current order of things. If voice is the language of desire and resistance to what comes in the way of desire, the liberatory potential of voice must be acknowledged since voice is a discourse of resistance and speech is of fundamental importance to any individual or group that seeks liberation. The politics of liberation is at the heart of the Derridean jest that Nietzsche’s style is a woman or that Nietzsche’s “woman” is style.

The copula is the being that stands between the legs of the father. Another definition of metaphysics: the thing “between the legs of a word, between a word and itself to the point

¹⁴ For instance, take the word “history.” It denotes an essence that there is a past that is common to entire humanity and this past can be referred to as history. There is also a history that is in fact *history*; it must be read and understood in order to arrive at an alternate order where one can co-exist with the other. We have a history that is colonialism but we also have post-colonialism that attempts to look at colonialism from a marginal point of view.

¹⁵ To the question of whether the Derridean notion of the playful woman is another male construction, one response would be that deconstruction like any other discourse functions within a historical context. It is possible to view the “playful woman” as a male construction at the risk of losing the “point of viewness” of deconstruction. To the latter, certainly there is a construction involved in the idea of the playful woman; but it is only when the construction is understood as a “construction” rather than *essential* that it becomes the space of deconstruction.

The Magic of the Copula

of making entire civilizations see-saw” (Derrida 1987, 78). As Derrida points out in his essay “The Madness of Economic Reason,” “For in the end, it must always be the Thing, the same thing that gives itself, even if it does so by dividing itself or by partitioning itself into partial objects” (Derrida 1992, 53). The question is not whether the thing is the point from where the mother/sister/wife (woman) *cums* like a baby toward Nietzsche, the father. The freedom of style that is woman is the death of Nietzsche, the stylist and disseminator. In an economic-political sense “Nietzsche,” the name is significant; an entire discourse of marketing his books and philosophy that is a monetary transaction takes place within the sign-field “Nietzsche.” Does this imply that it is the male author (Nietzsche) who has to make space for the woman; that woman must discover her own voice in the pleasure of the male author; that she must write in signs that signify a terror of the master woman-hater. Style becomes a basis of subversion (sub-version or an alternate reading), where women instead of *being* or *Da-Sein* deliberately choose elusiveness as a way of writing. If auto-eroticism is the error of the essentialists, one must discover the other, not as oneself, but as the other, i.e., woman.

The Derridean tryst with the copula does not end with opening the center to the margins. It is also about the magical dimension of words, the dreaminess of language and the metamorphosis that metaphysics undergoes in the hands of deconstruction.

The magic of the copula is the magic of words that is both woman and style. The copula is an emotion. As Sartre puts it in his *The Emotions: Outline of a Theory*: “It is necessary to speak of a world of emotion as one speaks of a world of dreams or of worlds of madness, that is, a world of individual syntheses maintaining connections among themselves and possessing *qualities*. But every quality is conferred upon an object by a *passage* to infinity” [my emphasis] (Sartre 1948, 80). The copula is a dream and unlike reality it has no pretensions of being captured in deed. The copula is the passage; it is the passage to India (or infinity—since the other is always infinite); “Thus, man is always a wizard to man, and the social world is at first magical” (Sartre 1948, 84). The copula or the dream is first and foremost social, potentially opening out to the magical. The magician is an artist of language or a language-user trying to understand things as events in a person’s life. She is the writer of the preface unlike the *speaker* voicing an essence. The copula espouses a philosophy of wonder and “Consciousness, plunged into this magical world, draws the body along with it, insofar as the body is belief. It believes in it. The behavior which gives emotion its meaning is no longer ours; it is the expression of the face, the movements of the body of the other person which come to form a synthetic whole with the disturbance of our organism” (Sartre 1948, 86).

The first line of Kafka’s short story “The Metamorphosis” clearly illustrates the magical and incantatory side to deconstruction. “As GREGOR SAMSA awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect” (Kafka 1949, 67). The copula is inserted at a position where the mood of casualness—uneasy dreams, (not a very unusual occurrence) changes into the grotesque—a gigantic insect. To identify a determiner in the sentence is to determine the identity of the copula. Is it Gregor Samsa or the morning or the dreams or the bed or the insect or the transformation

that is the essence of the copula? It is a magical situation and not about believing or disbelieving in the imagination of the author; however, if credibility is not the issue, what is it that makes the magical situation so convincing, owing to the fact that we *must* accept Gregor Samsa in his new incarnation as the insect? The magic is what the real is because we attribute a greater credibility to the fact that language is the source of possibilities. As Derrida expresses it: “But the counterfeiter can lie, he’s lying, I am almost sure of it, from experience. There is doubtless no real secret at the bottom of this sentence, no determined proper name” (Derrida 1991, 51). Gregor Samsa, like the author Franz Kafka—two counterfeiters lying about a transformation of a human being into an insect! The other characters in the story—Samsa’s parents, Grete—the sister, the charwoman and the chief clerk—are willing to accept Gregor’s new image as the insect. In fact they have taken it so seriously in a life and death manner (Gregor Samsa eventually is killed by an apple from his father’s blow) that it borders on the tragicomic.

There is a “lie” that gives the magical quality to the copula. It is a lie that functions systematically. As Derrida replied to Kristeva in the interview “Semiology and Grammatology,” “Now, ‘everyday language’ is not innocent or neutral. It is the language of Western metaphysics, and it carries with it not only a considerable number of presuppositions of all types, but also presuppositions inseparable from metaphysics, which although little attended to, are knotted into a system” (Derrida 1981, 19). Kafka is playing on this apparent “innocence” of the system (language) guiding Western metaphysics. In taking language to its logical extremes—the metamorphosis—Western metaphysics betrays its true face which is a quest for power more than anything else. The metaphysical must make way to the magical¹⁶ and the transcendental to the differential.

**From the Vocal
(Mouth) to the Visual
(Hand)**

Deconstruction’s project of subverting the metaphysical is about bringing to light what has traditionally been disprivileged. In this case I’ve used the “mouth” as a metaphor of the privileged voice of authority as opposed to writing connected to the serving “hand” or the watchful “eye.”

The notion of the transcendental is related to the dental area—the mouth¹⁷. The “originality” of the mouth in comparison with the secondariness of the hand; “writing” is a writing of a farewell to the end of the “ending” of Man, a dirge or a requiem, restoring the Babelian confusion of sounds in the form of a Nietzschean celebration—“writing” / writing, end/ “ending,” “”/— (the hyphen—a sign of the void of the in-betweenness). The question of the “future” of deconstruction is a question of the future of “Western” philosophy. Henceforth, a “history” of “philosophy” cannot be written except in quotes. The hand and

¹⁶ The magical far from being the illusory is the associative quality of words which gives the magical feeling i.e. the movement from one sign to another and so on, an interminable text whose meaning cannot be compartmentalized.

¹⁷ The plausibility of such a claim rests on the metaphorical nature of the voice. The mouth is the source of the voice. If Derrida refers to the voice as a celebration of origin, then the mouth is the origin of an origin. The argument is meant to play on the *prefacial* character of the voice in terms of the mouth. Every origin in turn has an origin to its credit or debit.

the eye trespass the zone of the mouth; the apparent enters the forbidden territory of the real and writing encounters the voice¹⁸. If all ideas are signs functioning within a system, what is possible is a literature of philosophy; a fiction of philosophy; a “passage” from *A Passage to India*; a philosopher-fictionist or a philosopher-writer; can a philosopher-writer be the philosopher-king?

The copula is the passage from the mouth to the hand. It is the preface to the eye in which one sees one’s face as the other. “The metaphysics of the face therefore *encloses* the thought of Being, presupposing the difference between Being and the existent at the same time as it stifles it” (Derrida 2002, 144). The face is not so much an expression of the senses as much as the repression of difference; it is transcendental because it encompasses the mouth—the teeth, tongue and the lips required for speech—it writes with the hand in precisely what it excludes, i.e., the hand itself.

The hand is an important metaphor to the copula because unlike the mind, the hand is without a destiny. The spirit is a mental thing—it has everything to do with Beingness that surpasses beings that Heidegger discovers in transcendence. “For, in *transcendence*, the essence of the finitude of Dasein discloses itself *as freedom of reasons*” (Heidegger 1969, 131). The hand does not transcend reason and is adjunct to the mind that can voice reasons with the aid of the mouth. The hand expresses itself in traces it leaves behind. As Derrida points out in *Of Spirit*, “the difference or duality inscribed by the trait or even by the impress is not considered by Heidegger as a division. It is the relation of spirit itself to itself as gathering together. The trait gathers” (Derrida 1989, 106). It is divisiveness that characterizes the hands rather than a gathering of the spirit. It is the being of the hand in its state of difference at once mute and simultaneously the condition of all writing (hence the silence of writing); and not the hand as a pure receptacle of spirit (in effect the spirit is the condition of the being of the hand). If the hand, far from being the voice of the spirit is the possibility of the spirit, or the trace that expresses the spirit, then the history of copula is the writing of the hand (in more vocal terms, good versus bad *hand-writing*) and not the voice of the spirit that is the traditional bastion of Western metaphysics.

**In-citing Derrida:
Deconstruction as
Metaphysics**

Is deconstruction “metaphysics” of another kind with its avowed project of dismantling systems of authority and privilege! Are all identities ultimately essential since we cannot imagine something being identified without offering the parameters of identification! Is deconstruction ready to assume responsibility for its own death since there is no other way for it to exist as a discourse that challenges mainstream assumptions about reality!

The ideal definition of metaphysics is contradiction, a contradiction that does not admit that *contradictoriness* is a way of looking at things. Can the margins be deconstructed or is marginality the point of situatedness that endows deconstruction with some kind of an identity? Metaphysics is an aspect of language because it cannot be otherwise. It

¹⁸ Writing, that is secondary to the voice, is further secondary to the hand and the eye that are helping aids to the writer. There is a metaphorical interaction going on between the voice/mouth and writing/ hand/eye.

exists in the spaces of words since *entities can* after all *be multiplied without necessity*. Deconstruction is an attempt to move to a point where language is *not* metaphysics, an “original” point in space, where things undermine their identities in order to claim their differences. If identity is not opposed to difference, but rather its outcome, how else could difference be identified except as an opposition in how it differs from having an identity? To deconstruct deconstruction (maybe it goes against decorum to quote a man against himself) is to assume that language becomes what it is not--metaphysics; that there is a language that can avoid metaphysics or at least perpetually cognizes its own metaphysicality.

Such a cognition based on rhetoric visualizes a viewpoint of labor that is primarily an operation in language working itself into the reality of beings. At the heart of deconstruction, there is a utopian hope of such a reading interspersed with pleasure (*la jouissance*), not as a consequence or telos, but as an experience of brilliance each time the reader, in the way she sees the text, undercuts the nowness, the “living presence” of words. “To grasp the operation of creative imagination at the greatest possible proximity to it, one must turn oneself toward the invisible interior of poetic freedom. One must be separated from oneself in order to be reunited with the blind origin of the work in its darkness” (Derrida 2002, 8). It is with this “poetic freedom” that one writes her work, reverting to the aboriginal as the origin, with darkness (of the other) as background (instead of light).

In the rejection of history as a point of origin, deconstruction breaks through the complicity between history and knowledge or epistemology as the history of knowledge. If deconstruction refuses the status of epistemology or being a phase in the history of language theory, then it seems to throw down the gauntlet to metaphysics trapped in the cage of essence into devouring the presumption that deconstruction claims for itself: that it is a statement revealing contradiction as the true face of Western metaphysics; did metaphysics ever have a “true” face to its credit? There is an essential cage and there is this strange, exotic creature that has obsessed Western philosophy--this being in the cage is metaphysics. *The otherness of metaphysics is the reality of deconstruction*. The precise point of deconstruction (if there must be one at all) is in the reader knowing that she can never escape metaphysics (the presence of the father), except literally in signs, and rejoice in the freedom of her knowledge. She must not mourn the imprisonment of the soul in the body, but rather celebrate the bodiness of the soul, the thingness of things and the wordiness of words.

If there is no truth opposed to falsehood all we can have is the truth of the falsehood of truth or the falsehood of the truth that there could ever be a single truth: has deconstruction brought language to a standstill where one could only be a “liar” celebrating the “truth” of the lie? What if the *jouissance* of the word cannot be sustained except as metaphysics? Does that imply that deconstruction once again makes way for history as the “truth?” Neither can deconstruction evade history nor can history encompass deconstruction without itself being deconstructed in its claim to reveal the past as a way into the future. Deconstruction is less the epistemology of death and more the death of epistemology (viewing epistemology as a systematic foundation of essence). If deconstruction is a discourse of death different

from philosophies of life based on the constructionist metaphysics of the unity of being, the pleasure is not a masochistic yearning but an intense desire of being in a state of non-beingness where one is in the present without being so¹⁹. The knowledge of being is not the knowledge of the living present except as a metaphor of death because the present has either become a sign of the past or a precursor to the future.

In the context of the death of the “present” (i.e., also the undermining of the name of the author who inscribes his signature in an “eternal” present or the deconstruction of the opposition of the temporal and the eternal) the reader interprets the text, while the text interprets another text (an interpretation that functions in the absence of the author as a source of meaning). The reader (in the act of opening the book) is exposed to the danger lurking within the text, what can never be known from the outside, but can be preconceived as reality or the truth. In fact, Western metaphysics is founded on the bifurcation of reality from the truth--one as what *is* (the present; illumination) and another as what is apprehended to be (history; the eternal; meaning). In a state of beyond, the “what is” and the “to be” fall into a communion of reality and the truth, where one becomes the other and the other the one, the *Aufhebung*, which “is a relationship between two terms where the second at once annuls the first and lifts it up into a higher sphere of existence; it is a hierarchical concept generally translated “sublation” and now sometimes translated “sublimation” (Derrida 1976, xi). While the Heideggerian position is to view reality as being-t/here (Da-sein), the deconstructionist position is to see being as truth that differs from other truths, the truth of “reality” being one of them; and the possible “truth” being difference itself.

If difference is not the master-word of deconstruction, then, what is? In an ironic and Beckettian stance, deconstruction must assume the responsibility of its own death. Whether the death is a theatrical move or a political ploy, either way it is an activity or movement that actively engrosses the reader desperate to look beyond the stage and so on *ad infinitum*. As Derrida points out in “The Theater of Cruelty,” “Theatrical art should be the primordial and privileged site of this destruction of imitation: more than any other art, it has been marked by the labor of total representation in which the affirmation of life lets itself be doubled and emptied by negation” (Derrida 2002, 234). The moral implication of an affirmation that both doubles and negates is that the other need not be cognized in the presence of the self and ultimately not even as the so-called other; possibly as difference, but difference is a mode of cognition rather than a name for the other; whether of naming the other or “namelessness” as marginal situatedness of the other is a transcendental question that can find an answer in metaphysics; without seeking an answer one can only differ—it is not a game of avoidance with the other circumventing

¹⁹ St Augustine’s definition of time in Book xi of the Confessions simultaneously accepts and undercuts the nowness of the present: “If, then, time present--if it be time--only comes into existence because it passes into time past, how do we say that even this is, whose cause of being is that it shall not be--namely, so that we cannot truly say that time is, unless because it tends not to be?”

India a Nation!

the predator-self, but a game that involves wit and humor. It is a game in which third world people and writers lay claim to their otherness, i.e., writing; a translation of authority in *other* terms, a passage that strikes at the impasse of speech and presence, the copula that liberates without pretending to terminate the dialogue between one and an/other.

While deconstruction must voice the aspirations of the excluded or the others it is also a discourse of perpetual resistance to the monopoly of one set of meanings over others. The copula escapes being pinned down firmly into one system of thought. It continues to play the role of a passage, a sign, a vision of difference that challenges the status quo built on the authority of discourses that claim to "know" owing to their power to repress every other meaning.

The passage of the copula is a metamorphosis of nations. It is Forster's dramatic vision of a postcolonial world at the end of the novel *A Passage to India*. The title is a passage from a passage that is also the burden of history upon fiction. Another version of Western metaphysics would be the metaphysics of nationalism characteristic of colonial structures operating in third world nations. In *The Other Heading*, Derrida challenges Europe's identity--its heading toward an end in view, the end of the passage or the copula. "The idea of an advanced point of *exemplarity* is the *idea of the European idea*, its *eidōs*, at once as *arche*—the idea of beginning but also of commanding (the *cap* as the head, the place of capitalizing memory and of decision, once again, the captain)—and as *telos*, the idea of the end, of a limit that accomplishes, or that puts an end to the whole point of the achievement, right there at the point of completion" (Derrida 1992, 24-5). The end in view is also the Christian after-life, the theology of the transcendent, the invisible secret that is God himself. "That is the history of God and of the name of God as the history of secrecy, a history that is at the same time secret and without any secrets. Such a history is also an economy" (Derrida 1995, 109). The end, i.e., God, a secret and an economy, is a social and political order functioning under the banner of nationalism to the effect of determining meaning that is in view. If at all there is such an end, all that remains of it is but ashes or cinders. "There the cinder is: that which preserves in order no longer to preserve, dooming the remnant to dissolution. And it is no longer the one who has disappeared who leaves cinders 'there'; it is only her still unreadable name" (Derrida 1991, 35).

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Öz

Derrida için Önsöz: Koşaç ile Buluşma

Bu makalede Derrida'nın felsefesine bir önsöz oluşturarak, Derrida'nın felsefesini "tanıtmayı" amaçlıyorum. Ancak Derrida'nın tartışmasının tümü, özgün bir çehre ve anlamdan yoksun olan felsefenin sadece önsözünün yazılabileceği fikrine dayanır. Derrida'nın çalışmalarının tümü de sadece felsefeye bir önsöz oluşturmaktan ibarettir; benim ortaya koyduğum önsöz ise Derrida'nın okuyucularına sunduğu önsözden iki derece uzaktır. Kısaca bu, Derrida'nın fazla ciddiye alınmayan ancak anlamın oluşmasında temel bir rolü olan koşaç ile buluşmasıdır. Koşaç nedir? Tarihsel olarak ciddiye alınmayan belli başlı marjinal grupların felsefi ifadesidir. Spivak'ın, Derrida'nın *Of Grammatology*'sine yazmış olduğu önsöz nezdinde benim önsözüm gerçekten bir derece daha uzaktır. En nihayetinde, felsefe (yazar ve okuyucu arasında bir bağ kuran) önsöz ya da koşaç ile bir buluşmadan başka nedir ki? Hem metodolojik açıdan hem de verileri yorumlarken ödün vermeyen bir tutum içerisinde olmamız mümkün müdür? Bu, Derrida'nın paradoksudur: bunların birer tutum olduğunun bilincine varmadan herhangi bir tutum içerisine giremeyiz. Sürekli değişken yapısıyla ve bir işaretleyen (signifier) olarak koşaç, bir Zen ustası gibi, durumlara yüklediğimiz, kelime kafeslerinde hapsolmuş anlamları sürekli olarak didikler durur. Beşeri ve Sosyal Bilimler söylemlerinde üst-anlamlarla doludur; demek istediğim araştırmacı bilim insanları kesin tutumlar içerisine girerler ve gerçekleri bu tutumların ışığında yorumlarlar. Tutumlarımızın temelinde varolan sınıf, ırk, cinsiyet ve diğer önyargıların bilincinde olmak, metni bütünselliğin pençesinden kurtararak anlam için sonsuzluğun kapılarını açacaktır.

Anahtar kelimeler

Yapıbozumculuk, felsefe, farklılık, koşaç, ötekilik.

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Yazar Hakkında

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