

Chapter 2

Configurations of Memory and the Work of Difference

Abstract In exploring cultural difference through cultures of memory, this chapter discusses European conceptions of memory and technics. While engaging with the classical debate concerning orality and literacy (from Plato to Stiegler) it points to the historical undermining of embodied mnemocultural traditions in European heritage. The chapter offers a mnemocultural critique of Derrida's conception of "writing" and Stiegler's account prosthetics.

Keywords Gesture and speech • Writing • Plato • Derrida • Stiegler

Performative or practical knowledge is the ability to act recursively in the world. The social environment created in such a culture will itself be recursive, exhibiting the properties of recursive systems. The history of this culture, of the coming-to-be of a people, just like the way it is with the West, is the story of the emergence, crystallization, and the development of recursively structured learning configuration.

Balagangadhara (1994, p. 465).

This chapter aims to address some concerns regarding teaching the humanities in today's postcolonial situation. These concerns are composed here by way of a strategically configured domain that brings together the thematics of Europe and its others (in this case, heterogeneous India), cultural singularities, historical violence, memory, the body and idiom; and we shall call this domain mnemo-cultures. Mnemocultures are cultures of memory that survive and proliferate in immemorial communicational forms of speech and gesture. These cultures move with and live on memory.

2.1 Cultures of Memory

Memories are intangible. Two distinct kinds of memories bind and unbind, continue and discontinue the phenomenal and non-phenomenal relations and existences in the world. One set contains externalized and objectified memories, which are created by the work of the hand and face. The other set figures the enacted and embodied memories that circulate across all sorts of materialities and whose relays are intractable and indeterminable. Lithic or glyphic technologies make possible the objectification and archiving of the memory. In contrast to that, the a-lithic “technologies” (of gesture and speech) articulate the work of the face and the body. The lithic mode preserves memories externally, outside the body in material substrates and structures. The a-lithic mode does not quantify and objectually externalize memories; it brings forth memories through embodied articulations. Here the body is the most decisive and articulate substrate.

Although both the modes can be noticed in all cultures, based on their prominence or the status accorded them in different cultures, civilizational or cultural differences can be tracked and their differential mnemo-archival articulations can be grasped. All the changing forms of articulating memory are the result of two specific acts on organic or inorganic material substance: the work of hand and the work of face; of gesture (graphics) and language. If archeo-paleontology tries to track these manifestations of memory, archive-museum shelters and guards these exteriorized material markers. Greek and Judaic traditions of memory, for instance, privilege the objectual and archival drive and marginalize the mnemocultural pulsions.¹

2.2 Lithic Ventures

Memory in Indic traditions, as will be shown later, significantly differs from the Greek and Judaic traditions of antiquity. If memory has entropic status in Greek antiquity, it is configured as traumatic in Judaic culture. Let us briefly dwell on these differences before sketching the larger argument of this work.

In philosophical accounts of memory in Greek thought, memory is the soul’s quest or struggle to return to its heavenly abode from where it is banished. The

¹ (I am not taking into account the more ancient Egyptian cultural memory here. This is because the Europe that expands its intellectual regime is predominantly formed by Greek-Jew [and Christian] lineages. All the major thinkers of Europe confine themselves to this lineage in their accounts of European thought.) Although archaeologists argue that the “modernity of human behavior” can be traced back to the “liberation of memory” achieved by the “storage of symbolism outside the brain”, in the petroglyphs or rock drawings of paleoart, such modes of externalization must be distinguished from the archive-museum based politico-epistemic dominations of modern European regimes. The paleoart was certainly not driven by any form of “archive fever”. Cf. Bednarik (2006). Also cf. Leroi-Gourhan (1993), especially the chapter “The Language of Forms”; also Derrida (1976), esp. “Of Grammatology as a Positive Science” (pp. 74–93); and Derrida (1995).

banished soul descends to the earth in graded (or degraded) and stratified division and occupies differently marked bodies. The best will remember and yearn for the return more than the worst; and the latter will indulge and rejoice their degraded bodily imprisonment. But this is a philosopher's version of memory that gains privilege at a certain moment in Greek culture.²

The pre-Socratics had recognizable continuities (although literacy was making inroads already) with a cultural ethos that sustained itself in a different mode in archaic Greece. In the earlier mode, the goddess of memory (Mnemosyne) touched the poet and released him into a melopoeiac realm. The poet-singer thus inspired and intimated had access to the innermost past and the indefinite future, in the moment of his existence. He wandered along singing rhapsodically and performing ecstatically the vision he was exposed to. This inspired memory recalled and recounted the past of the beings and their deeds (Pythagoras and Empedocles could recount their multiple lives and experiences) (Vernant 2006a; Detienne 1999a; Hunter and Rutherford 2009).

The bard was a medium which connected the present to a past and paved the way for a future for generations. Alethéia ("poetic or bardic truth") and Mnemosyne were deeply filiated and were opposed to Lethé and forgetfulness. These "masters of truth" and memory (as the bard/poet along with the diviner and the king of justice were called in ancient Greece) (Detienne 1999b) were displaced by a new tribe of seekers of truth called philosophers. The masters of truth enacted and performed their intimations. Whereas the seekers of truth sought to propound truth by verbal postulates and logical demonstrations ("I am only a common man seeking truth", says Socrates in his loaded, ironic utterance to Ion).³ The gap between the two became unbridgeable by the time of Aristotle.

Memory is no longer the lively intimation actively performed in an immersive mode, through sonic and choreographic waves—but a mental category to be invaded by the logical verbal protocols of knowledge. As language, memory too gets grammaticized, discretized for analysis. Even this privileged access to memory was reserved for the dialectician—the one who ought to be most capable of remembering and the one who (with the promise of memory drawing him to his original abode) prepares himself for death. Philosophy was a preparation for death

² The philosopher in question here is Socrates and the account of memory here refers to Socrates' discussion of the relation between memory and dialectics in the *Phaedrus* (Plato 1952c, pp. 124–125).

³ Plato's *Ion* demonstrates the epistemic difference that was beginning to emerge between two modes of thinking in ancient Greece. This difference in this dialogue, however, is framed entirely from the vantage of the philosopher Socrates. The rhapsode Ion is grilled by Socrates to make explicit the "principles", the general (i.e., epistemic) basis of his recitations. Socrates ridicules Ion for singing without knowing; his lively performance is said to be devoid of "art" (techné) and knowledge (episteme). Ion is either a deceiver or an inspired (that is, without being conscious about what he does) person. He does something without knowing what he is doing. Socrates turns the rhapsode Ion into a straw figure by exposing his ignorance of "art" (techné) and "knowledge" (episteme)—the weapons of the new master of truth (philosopher). Cf. Plato (1952b, pp. 142–148). The figure of Ion will obliquely move in, as much as the Shadow of Plato falls on, this entire work on mnemocultures.

in this entropic vision of memory in the work of Plato. Despite his own defense of memory, his apparent celebration of the tradition of memory (mneme and *muthos*) and the pivotal figure who remembers most in his dialogues—Socrates—Plato’s work confirms the entropic vision of memory.

Although Socrates never wrote a word (at least none was preserved—but he does draw geometric figures in *Meno*), Plato (2002) records and preserves or creates and archives everything that Socrates is supposed to have said. It is neither memory nor recitation but entirely Plato’s *writing* that handed down Socrates to posterity. One notices a certain ambiguity in Plato towards the mnemocultural media (of speech and gesture). While he appears to defend speech against writing in the *Phaedrus*,⁴ he denounces singing poets and musical choruses in the *Laws*. In other words, Plato is aiming at salvaging speech (logos) from mnemocultural *muthos* for the philosopher of truth. Hence his denunciation of song and performative cultures and championing of speech (rational speech).⁵ We shall return to this ambiguity later in this chapter.

By the time of Aristotle memory is firmly a philosophical psychological theme for conceptual speculations and archival preservations (cf. Sorabji 1972/2004; also Krell (1990, pp. 13–23).⁶ If philosophy turns memory into its object of thought, history—recording of past accounts—takes over the mantle of performative memory. Literacy, the new art of managing memory irrupts the mnemoscape and inscribes itself in stone. Recitation of Homer, a well-entrenched practice for centuries, gets displaced by the time of Plato. Classical Greece goes through the decisive displacement of its archaic past and inaugurates the denigration of mnemocultures.⁷

⁴ The *Phaedrus*, it must be said, presents an ambiguous picture about writing. Although Socrates, citing the Egyptian myth about writing, seems to discount writing, when we closely look at the beginning of the dialogue, we notice that he insists on Phaedrus *reading* out from the written document about Lysias’ account of love. Denying Phaedrus “hope of practicing my art” of oratory, Socrates demands: “but you must first of all show what you have in your left hand under your cloak, for that roll, as I suspect, is the actual discourse. Now, much as I love you, I would not have you suppose that I am going to have your memory exercised at my expense, if you have Lysias himself here.” That is, the physically absent Lysias himself can be present in the recorded manuscript and Socrates wants to access that carried over presence from the hidden pages. Succumbing to the pressure of the master, Phaedrus says “if I am to read...” Plato (1952c, p. 116). Curiously, this scene of writing does not receive much of Derrida’s or even Stiegler’s attention.

⁵ It must be pointed out that Plato’s position with regard to writing and its relation to memory remains ambivalent. On the one hand Plato is the philosopher who writes and records and on the other hand he defends memory against the art of writing. On the one hand he can’t tolerate the singers and bards (his Oedipal tussle with Homer) and on the other hand he makes Socrates dream about practising music in prison in the last few days of his life. Cf. Plato (1952a, d).

⁶ Jean Pierre Vernant chronicling the changing fate of memory in Greek antiquity argues that by the time of Aristotle memory gets dissociated with traditional techniques of remembrance (*meleté* and *mnemé*), its filiation with the soul, its discerning intellection and becomes more and more bonded with the senses (as a perceptual category). (Vernant 2006b, pp. 130–140).

⁷ Xenophanes and Heraclitus denounce Homer and Hesiod on the one hand, and the “oral order” on the other. (cf. Ferrari 1984). Ferrari critically reviews the orality/literacy debate in this article. He critiques Eric Havelock’s biased reading of pre-Socratics as belonging to oral traditions. Ferrari’s point is that Havelock insufficiently attends to the impact of literacy on pre-Socratics.

2.3 A Mosaic Distinction

If Greek antiquity provided one decisive root of European tradition, monotheistic Judaism provides another such root. Judaic memory configures a “normative past”. It persistently recalls a traumatic history. This memorialized trauma is not the work of the catastrophe of decimation that the Jews were subjected to in the recent history. The 20th century trauma of Jews seems to be an aggravated repetition of a much more primal trauma that seems to haunt Jewish memory. The Bible inscribes that primal trauma of Jews and their life and suffering in Egypt as slaves (a state which itself was the result of a more originary trauma of the sin). Jewish memory is regulated by this indelible horror of a traumatized psyche. That horror of the past became a concentrated narrative experience and a warning for the Jews.

As distinct and chosen people every Jew is required to internalize the codified historical memory (because the Bible and what it records/recounts is believed to be a “true” historical occurrence) of the experience; and every Jew is induced to learn the words of the Torah by heart and thus become conscious of the memory, nurture and endure it. The words of the Torah “shall be upon thy heart”—inscribed in the heart and soul. Deuteronomy in the Bible transmits this codified traumatic memory (Assman 2006, pp. 1–31, esp. “Monotheism, Memory, and Trauma,” and “Cultural Texts Suspended Between Writing and Speech”; Assmann 2008).⁸ As Freud the Jew discovered, trauma, whether real or imaginary (that is, whether one really experiences trauma in one’s own life or not)—has the tendency to haunt the subject. The traumatic and violent Judaic memory is inscribed in stone. Moses the patriarch authenticates and transmits this lithic memory.⁹

But memory as such is nothing; only articulations of memory constitute cultural difference. In contrast to the externally stored lithic memories of European past, embodied or enacted memories are not just a peculiarity of the “life-world” as such (whether human/plant/animal). Such memories are inescapable in the “lives” of geo, hydro and atmospheric formations that compose the planet that houses us. In fact the so-called life form itself is the effect of mutations (evolution) within the unagentive and unarchived, memories (inherent/inherited qualities) of these planetary forces. It would be a challenge to track the relations that connect these planetary memories.

⁸ It must however be pointed out that Jewish cultural history is surfeit with song cultures. The three techniques of cantillation, psalmody and modal chant were central to the transmission of the Hebrew liturgy. The first and second Temples were associated with songs in varying degrees (sometimes with musical instruments and sometimes without). Enchantment was achieved in the synagogue by the chants (cf. Levine 2010).

⁹ Dominic LaCapra (2009, pp. 192, 220) contrasting “traditional” societies from Western ones thinks that in the case of the latter “there may be something like transhistorical or structural trauma,” some kind of disruptive fissure (such as original sin, transition from nature to culture, separation from mother, crucifixion, “revolutions”, etc.). LaCapra does not see such structuring ruptures in “traditional” societies. We shall see later how such tropes of rupture structure European descriptions of India.

Myths, folktales and “ethnoreligions” are replete with intimations of these relations and permeations. The figural set of the *mahabhutas* (primal elements) in the Sanskrit tradition offers a dynamic web that weaves relations, associations and bonds across the elemental forces and the tangible forms of the planet.¹⁰ Today the remarkable Brazilian philosopher, Manuel de Landa, offers a “poetics of relation” across the diversity of “historical” memorial formations that surround and compose us (de Landa 1997). These memories, while indicating the limits of the planetary forces leave open possible relays into the infinite rhythms and formations of the universe. The “finite” biological archive’s articulation of the traces of infinite forces and memories that live on across the circulating planetary bodies is rarely explored. Myth and religion are still the resources for reflection on these articulations for many; in other words, imagination still intimates us with these regions. But to explore these archives of planetary relations—the very nature and concept of science would need a rearticulation.

Straddling the two forms of the archive, but blurring their boundaries circulates and permeates the archive of “ancestral memories”. These memory-traces are not the biological continuities but the equally formidable transgenerational inheritances of a demarcated/differentiated community. Embodied memories of this kind are not just what an individual acquires through conscious learning in a life-time. But they are, as Freud writes in his most hesitant and adventurous text, *Moses and Monotheism* (1985), they are the “acquired characters” of ancestry, trans-individual memories and received experiences. These *gunas* (quality or property) as the Sanskrit tradition would call the “pre-historical” receptions, however discontinuous or even discordant these memory traces might appear to be with the “biological archive”, Freud (1985, p. 343) insisted on their formative role in the formation of psyche, their “*constitutional* factor in the individual” (emphasis in original).

Reflecting on the genesis of monotheism, Freud writes: “the archaic heritage of human beings comprises not only dispositions but also subject-matter—memory-traces of the experience of earlier generations. In this way the compass as well as the importance of the archaic heritage would be significantly extended” (Freud 1985, p. 345). These phylogenetic memory-traces, sedimented and internalized, manifest as near instinctual recurrences in gesture and speech, in language and graphics, in the immemorial work of hand and face. In the Indian traditions ritual and recitational practices carry the legacy of this archaic heritage and surviving memory traces. These traces move across the embodied and externalized memories, but also beyond them to the other finite and infinite spheres of elemental forces. The movement of life itself is extended by these non-biological

¹⁰ The most succinct and comprehensive formulation of these relations could found in *Samkhyakarika* of Iswarakrishna. The *Karika* conceives these elemental relations and their coming into being in the phenomenal form of the body complex along with an irreducible alterity in prominently gendered and erotic terms (cf. Koteswarasarma 1996). In this work, the critical centrality of the body in Sanskrit mnemocultures (the question of what one does with one’s body) is partly grasped from this *Karika*.

discontinuous relays—called epigenetic transmissions—contend some theorists in the life sciences today.¹¹

Immemorial articulations of life emerge in the embodied forms of acoustic and gestural rhythms, visual and verbal performatives of the being; they are the monstrations of existence. Yet, these articulations of such magnitude essentially remained in the grip of the sciences that privilege the human faculties of reason and evolution. The human sciences of history and anthropology paved passages and confined the approaches to these tectonic rhythms of unfathomable duration. Philosophy as systemic thought barely attended directly to these intimations. But as we have tried to sketch earlier, philosophy as such could come into existence only after it successfully (and violently) overcame or displaced the cultures and modes of being that prevailed earlier. The division of *muthos* from *logos* suggests the rise of first philosophy. The great beginnings of Western philosophy, contends Heidegger, emerged in the process of overcoming “its extreme opposite, the mythical in general and the Asiatic in particular” (quoted in Mehta 1985, p. 245).¹² Despite Heidegger’s celebrated turn to the pre-Socratics, his investment in archaic speech and song, and above all, his life-long contestation of the principle of calculative reason, his work does not figure passageways to rearticulate the mnemocultures of Europe in particular and their survival elsewhere in general.

But the singular philosopher, Derrida, who admiringly, if agonistically, grappled with Heidegger and unravelled his investments in the archaic and metaphysical, overturned and displaced the violent division of speech and writing, *muthos* and *logos*, and decisively aligned *logos* with speech. In other words, he pushed the violent division much further into the past beyond Plato. Strategically he undermined the privilege that the tradition accorded to speech; contesting such privilege, he radicalized the notion of *writing* which is said to have suffered discredit in European heritage. In this epochal context of rearticulating the mnemotechnical tradition, in the light of Derrida’s counter-signing of his European heritage, it is worthwhile asking: Can there be a place for mnemocultures in the colossal work of Derrida? Can the strategies of deconstruction—of overturning and displacing the existing structure—remain hospitable to these cultural memories? The next section

¹¹ Eva Jablonka contends that there are therefore at least four dimensions of evolution. Along with the DNA lines, the neglected heritable resources are the non-DNA (“daughter cells”) paths, the behavioural transmission (as in the case of animals), and symbol-based inheritances (such as language and gesture) play substantial role in the evolution of life forms, argues Jablonka (Jablonka and Lamb 2006). Also of more direct relevance here is the work of Bernard Stiegler (1998).

¹² Plato, who inaugurates the tradition, asserts that “philosophy begins when one stops ‘telling a story,’ that is defining entities by recourse to some other entities, as is done in the presocratic doctrines of Being” (cf. Dastur 1998). Historicizing this move from myth to philosophy, Kirk et al. (1957/2006) thematize this as a transition from “the closed traditional society (which in its archetypal form is an oral society in which the telling of tales is an important instrument of stability and analysis) and towards an open society in which the values of the past become relatively unimportant and radically fresh opinions can be formed of the community itself and of its expanding environment” (pp. 72–74).

aims at taking Derrida elsewhere (from his cherished Europe-centred cultural formations) and sounding mnemocultural questions in the portals of deconstruction.

2.4 Derrida Elsewhere

Derrida's immense work persistently and with patience unraveled how the diverse lines of inquiry in the human sciences kept intact as guardrails a specific line of thought—the theologico-metaphysical inquiry that operates with a pre-comprehension of origin and significance.

Learning from him that the contexts, events and signatures that weave our textures of reflection must be set to work in contexts of our own singular performative enactments, it should be possible to move Derrida elsewhere from his own Europe-centred claims of heritage; it should be possible to take him elsewhere to another, heterogeneous trace structure of memory, to another barely understood a-normative palimpsest of memory traces to interface his (lithic) memory with mnemocultural experience.

Thought in a certain sense, stated Derrida (1976, p. 93), means nothing. Yet one learns from his work that thought is the effect of modes of communication; thought is also an articulation of inheritances. Communicational modes carve or inflect the course of thinking. Yet thinking itself or thought as such is irreducible to the determined modes and materials of thought. Earlier we have identified the modes of articulation broadly as lithic and alithic. Although both modes are filiated to the body, and both constitute the externalized memory, they can be differentiated as the gestural-graphic work of the hand and verbal-gestural work of the face. Reflective practices and traditions depend on the articulation of the lithic and alithic modes. Literacy and discursive philosophy, for instance, believed to be the boon of lithic technique of writing, are the celebrated tools of European civilizational demarcation from its others. The alphabetic writing is said to be the mark of European distinction: “alphabetic writing supporting the history of the development of geometric thought” (Stiegler 2001, p. 257). Archives are the granaries of alphabetic writing.

The lithic work of graphics and the alithic vocalic expression are, however, deeply related to gesture. If the force of limbs finds externalized articulation in graphics (as in parietal or Paleo art) or performance (as in dance), the gestural modulations of internal body parts result in the emergence of speech forms. The rhythms of gestural force are at the root of both lithic and alithic memories and articulations. But a hierarchic relation between the alithic speech form and lithic orthography is said to have regulated our reflections on communication systems in their relation to thought across history. A linearized relation between speech and the reductive graphical system called writing got established. In this reckoning, writing would only carry on and extend what otherwise would be lost in speech. As a mnemotechnology, writing is the preserver of speech and the quintessential emblem of the archives. Four thousand years of linear writing, Andre Leroi-Gourhan argued, have accustomed us to this bifurcation of graphical art from writing (Leroi-Gourhan 1993, pp. 192–202).

In his strategic project to displace this hierarchy, Jacques Derrida privileges the subordinated lithic figure—writing—and unravels the alithic speech form as a dominant metaphysical dogma underlying the entire (Western) episteme itself. The phonic substance, writes Derrida, “*presents itself* as the nonexterior, nonmundane, therefore non-empirical or noncontingent signifier—has necessarily dominated the history of the world . . . and has even produced the idea of the world . . .” (Derrida 1976, pp. 7–8, emphasis in original). Phoné for Derrida is being’s self-relationship—“hearing and understanding oneself speak”; it is a sort of auto-affection (Derrida 1976, p. 7).

The essence of the phoné “would be immediately proximate to that which within ‘thought’ as logos relates to ‘meaning . . .’” This, for Derrida, confirms absolute “proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the identity of meaning” (1976, pp. 10–12). In questioning the alleged primordialism of speech, its assured filiation with consciousness, its unexamined access to origin—Derrida’s strategic project has been extraordinarily productive. Although it is of tactical and not of empirical significance or significant as a “historically” specific mode of articulation, the lithic figure of writing does not seem to escape an ethnocentric ruse here. For, it is precisely this “historical” and empirically specific system of lithic communication that was used to demarcate Europe from its others in an entire epoch called colonialism.

The oddity of this rather loaded figure (writing) in a radically subversive project (of Derrida’s) does not, however, undermine the critical force of the project. For, in deploying this empirically and historically singular figure in his project, Derrida is only concerned with forging a filament, weaving a thread, configuring a versatile template of the most general significance. Thus writing in the narrow sense is a weave of differential system, a chain of variable filaments, spacing among a finite set of elements (letters).

The lithic system of writing is constituted by the rhythms of the weave, the forge and the template. These are rhythms without substance; but they bring forth or lend themselves to substance and system—“regulating the behavior of the amoeba or the annelid up to the passage beyond alphabetic writing to the orders of the logos of a certain *homo sapiens*, the possibility of the *grammé* structures the movement of its history according to rigorously original levels, types and rhythms.” They are forces without essences; but they appear or lend themselves to engendering essences: “But one cannot think them without the most general concept of the *grammé*” (Derrida 1976, p. 84).

It is precisely in order to put to work this general force of difference or programme that Derrida draws on the figure of writing. The radical import of this strategy is to redress the historically repeated structures of violence—a violence that subordinates the work of hand to the work of face—of the graphic to the phonic. The most prominent casualty of this subordination, for Derrida, is the graphical system of alphabetic writing itself. The alphabet is the most illustrious instance of the violence of linearization. The graphic figure of the alphabet, in this linear dispensation is subordinated to the pre-supposed phonic essence. Hence the divergence between graphical art and writing, observed Leroi-Gourhan. Similarly alphabetic writing is reduced to little more than writing following speech, simply extending the regime of speech as it is: writing is “technics in the service of language” (Derrida 1976, p. 8). In subordinating the work of hand and the lithic mode of articulation of

memory, to the work of face and the alithic forms of expression, the linear schema has given birth to the archive and the practise of archivation of memories. The alphabetic writing is said to be the mark of European distinction.

2.5 In Gratitude

The deconstructive strategy—of conserving the empirical figure of writing but at the same time annulling it as derivative of speech, precisely in order to allude to the more originary programme of spacing—has initiated a radical questioning of inheritances, modes of communication and sedimented inquiries in the human sciences. But the *illustrative or exemplary* significance of the figure of writing has remained undisturbed in the project. Although Derrida was explicit on occasions in declaring the empirical division of speech and writing as irrelevant in his work,¹³ although he would certainly regard speech very much like writing as a system of differences,¹⁴ constituted by the force of spacing—nowhere in Derrida’s work the differential system of *speech* is considered as a usable figure (“concept-metaphor”) for articulating the force of difference.

From the very beginning of his work, Derrida has committed himself to recapture, within the history of life as the history of *grammé*, “the unity of gesture and speech, of body and language, of tool and thought, before the originality of the one and the other is articulated and without letting this profound unity give rise to confusionism.... To recover the access to this unity, to this other structure of unity, we must de-sediment ‘four thousand years of linear writing’” (1976, pp. 85–86). *Yet, nowhere do these “original” communications of speech and gesture offer themselves for unraveling the Western episteme in Derrida’s work.*

The privileged figure of literacy, the trope of scribal communication system—writing—remains the conserved (and annulled) element of Derrida’s schema. Writing on drawings and art about the blind, sketching a scene of sibling rivalry, Derrida’s confession about his investment in the figure of writing (against his brother’s ability for painting) is unequivocal: “as for me, I will write, I will devote myself to the words that are calling me” (Derrida 1993, p. 37). These are of course, the words on the page—the traits of alphabetic writing. Quite often in his work, the general force of *grammé* (mark, trait, trace, etc.) lends itself to the alphabetic figure of writing. This can be seen in his emphasis on Plato’s account of hypomnesic over

¹³ “I will disregard...”, declared Derrida in a related context, “everything that consists in reducing the concept of text to that of written discourse, in forgetting that deconstruction is all the less confined to the prisonhouse of language because it *starts* by tackling logocentrism” (Derrida 1990, p. 91, emphasis in original).

¹⁴ Derrida wrote elsewhere, emphasizing the singular traits of writing (in the empirical sense): the “structural possibility of being severed from its referent or signified (and therefore from communication and its context) seems to me to make of every mark, *even if oral*, a grapheme in general... the nonpresent *remaining* of a differential mark cut off from its alleged ‘production’ or origin” (Derrida 1982, p. 318, first emphasis mine.)

mnesic or mnemonic, the virtual mark (inscription on the soul) over the intangible force of memory: “The archive is hypomnesic” (Derrida 1995, p. 11).

At a crucial level, Derrida invests in the archive as the material “monumental apparatus” and opposes it to anamnestic memory as a metaphysical figure. Derrida advances the archive as the material exterior, which is destructive of either “memory or anamnesis as spontaneous, alive and internal experience”. He goes on to argue further that the archive irrupts the “originary and structural breakdown of the said memory”. Derrida, thus, “consignates” only the hypomnesic apparatus (essentially writing in the narrow sense) as the proper material signifier. Speech and gesture—also material forces of the exterior—are not reckoned as worthy sign forces that can weave immemorial alternatives to the hypomnesic archive (Derrida 1995, p. 11).

Conversely, his devotion to Freud’s “postcard” over the colossal investment of psychoanalysis in the figure of talk (“talking cure”), once again reiterates the status of exemplarity accorded to the empirical figure of writing. The “hand-written correspondence” has “played”, states Derrida (1995, p. 17). in exploring the relation between the archive and psychoanalysis, a “major and exceptional role... at the center of the psychoanalytic archive”.¹⁵ The figure of alphabetic writing has served throughout Derrida’s work as the most *exemplary* trope for illustrating the general force of *grammé*. Indeed, it is the letter, the written alphabetic letter that *alone* captures his “discreet graphic intervention”, his strategic “neographic” substitute for writing: *differ-a-nce*.

Although *differance*, like writing, is the prior condition for the vulgar division between speech and writing, despite its constitutive play with time and space (difference and distance), and above all its potential for unravelling of sedimented master names and categories, *differance* “remains purely graphic”—*only* the vulgar sense of writing can provide us access to this “non-concept” in Derrida’s work: “it (*differance*) is read, or it is written, but it cannot be *heard*.... *It cannot be apprehended in speech*”. Only the “*written text*” (emphasis in original) will “keep watch over my discourse” (1982, p. 4, first emphasis mine).

Derrida too seemed to believe that the critical protocols of reading—rigour, differentiation and refinement “which our heritage continues to associate with the classical forms of discourse, and especially with written discourse, without images and on a paper support”—are possible only with writing (in the vulgar sense) (Derrida and Stiegler 2002, p. 243).

Although the materiality of speech forms, in Derrida’s own account, are unthinkable without the work of *grammé*, neither the immemorial song cultures nor the intractable speech genres “before” writing (in the narrow sense), nor the vibrant performative forms of dance (“the unity of gesture and speech” referred to above), have any chance of the exemplary status that writing is accorded in Derrida’s work. Could this be a symptomatic problem of inheritance (the “written Torah”)—Derrida’s heritage of patriarchal-monotheological culture whose origin is deeply chiselled in lithic orthography?

¹⁵ The figures of “inscription”, “cut”, “substrate”, “impression”, the “press”, “house”, and a whole lot of substitutes of writing (in the narrow sense) pervade this text.

Although Derrida's strategic reading of heritage is of profound importance even beyond the confines of his inheritance [his attempts to universalize the singular Judaic-Islamic figure of circumcision as "cut", "election" as the call (Derrida and Roudinesco 2004, pp. 92–95)], in his strategies of putting to work the inheritances, these resources do not have a place for mnemocultures—indeed of speech and gesture and their (ambivalent) articulations of the body.¹⁶ They disregard the alithic *accents* of memory. If every communication (system) is the effect of spacing, repetition and difference and if it emerges only as a system of differences,

¹⁶ Although Derrida wrote that he was always drawn to both the "general and universal figure of circumcision, of excision and in all the ethno-religious marking of the body," it is abundantly clear in his work that his reflective concerns (like those of most notable European thinkers) were circumscribed by monotheisms of Judeo-Christian-Islamic relays. Curiously, Derrida wrote, "if circumcision is abandoned (literal or figural circumcision, but everything played out around the letter, in Judaism as well as in Islam), one is on the road to an abandonment of phallogocentrism. This would apply *a fortiori* to excision. This abandonment applies also to Christianity. Since these three religions are powerfully, although differently, phallogocentric. In any case, phallogocentrism, and circumcision link Islam and Judaism" (Derrida and Roudinesco 2004, pp. 194–195). If this is Derrida's way of exemplifying the universalizability of the singular (a conviction that he radically affirmed in his essay, "Faith and Knowledge" [1998, p. 18]), then one wonders how this monotheistic inheritance can become a synecdoche for a cultural/conceptual universal. For circumcision and excision are not necessarily the universal "ethno-religious markings of the body". One wonders why Derrida, who wove his texts with such extraordinary figural traces of the feminine (track, sign, furrow, hymen, invagination, etc.), who taught us so much about the originary violence of the irruption of life itself, should not consider the deepest mark, that deepest "wound", that brings forth every hominid body. This "wound"—linked to a bare fibrous thread, floating in the non-space, non ground, of the bodily fluid, yet absolutely essential for any being's coming forth—leaves the most literally indelible mark on every body. This thread—the umbilical cord that connects the fetus to the mother in the womb—ought to remind *every* body of the source, indeed "memory" or "history" and the untraceable origin of the body's emergence. Yet, the thread is the absolutely significant mark, a mark that no one excepting a woman (female) can inscribe. It is rather a mystery why this deepest mark *of* woman does not find a hospitable shelter in Derrida's figural weave.

It is not irrelevant to observe here that the figural-literal "thread" is the most central, inherited mark that one finds on the bodies of several communities in India. The figure of the thread has a more profound significance in the differentiated memories of *jatis*. One is made to remember constantly that the "thread", the "c(h)ord" as the "link" that, even after its literal severance, continues to remind one of its pull or touch. In the Telangana colloquial Telugu, this thread is called the "*pegu*" (literally, a piece of rag). The figure, it must be pointed out, refers to the mother's bodily experience. This figural mark appears in various ways (sacred thread, origin thread [*moltadu*], thread of well-being [*mangala sutra*], etc. The figure of thread refers also to an extraordinary reflective-poetic genre in Sanskrit tradition which was the most productive form for over a thousand years—the Sutra tradition.). Given such singular-plural, singular but with a cultural universal status that the figure of thread signifies, it is rather strange that this figure does not receive attention in Derrida's critique of phallogocentrism. Reflecting from the specific monotheistic heritage, Derrida sees the possibility of abandoning phallogocentrism in the abandonment of circumcision. Reflecting from the other possibilities that the figure of the thread suggests, one begins to see the necessity of rethinking the cultural universal status phallogocentrism has been given in psychoanalytic and deconstructive work. It is here, once again learning from Derrida, that one must begin to explore the most singular, idiomatic articulations of the body and symbol in the heterogeneous inheritances of the past that still weave our existences and beings.

why does writing alone become the effective figure for grasping this non-transcendental force? Why can't differential systems of speech and gesture with their discreet "marks" offer effective acoustic resources for unraveling the transcendental, even if there were one? Speech and gesture remain unexplored as differential systems and as figures off/for thought in the work of deconstruction.¹⁷

Despite the enormous success of Derrida's strategies of reading, his critique of voice did not escape critical interrogation. The voice deconstructed by Derrida is a totally incongruous and reductive one, argued Sarah Kofman. Derrida essentially focused on a voice privileged by Husserl and "not the physical voice, a sonorous substance, but rather the phenomenological, transcendental voice that continues to be present to itself, in the absence of the world" (Kofman, quoted in Cavarero 2005, p. 220). What orients deconstructive labour—Derrida's philosophy of difference—is the theory of "the interminable deferral of a trace, understood as the movement of signs, whose concept basically coincides with writing. Writing, generally understood, is in fact the privileged realm of the movement of a trace that not by chance, acquires the name of *arche-écriture* in Derrida's lexicon. Derrida's interest in the phoné, his discovery of the theme of the voice, emerges precisely from the prejudicial interest in a writing conceived as a texture of differential, as an open system of deferral, and deviations, which do not allow access to any presence" (Caterina Resta, quoted in Cavarero 2005, p. 220). Exemplification of (orthotic) writing undermines and ignores the acoustical grasp and vocalic articulations of memory.

In an extended critique of Derrida's anti-acoustic position, Adriana Cavarero argues that there is a "fundamental theoretical nucleus" alternative to Derrida's grammatological path which she finds in "vocalic uniqueness". Vocal emission is the sonorous manifestation of an embodied uniqueness. The "rhythmic matrix of pleasure, the delight of the acoustic sphere that follows the rhythms of the body, which makes the rhapsode's voice powerful" configures the vocalic uniqueness. Each voice is not only the vibration of a "throat of flesh" but "also something that comes certainly from a unique, unrepeatable person is a given that never becomes a philosophical point of reflection". When the grain of voice is ignored and when one becomes deaf to acoustic pleasure, indeed to the affective relation between the mouth and ear, one turns the voice into an abstract and *disembodied* category.

¹⁷ This appears to be the case even in critiques, which insist that deconstruction should attend to the specificity of different communication systems. For instance, in Bernard Stiegler's attempt to differentiate the digital conjuncture from the alphabetic context—it is once again the figure of literacy—*writing*—that by default enters the horizon as a frame of reference. In an interesting dialogue, in contrast to Stiegler's insistence on the alphabetic writing as the inaugural event of testimony ("*Isn't this [alphabetic] writing what makes historical work possible?*"), Derrida makes an unusual comment: "Yes, language, but I prefer to say speech or the voice here. Language in the singular event of a phrase, that is to say, the voice... the voice makes language an event. It takes us from the linguistic treasure-house to the event of the phrase." If speech or voice has this enunciative, event-making force or effectivity, one is impelled to ask, why is it this figure of speech/voice doesn't lend itself to unravel the heritage of the West in Derrida's work? (Derrida and Stiegler 2002, pp. 100–101).

Derrida “symptomatically misses the opportunity”, argues Cavarero, to engage with “vocal ontology of uniqueness” (Cavarero 2005, pp. 84, 90–91, 235).¹⁸ The anti-vocalic symptom can be traced back to Plato—despite the latter’s professed antagonism towards writing.

2.6 Legacies

Apparently opposed in their positions, curiously Derrida’s and Plato’s *vision* of memory converges on the repression of the vocalic. Plato’s apparent denunciation of writing does not mitigate his antagonism towards the experimenting bards who mix genres and combine hymns with lamentations, where choruses seduce their audiences with doleful paeans and Bacchaic revelry. Plato disparagingly dubs such experiments as “theatrocracy”—a *mélange* of heterogeneous voices, a celebration of sonic variants (“instead of an aristocracy [‘where multitudes obeyed order’], an evil sort of teatrocracy has grown up”¹⁹). The literary form of dialogue that Plato deploys in his work is *apparently* a legacy of mnemocultural vocalic force. But

¹⁸ Despite Derrida’s extended use of acoustic terms (“Glas”, “otobiography”, “ear”, “tympanum”, etc.), it must be noted that all these are in the service of overturning the alleged privilege they enjoyed in association with speech in Western thought. For a more recent critique of Derrida’s erroneous approximation of acoustic apparatus in his critique of speech see Veit Earlman, *Reason and Resonance* (2010).

¹⁹ Plato (1952a, Book III, p. 676). For the Czech philosopher Jan Patocka, this teatrocracy forms the “thaumaturgical tradition” of pre-Christian orgiastic and demonic cults. Plato, according to Patocka, draws upon these traditions but overcomes them by incorporating them in his work of philosophy. From the orgiastic mystery Plato develops the idea of soul’s immortality and grasps “subjectivizing interiorization” and this underlines the emergence of egological subjectivity, argues Patocka. But for Patocka the residue of the demoniac in Plato makes his philosophy a sort of thaumaturgy. Patocka argues that responsibility emerges in surpassing the demoniac mystery – ecstatic, orgiastic, pre-religious secrets. In other words, here evolution of ethical responsibility culminating in Christian religious thought is affirmed. If the demoniac survives the triumph of the egological-philosophical despite Christian evolution, it lurks as “a nucleus of irresponsibility or of absolute unconscious, something Patocka calls ‘orgiastic irresponsibility’”. This incorporated (by Plato) and repressed (by Christianity) “irresponsibility” resurfaces, writes Derrida in his commentary on Patocka, in (Platonic) philosophy, (Christian) religion, and even in (Enlightenment) secularization. But this return “corresponds to an abdication of responsibility”, states Derrida. What is at stake in this entire discussion is in reality Christianity’s (failed) maneuvering of the Pagan (mnemocultural) traditions. What this exegesis tells is a (Judaean) Christian account of Pagan cultures of the ancient world. Christianity or monotheism continues to think about “human kind” from within the theo-conceptual framework which has evolved over two millennia. Patocka, points out Derrida from within the framework, never dissociates himself from Christian Europe. But for the Czech philosopher of responsibility, “Christianity remains thus far the greatest, unsurpassed but also un-thought-through *human* outreach that enabled human to struggle against decadence.” The “decadence” is the “absolute unconscious” that lurks as the Pagan residue of the Pagan demonic mystery (cf. Derrida 1995/2008, pp. 17–30, emphasis added). For a scintillating critique of this entire mono-theological framework’s descriptions of Pagans, cf. Balagandhara (1985, Chs. II and III, pp. 33–109).

this speech genre is already deeply regulated by the non-vocalic, visualizing literacy; Plato's dialogic speech is already deeply affected by logos—the meta-positional reflective technique: *Theoria*—envisioning insight in seeing behind or beyond—is essentially an occulocentric insight.

Plato's work is replete with this occulocentric figuration (the cave, Form, shadow, sunlight, etc.); the irresistibly talkative man Socrates represents two things at the same time: he who only speaks—that is, who has mastered speech, has absorbed and surpassed the bard—and his (that is, Socrates') rhapsodic and sophistic, seductive and hypnotic guises that beguile everyone. Yet, his logos-oriented dialogue is anti-melodic (in its thematization and disparagement of the bard). He demands seeing behind or beyond appearances; his visual dialectic is tone deaf.

Surely Socrates, more than anyone, is aware of the power of music and hence also the damage it can wreak upon a society; yet he is also meticulously sensitive to all the mnemocultural moments of his cultural habitat. That is, of all the interlocutors of his dialogue, Socrates is the one who most insistently recalls the days of festivals, the rituals to be performed, the locations of deities, local legends, hymns to be recited in specific contexts, debts to be repaid and above all render Homer any time with ease, and offer entrancing myths and (local) legends with superb sophistic fluency.

Yet, in the Socratic/Plato sphere logos overcomes the performative ritual and the efficacy of song-utterance; this can be seen in the paradigmatic case of Plato's *Ion*. In this short dialogue of Plato, as sketched earlier, Socrates—in a one-up-man scenario—ridicules Ion, and the rhapsode's inability to know the principles and nature of his art. For Socrates, Ion simply performs as a madman or an inspired person (in both cases what is at stake is conscious rationality) lacking the faculty of abstraction or theorization. He sings and performs without knowing the logic of what he does. In the place of the mode and being which persistently put each other to work (as in the mnemocultural act), autonomization of the mode or symbolization becomes the norm in Socratic discourse (unexamined life is not worth living).

The most classical forms of this autonomization can be witnessed in the agonal genres of reflection called philosophy and art (a “raging discord” between them sets in European history, says Nietzsche [quoted in Heidegger 1979, pp. 142–150]). The emergence and consolidation of this contestatory duo (philosophy/art) is actually a testimony to the interested undermining and overcoming of mnemocultures. Whether one chooses one of the agonistic domains (philosophy or art) or whether one tries to run them together (the concerted effort of German Romantics)—one still seems to disavow, as will be shown below, the mnemocultural mode of being—the radical performative (of) being.

The Socratic question—is there an ideal mode of being? (How should one live?)—has no use as long as it continues to strive for erecting an ideal. Western mode of saying *about* the ideal is voluminous. The volume seems to remain deaf to Socratic performative “question”—that of being, not of saying, discoursing *about* being.

No wonder, despite his voluminous talk (“chatter” as Nietzsche calls it)²⁰ about the question of being, goodness and a plethora of themes and questions, Socrates appears to be a vibrant performative figure as well. He never ignores or loses opportunity to render his rituals—before, during or after his talks/dialogues.²¹ The talks/dialogues offer eloquent sayings that lend themselves to relentless theorization/discursivization. As if in the apprehension of such mis-cognitions of his talks Socrates intersperses his sayings with performatives. He is involved in a mode of being that remains incommensurate with the volume of his talks. He never theorizes this performative side of his being. On the contrary he questions the idle philosophers who offer logical explanations about what he affirms in practice.²²

Socrates does seem to carry mnemocultural intimations. His major contention, his fundamental thesis—if one can put it this way—about the essential task of philosophy is not offering rational discourses as such but effective remembering—the essential anamnestic act. One can configure this Socratic mode of being as exemplifying, in the idiom of Sanskrit reflective traditions, the position of a *smarta* (the recaller, the performative rememberer) rather than that of a *karta* (the sovereign agent in full control of his action) (Sarma 2010, p. 9). As is said in the Sanskrit (Upanishadic) tradition, *shastram hi jnapakam na karakam* (discourse is only for remembrance, after the event, and it cannot cause) (*Brhadaranyaka Upanishad*, 2:1), the “dialectic” in the case of Socrates is to strengthen remembrance, and recall.

Yet it must be pointed out, as was shown earlier, that Socrates’ mode of utterance—although performative—persistently purges or cleanses itself of the song-cultural, acoustic melodic resonances of the tradition. As is well known, Plato/Socrates’ agonistic other was none other than the blind bard Homer. Thus, although Socrates draws on speech form of dialogue, it is systematically distanced from the acoustic sphere of the song. His dialogue-dialectic is anaestheticized from the heritage of Aoide (the muse of song); Socratic speech genre is logos-centred. It has feverishly sought to distance itself from *muthos* as well as epos.

The enigma of Plato’s work is that it finally frames this dialectic-dialogic and performative life of Socrates with the most ironic turn in the *Phaedo*. Socrates’ recurrent dream in prison disturbs him. The man who led his entire life weaning himself away from the musical-melodic cultural heritage, by consolidating

²⁰ For Nietzsche, Socrates was a “misfortune” that befell Greek culture. This culture, in his view, had “marvelous philosophers” preceding Socrates and they were replaced by the “combative and garrulous hordes of the Socratic schools”. Nietzsche differentiates the non-literacy of these pre-Socratics from Socrates’ avoidance of writing. Unlike the latter, “These early Greeks did not *chatter* and *revile* so much; neither did they *write* so much”. Socratic garrulity, writes Sarah Kofman commenting on Nietzsche, was a “way of exercising mastery over others; one can limit oneself to questioning others without communicating anything to them” (Kofman 1998, pp. 222–224, emphasis in original).

²¹ These ritual performances can be seen in the *Phaedrus*, *Republic*, and *Phaedo*, among others.

²² In the *Phaedrus*, talking about skeptical people who discount age old accounts of tradition by reducing “them one after another to the rules of probability,” through rational explanation, Socrates clearly says: “Now I have no leisure for such enquiries.” For, “I must first know myself”, he adds quoting the “Delphian inscription” (Plato 1952c, p. 116).

a paradigm of thought called philosophy (or dialectics), is (almost at the end of his life) driven to practise music. The logos-centred life is impelled to reflect on the repressed *muthos/aoide/mousike*. In all these performative modes of being, Socrates comes across as the bardic master of truth and a diviner, as an exemplary figure from the culture of wisdom. But on closer reading one notices that Socrates in fact musters and masters all these mnemocultural forces to bracket them, to surpass them; he subordinates these performative resources to the logos-oriented, theorizing drive of the dialectic. With all such power of the heritage, Socrates moves away from being the guardian of mnemoculture to playing the pioneer of the philosophical vocation—a thaumaturge with a variation. He affirms the epistemic turn even as he appears to exemplify the culture of memory. Despite the disruptive mnemocultural intimations, the structure of the *Phaedo* carries on in the typical Socratic dialogue-genre.

For Plato's Socrates, the Homeric culture of memory, which is indebted to acoustic sphere, is a "paralysis of thought". "To liquidate Homer means", writes Cavarero, "for Plato, to neutralize at once the world of the tale and the seductive, bodily, and the enchanting effect of the phoné" (2005, pp. 80–81). Though Socrates knows the world of epos, of bardic recitations, he devotes himself to capture the essences in terms of abstractions (the essence or nature of art) and into a coherent system: "Thus are born *episteme* founded on *theoria*"—knowledge as visualized abstractions. "The acoustic and videocentric", argues Cavarero, which marks "Platonic thought, and hence of Western philosophy, is therefore confirmed by studies that investigate the difference between oral and literate cultures" (Cavarero 2005, p. 81).

Perhaps Socrates himself is responsible for this lithic rendering of his intimations; or, at least Plato renders him this way. His talks dominate; the significance of Socrates is reduced to his discursive reasoning. He is the dawn of rationality or at least advanced the dawn to the brightness of daylight. Yet, the complexity of Plato's task is two-fold. He criticizes epic poetry but criticizes writing too. The critique has something to do with Plato's aversion towards the body. Writing forges speech into a visible, dead body—a carcass of letters, whereas epic poetry incites revelling and the intoxicated pleasures of the body. Plato condemns both. Therefore in his critique of writing it is the speech devoid of revelry and the irrational (or the inspirational rhapsodic) that he makes Socrates utter—and not the Homeric (or Orphic) sonorous rhythms: "In the historical transition from orality to writing, Plato takes the side of an orality that is stripped of its originary connotations and already depends on the antivocal effects of writing" (Cavarero 2005, p. 82).

Although Derrida unravels the heliocentric tropes in Plato's work, he largely focuses his attention on Plato's phonocentrism, his alleged fixation on speech over writing, his disparagement of writing; the message of the *Phaedrus*, argues Derrida, is that writing for Plato is "at once mnemotechnique and the power of writing" (1976, p. 24). In overturning Platonism, Derrida moves with writing as the discarded, denigrated material inscription preceding and constituting all colloquial communicational forms. In contrast to this constitutive material force, speech of Plato's oeuvre gets highlighted as a target of critique, whereas what this

anti-bardic, devocalized speech achieves is not antagonistic to Derrida's essentially visual-graphic (i.e., non-vocalic) figure of writing. For what stands out as Plato's Socrates' discovery is the occulocentric *theoria*—its drive, weaning itself away from the “inspirational” sonoric mode of embodied knowledge, *techné* (*episteme*) drawn on rational dialectic.

Although Derrida is critical of an alleged transcendental relation between the phonic (sound/voice) and the metaphysical presence, he too (like Plato) invests in an ultimately visual, graphic, inscriptive figure (writing) in his critique of the heritage. Further, although this figural marking of writing is said to be irreducible to the colloquial, empirical sense of writing and the other (general) force of writing is said to be anterior to all colloquial systems of communication, nowhere does Derrida take recourse to colloquial forms of vocalic, melodic, aural communicational practices to put to work the general force of writing. All the instantiations of the general are always deployed by means of the *colloquial* figure of writing or graphical forms. In other words, despite his apparent critique of Plato and departure from Platonism, Derrida's work converges on and extends the visual/graphic forms of reflection affirmed by Socrates-Plato in their overcoming of *mnemocultures*.

Contrary to appearances, the most crucial thematic that brings together Plato and Derrida is the question of the body. It is well known, as pointed out earlier, that Plato treated the body as contingent and dispensable; his dialogue form and his belated urge to usher in musical praxis are all in inverse relation to the body: they treat the body as accidental. In privileging the disembodied voice as the source of the soul's travel and transcendence, and in discarding writing as carcass, Plato became the target of Derrida's pointed critique. In his unravelling of Plato, Derrida emphasizes the materiality of the lithic supplement (writing) and counters Plato's autonomous soul-memory (against the body) as it manifests in the latter's work in binaries: “being versus becoming, the soul versus the body, intelligible thought in the immortal soul versus the sensible thought of the mortal body, in short *logos* versus *techné*” (Derrida 1976, p. 72).

In this critique Derrida champions the *mnemotechnique* that creates surrogate memory systems—and as a result, the absolute material entity of the biocultural formation called the body barely receives attention. Curiously, in Derrida's own immense attention to writing as a *mnemotechnique*, as a system of differences that exists beyond and without the determined agency, the irreducible material entity called the body loses its space for the prosthetic or surrogate body. That is, in overturning and displacing the traditional hierarchy between the soul and the body, Derrida does not attend to the materiality of the body as such but concentrates on the externalized marks, hypomnesic material signifiers and the objectified and evidentiary appurtenances of symbolization. The body of *mnemotechniques* (writing, graphics, lines, mythograms, hypomnesic representations) takes over the place of the biological formations that are deeply involved in symbolization. This silent displacement of the body has barely received attention in Derrida's work. On the contrary, his persistent attention to “writing” as a *mnemotechnique* has furthered the ascendancy of the prosthetic—especially in the work of Bernard Stiegler, whose work has barely any space for *mnemocultural* articulations.

2.7 Prosthetic Sublimations

Plato inaugurated a formidable paradigm for addressing the question of memory. While implicitly acknowledging the ineluctable fact that memory can be accessed only by means of its exteriorization, Plato *appears* to favour alithic modes over lithic ones in articulating memory. The alithic means are those of speech and gesture and Plato called these anamnestic modes of remembering; whereas the lithic ones externalize memory by means of inscription on a substrate, accessed by means of chiselled or carved letters. Plato called the latter hypomnesic memory (to be sure Plato refers to the latter more as writing on the soul—metaphoric writing and not the material inscription). Plato's preference for the former sets up an opposition between anamnestic and hypomnesic modes of externalizing memory.

Drawing on Plato's morphology of memory, Bernard Stiegler extends the lithic heritage of memory to early hominid evolution (in tool making). Only externally retained memory can form heritages; but Plato sensed that bequeathing memorization only to lithic or hypomnesic technologies is dangerous to memory itself. Stiegler acutely senses this in our contemporary industrial production of memory. He notices that there is an aggravation of the dissociation between hypomnesic and anamnestic modes of memorization in our contemporary world. In such situations who ever has control over hypomnesic apparatuses controls and commands memories in the world, Stiegler argues: "But the new technological forms of knowledge, objectified in equipment and apparatus, conversely engender a loss of knowledge at the very moment one begins speaking of 'knowledge societies', 'knowledge industries', and what has come to be known as 'cognitive' or cultural capitalism". Hyperindustrialization of memory commands and controls the behaviour of consumers and threatens modes of existence, contends Stiegler.

Following Derrida's critique of Plato, Stiegler sees the relation between the two modes of externalizing memory not as hierarchical (privileged anamnesis and denigrated hypomnesis) but as mutually co-constitutive. Such a conception affirms a supplemental relation between the two modes of articulating memories. For Stiegler the decisive political question today is: how to articulate anamnestic and hypomnesic memories. In his historicization of this relationship Stiegler contends that the mnemotechnique of writing provided the possibility of individual response to archivals of memory, whereas industrial productions of memory by means of audiovisual technological systems increasingly deprive the receiver of any possibility of active participation in the productions. The distance between producer and the receiver gets widened.

But the currently ascendant networked technological systems, which are not under the control of any single individual or group, require active participation from the receiving ends, argues Stiegler. Here, receivers can also be potential senders. Such co-productions of memory can contribute to the "sustainable hypomnesic milieu". The internet involves participatory technologies—and turns away from the producer/consumer opposition, argues Stiegler: "The Internet age is an age of hypomnesis constituting itself as an *associated* technical milieu." Given the limits

to genetic evolution of human species, its open-ended evolution can become possible only by non-genetic or non-biological means, argues Stiegler. Such evolution by other means is what he terms epigenetic or epiphylogenetic advancement, or through externally retained heritages (Stiegler 2010, pp. 64–87).

Stiegler's account of memory makes a compelling reading. Yet, what emerges most strikingly in this account is that Stiegler, by default as it were, privileges (like Derrida) the mnemotechniques and in his entire account the space for immemorial forms of communication such as speech and gesture are conspicuous by their absence. Hypomnesis is essentially and always determined by or represented only by inscriptional marks; externalization is identified only by means of grammaticization and spatialization—that is, by written means; it is thus to make a spatial object. For grammaticization, points out Stiegler, is the “process whereby the currents and continuities shaping our lives becomes discrete elements”. He explains this by contrasting writing with speech. Writing, contends Stiegler, breaks into discrete elements “the flux of speech”. Writing or spatializing of the mark, Stiegler argues, is “transforming the *temporal flow* of a speech ... into a *textual space*, a de-temporalised form of speech”. It is, in other words, quoting Walter Ong, Stiegler states, “the reduction of a dynamic sound to quiescent space” (Stiegler 2012). But one wonders why is speech characterized as such a chaotic flux? Is discretization contingent upon writing? Can “grammar” be reduced to literate or linguistic training?²³

²³ Curiously and ironically, despite her provocative critique of Derrida, Cavarero too functions from within the confines of literate heritage: “the culture of primary orality lacks ... the elements that allow the voice to be thought of as an acoustic material governed by the system of signification. A discipline like linguistics – which Plato and Aristotle inaugurate ... presupposes writing”. Whereas minute and precise reflections on the sonority and accent, modulation and intonation, utterance and recitation are for millennia transmitted in preliterate Sanskrit traditions of *shiksha* (“phonetics”). The *pratisakhya*s (schools of Vedic utterance) offer extended reflective accounts of vocalic expression. Unaware of such traditions, Cavarero goes on to say: “In fact, all scientific knowledge presupposes writing. Linguistics, however, has the direct aim of swallowing the phoné within the space of the sign.” This certainly may be true in the context of European heritage, but this is not necessarily a cultural universal. Frits Staal devoted a significant part of his life to drive home this point – that the “science” of reflecting on language (as utterance) – *vyākaraṇa* (“grammar”) – existed long before lithic technologies of literacy developed. Also cf., for a valuable account on this tradition, *Critical Studies in the Phonetic Observations of Indian Grammarians* by Siddheswar Varma (1961). An important thinker, who too functions from within the European heritage but who is sensitive to the independence of metalevel reflections on language from literacy, has this to write: “One need only, in this respect, mention the work of Panini who around the 5th century BC, at an epoch in which writing was not yet a common tool for the notation of spoken language and in a fundamentally phonocentric tradition (that is of the Veda), developed a meta-linguistic analysis of Sanskrit so perfect that today it still constitutes the most commonly used practical manual for learning this language.... Panini termed [this] *vyākaraṇa*, a word that means at once manifestation and distinction, that is to say, analysis that renders visible and thus makes known the morphology and the syntax of spoken language” (Dastur 2000, pp. 17–18, 94–95). Discretization of “the flux of speech” here has little to do with mnemotechniques.

Even if one goes with the axiom that no interiority precedes exteriorization (“there is no memory that is not hypomnesic” [Hansen 2010, p. 66]—the question that needs address is: why is that the lithic mnemotechniques are the only paradigmatic instances of exteriorization? Why privilege mnemotechniques to configure hypomnesis? Why aren’t supplemental resources of speech and gesture filiated to (but alienated from) the body are seen as equally significant hypomnesic forms proliferating in discretized biocultural formations across millennia among mnemocultures? Why is it that even radical critical engagement with received heritages in European tradition (such as Derrida’s and Stiegler’s) does not inquire into the question of *techné* or *technics* in the context of alithic modes of living on?

What is striking in Stiegler’s (and Derrida’s) narrativization of memory is that the emphasis here falls more on memory *per se* as it is retained by the material supplement; that is to say, Stiegler’s concern is essentially with the materially exteriorized memory as an object. Consequently, the biologically discrete individuals and individuated *jatis* or “communities” who nurture and exteriorize memory through embodied and enacted modes of being find no place in this theorization of memory. In other words, Stiegler’s inquiry into *techné* or *technics* has little to say about articulations of embodied memory among alithic mnemocultures. If Derrida looked for “lines” and marks on the *kalabashes* of Brazilian Nambikwaras, Stiegler focuses his attention on the flints, bifaces and the later Paleolithic markers or petroglyphs and glyphs of memory (“Flint is the first reflective memory, the first mirror”) (Stiegler 1998, p. 142, Chap. 3). But the critical fact that along with embodied markers of tattooing, jewelry and costume, these mnemocultures sustain their memories essentially through enacted musical-verbal and visual forms and through unarchived, non-objectified and “ephemeral” modes of living them barely receives attention from these thinkers. By focusing entirely on archivable objectivity (in non-organic material forms), these thinkers barely provide any space to reflect on life’s embodied systems of retentions. These radical thinkers, in line with the European heritage, devote their work to theorize prosthetic and surrogate systems and thus subsume the entirety of (hominid) life to archive fevers.

Mnemocultural retentional practices, this work contends, remain indifferent to surrogate storage systems and articulate their biocultural existences differently from those of the lithic heritages. In his exclusive attention to the epigenetic “spiritual struggle” (living on by means other than biological living), Stiegler silently removes the body from the arena: The “spiritual struggle is a struggle that takes place in a domain other than the living.” The irony of this account is that it characteristically (Platonically) reduces “the living” to either the animal or biological. That is, once the “spiritual” (for Plato this is the realm of the intelligible) domain emerges and distinguishes the human, the latter is distanced from the immemorial material phenomenal body—another colossal palimpsest of lively memories. The question that barely gets addressed here is: are the mnemotechnological apparatuses the final destination of all epiphylogenetic receptions and endowments? Why can’t the question of technicity as desire and knowledge be addressed from outside this one single trajectory which manifests in the form of mnemotechnological apparatuses?

Does the alithic mnemocultural indifference towards surrogate systems of exteriorized memory articulate a different relation of desire and technicity? These are the kind of questions that impelled me to undertake this work.

Despite the privilege and power it is accorded, the figure of literacy—orthotic writing—has had a very limited duration and reaches in the human history. However, the origins of gesture and speech remain immemorial and their spread continues to be planetary. If the non-West is demarcated as devoid of alphabetic writing, the European West could be reckoned as bereft of gesture and speech—though such oppositionalism cannot escape deconstructive critique. The lithic text of the “alphabetic body” displaced, if not silenced, the alithic rhythms of mnemocultures in the West. Alphabetic writing of speech substantially mutes the sonority of speech, contends Cavarero (2005, pp. 82–83).

The word and inscription are sacred entities themselves in the Abrahamic traditions and they demand exclusive attention; they gain an autonomous status with regard to the body that experiences them. The most cherished and covetable task in the context of such autonomous (from the body) prosthetic forms of signification is the deciphering and interpretation of what are considered to be the enigmatic, cryptic instantiations of the sacred.

The word, in the form of inscription—lithic materialization—can be postulated as a surrogate, prosthetic object in space and time. Space and time as referential coordinates or originary conditions, gain genetic significance. A sovereign creation, the word turned into lithic inscription, brings forth the imperative of representation of the object out there. Representation of the object is conditioned on the faith or belief concerning the encrypted truth of the object—truth that requires unveiling, disclosing. Life in such lithic tradition is inextricably conditioned by its relation to the object—word/inscription in a space that captures time.²⁴ Only such a tradition can generate object-oriented/objectifying discourses such as history (time), anthropology (space), science (object). Knowledge is the objectual representation aimed at revealing or proposing truth of the object by means of inscription. Lithic traditions are haunted by epistemophilia. The civilization of the Book, points out Derrida in his retrieval of writing, offers the “encyclopedic protection of theology and of logocentrism against the disruption of writing, against its aphoristic energy, and ... against difference in general” (Derrida 1976, p. 18).

While countersigning his (Abrahamic) heritage profoundly, Derrida emphasized the praxial intimations of his work; he committed himself to practicing thinking differently. Although such thinking cannot be reduced to determined codes of communication (which is Derrida’s lesson), Derrida substantially concerned himself with mnemotechnological domains of inscription. His ear turned away from mnemocultural sonic-melodic difference; surrogate, prosthetic bodies alone captured his attention and moved him away from the embodied and enacted

²⁴ Curtius (1953, pp. 302–347) has extensively documented the centrality of the symbol of script in European heritage which derives from the theological sense that the universe is the colossal script (“natural writing”) of the god. Derrida unravels the legacy of this theological metaphor in his work (1976, pp. 12–18).

praxial modes of being. Therefore, there was a need to take Derrida elsewhere and disperse him across mnemocultures.

Departing from the common root of anamnestic reflective performative mode of living on, the Greek antiquity (at least from Plato onwards) seems to have oriented itself towards the objectifying forms of knowledge making. Once the Greek intellectual traditions inaugurated the epistemic turn, discursive, lithic, scribal, archival, architectural forms of consolidating the symbol were pursued systematically in the European heritage. This epistemic turn remained the most powerful regulative and productive force in European discursive productions. Consequently, what might be figured as the most originary of questions concerning the relation between the body and symbol remains un-addressed, outside the paradigmatic episteme advanced in Greek-Jew-Christian history of alphabetic-archival literacy. Eventually, even if there were inquires into the question—they are largely guided by the paradigmatic resolution—which is oriented towards objectifying, positive knowledges. History, anthropology guided by the epistemic turn of knowledge production, consolidated a mnemotechnological culture that can convert every singular mnemoculture into an object of knowledge.

The ascendancy of lithic knowledges displaced or discarded the embodied and enacted modes of learning and being; as surrogate or prosthetic apparatuses (document, archive and library) became prominent, the body and its learned modes of going about in the world became redundant or useless. Such prosthetic modes of knowledge production is cherished as a European distinction and affirmed as European difference from, say, the (alleged) Oriental pursuit of divinity (Vernant 1982, pp. 10–11; Vernant 2006b).

God is said to have spoken to Moses before he bequeathed him the lithic tablets. But there was no clue to the passion of god's tongue, the rhythm of his speech, the pitch, the grain of his voice, the accent of his breath and the emphasis of what is announced; it's no more a part of cultural memory. In other words, the syntax of the lithic displaced the *prosody* of utterance and the prosody that enacts the rhythms of sound and movement in embodied forms. But to the author(s) of the alphabetic culture the question of god's passion and affect, the accents of his speech, have no sense "at least in so far as these traditions [of Judaeo-Christian religion] have no resources for establishing differences that could be humanly registered between the ways God spoke and wrote words" (Rotman 2002, p. 99). Hence the necessity of engaging with the lithic and alithic memories, the singularity of their mnemotechniques, or technics in general, and indeed the necessity of responding to the call or conflict of these demarcated heritages. If the lithic writing consolidated monotheism, discursive philosophy, calculative reason, and codified law—the cherished resources of European colonialism and difference—the destinies of alithic mnemocultural traditions of the world must be reconstellated beyond their enframing in the imperial traditions and their lithic codes. The call of mnemocultural inheritances invites other responses, intimates other responsibilities and offers other figures of/for reflective practice.

Articulations of memory differ in different ways. Conceptions of anamnesis and hypomnesis are seen to be different but both these are markedly different from

mnemocultural compositions and dispersals of memory. The thematics of repetition, freedom, memory, desire, the body and alterity in Indic mnemocultures suggest the possibility of a different articulation of the body and symbol than the ones unravelled in/as the monologothicism of the West by Derrida.

When mnemocultural speech and gestural acts name and demarcate elements and entities, the very modes of utterance and the diverse forms of address that disperse from these cultures of memory require attention. Their archivability and representability cannot be reduced; but the fact that the mnemocultural traditions made such possibilities of reproducibility entirely contingent upon the acts/articulations of the body marks the singular difference of mnemocultures. The centrality of the body here must not be measured in terms of the content of these compositions of image, music, text—but in the very performativity of the body-symbol in each instance. Mnemocultures circulate and proliferate through performative reiterations and not by way of archival accumulations and representations. The next chapter thematizes the enigma of enduring memories of the body in Indian (Sanskrit and other) cultural inheritances.

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Cultures of Memory in South Asia
Orality, Literacy and the Problem of Inheritance
Rao, D.V.
2014, XVI, 336 p., Hardcover
ISBN: 978-81-322-1697-1