

Chapter 2

Thought and Context: *Philosophy on the Eve of Colonialism*

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Abstract Unlike other disciplines in humanities and social sciences, philosophy has been hesitant in taking its colonial and post-colonial contexts seriously. Colonialism belongs to the external history of philosophy. Hence, it is often seen as a temporary disruption in a living tradition of thought or as a harbinger of philosophy proper. Such an external perspective does not help us in understanding the work of Indian philosophers who while living under colonialism actively engaged with both Eastern and Western thought but felt that philosophy of their time had lost its vitality and soul. This essay argues that to study philosophy under colonialism, we need to clarify the relationship between philosophy and its historical context. We discuss Sheldon Pollock's idea of the death of Sanskrit to formulate the temporality of a tradition that can live through multiple deaths. We defend Quentin Skinner's use of speech act theory to study philosophy and deepen Jonardon Ganeri's idea of intellectual context of intellectual traditions in India. Using the insights of historians such as Sanjay Subramanian et al. and philosophers such as Roland Barthes, we argue that the bearer of the marks of context is neither the proposition nor the text, but the texture of discourse for which the photograph is an exemplary instance.

Keywords Pollock • Ganeri • Skinner • Speech act • Swaraj • Context • Time

2.1 Philosophy and Its Historical Context

Colonialism has been a significant historical rupture for the self-understanding of most disciplines in humanities and social sciences. Reflection on colonialism has had the effect of transforming the very nature of these disciplines. Today, the 'post-colonial condition' defines research practices. Interdisciplinary in-disciplines such

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as cultural studies and research programmes such as subaltern historiography have emerged from the post-colonial criticism of the epistemological and ontological foundations of traditional disciplines. Philosophy, while contributing to the critical resources of post-colonialism, has kept itself out of that critique. Philosophy sees itself as being concerned about eternal conceptual problems and so acknowledges colonialism only as a historical accident. Such accidents belong to the external history of the discipline and have no significance for the ongoing practice of problem solving. It is often claimed that philosophy does not and need not register its historical context. Here, philosophy would like to see itself in philosophy's own image of natural sciences.

One might object that this characterization of philosophy is only valid for certain ahistorical traditions such as the Anglo-American analytical philosophy. This tradition distinguishes between philosophy proper and history of philosophy and assigns only a pedagogical status to the latter. However, it may be claimed that the European continental philosophy does not work with such a hierarchy and acknowledges the historicity of philosophical reflection. This is only partially true. As we shall see soon, the concept of history or historicity that this tradition grants presupposes the neutralization of colonialism as a nonevent. The unabashed Eurocentrism of the masters of historically sensitive thought like Hegel and Husserl either makes colonialism a moment in the historical unfolding of ideality or a mere consequence of the crisis of European culture. In any case, the radical questioning of the idea of history and the historical ideality in this tradition has found its home in disciplines outside philosophy—such as comparative literature or even theology.

Often, our nationalist narratives of philosophy assume that colonialism was an oppressive condition under which those who philosophized at a particular historical juncture were forced to live and think. It caused the death and destruction of the ongoing tradition of classical philosophy and the advent of Western ways of thought and life (Coomaraswamy 1981: 1–6). Various strands of nationalism differ on evaluating the effect of these changes. Some see this as the destruction of our own glorious and continuous traditions and the imposition of an alien culture and thought. There are others who welcome this destruction. For them, the intrusion of Western philosophy brought out a necessary and fortunate transformation of the philosophy-like practice which existed in classical India to the modern philosophy proper (Mukherji 2002: 931–936). Colonialism as modernity challenged the authority of tradition and made philosophy a rational discourse that responded to the developments in modern science, politics, and art. Here, we can also expect a modern revivalist who locates all the features of modernity back in the very tradition destroyed by colonialism. We can make these claims about colonialism, tradition, and modernity only if we have some hold on the relationship between history, thought, and freedom. Otherwise, we shall end up treating colonialism as a mere historical marker for a period and discuss the works of philosophers who happened to live during that period. From this perspective, colonialism was an external accident that either destroyed existing traditions of philosophy and imposed an alien thought on us, or inaugurated philosophy proper. If we wish to

take colonialism seriously, we need to explore the link between political freedom and philosophy and acknowledge the historical dimension of thought. The latter is the task this essay has set for itself.

The two contemporary participants in this debate—Anglo-American analytical philosophy and the Indian philosophy that is reconstructed in the ‘Anglo-American style’—seem to be free from any sense of history and have nothing much to say on the relationship between the historical conditions of thought and freedom. The so-called continental philosophy takes both freedom and history seriously. However, the epochal masters of this tradition—Hegel and Husserl—were undoubtedly Eurocentric and denied Indian thought the status of philosophy. For Hegel, the only historical context that matters is the culmination of Philosophy in the West. For Husserl, the only moment of significance is the birth of philosophy in Greece. It is doubtful if we can explain away this Eurocentrism as a personal aberration of individual thinkers and carry on with their philosophy. A concept such as ‘tradition’ is symptomatic of this muddled state of affairs.

There have been several attempts in post-independence India to bring the traditional scholars and modern academic philosophers to a dialog. The *Samvād*, a project initiated by Daya Krishna et al. (1991), is an example. These attempts have failed miserably. The incommensurability of the participants’ world-views has often been cited as the cause of this failure. However, as we know, incommensurability does not entail non-translatability. In fact, translation of traditional Indian philosophy into the modern idiom is continuing successfully. The works of B.K. Matilal and J.N. Mohanty are exemplary of this trend. However, such efforts do not seem to inspire either of the parties—modern Western philosophy or traditional Indian scholars. Is it possible to write the history of this indifferent silence and intellectual exhaustion?

Indian academic philosophy was active during the colonial rule. Philosophers who worked in Indian universities did have a presence in international journals. We find occasional review articles on philosophy in India. A review article by Schrader (1937: 335–341) published in *Philosophy* predictably makes patronizing comments on the nascent presence of philosophical impulses in India. Another review article by P.T. Raju in 1949 identifies six kinds of philosophical engagements taking place since the introduction of English education in India (Raju 1949: 342–347). Of these, the first two, namely a collection of manuscripts and translation of manuscripts primarily into English are not philosophy proper. The third kind involves the exposition of Indian thought in English, for example, S.N. Dasgupta, in his famous five volumes on *The History of Indian Philosophy*, and the fourth is the interpretation and evaluation of Indian thought often undertaken by missionaries. Comparative philosophy practiced by the likes of Radhakrishnan comes as the next kind. The sixth one practised by K.C. Bhattacharyya starts from a Western line of thinking but develop it in such way that to reach a result achieved by Indian thought. Those such as Hiralal Haldar, G.R. Malkani, and G.N. Mathrani took the seventh mode; they were proficient in Western philosophy but claimed no acquaintance with Indian philosophy.

All this shows that the colonial era was a period of intense activity which cannot be reduced to the invasion of traditional thought by Western philosophy and

its thought habits. However, it was widely felt that this fervent activity did not announce the birth of a new possibility of thought. Even those who were proficient in both the classical Indian traditions and modern philosophy felt a sense of rupture, homelessness, and lack of spirit. A yawning gap seems to have opened up between the demands of philosophy and the clamor for a historical life. This listlessness finds its rigorous articulation in Bhattacharyya's (1984: 385) *Swaraj in Ideas*, a significant text which we shall discuss in the next section.

Serious talk about philosophy under colonialism makes sense only in so far as philosophy registers the event of colonialism. How can philosophy bear the mark of a historical event? Where do we locate this mark? Who/what is the bearer of this mark?—proposition, text or act? Do we expect that, to register the effect of colonialism, philosophers should speak explicitly about colonialism? Or should we try to study the causal influence of colonialism? How do we reconstruct the colonial against a paradoxical demand—the demand for an internal history of thought which could register an external event such as colonialism?

The project under the leadership of Sheldon Pollock titled *The Sanskrit Knowledge Systems on the Eve of Colonialism*¹ is perhaps the first concerted and self conscious attempt to address the significance of the historical context of colonialism for the study of Indian thought. This project focuses on the period between 1550 and 1750. According to Pollock, this period just before the consolidation of colonialism witnessed a sudden spurt of intellectual activity in many areas of classical Indian intellectual life. However, these vibrant traditions yielded to Western intellectual dominance without any resistance or serious engagement. This project demands an internal history of Sanskrit intellectual systems as a necessary condition for studying their encounter with colonialism. It speaks about an internal historical condition that rendered these traditions at once productive and speechless. What concept of historicity does this project propose? Does it have a notion of internal history which is sensitive enough to register an event such as colonialism? These are the questions I shall pursue in this essay. These questions should be important for anyone who accesses *our* traditional philosophical texts and practices without presupposing any strong sense of a *we*.

2.2 Philosophy: Twice Dead?

In K.C. Bhattacharyya, we hear a philosopher who lived and thought under colonialism speaking about his present. His *Swaraj in Ideas* takes his present as an explicit object for reflection. His main concern was not the subjugation of his own living tradition. He argues that such subjection when recognized loses its hold on the subjugated. What worried him was a sense of indifference or lack of vitality that had affected the philosophers and also the whole culture.

¹ <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pollock/sks>.

That Indian Mind has simply lapsed in most cases for our educated men, and has subsided below the conscious level of our culture. It operates still in the persisting routine of their family life. And in some of their social religious practices which have no longer any meaning for them. It neither welcomes nor resists the ideas through the new education. It dares not exert itself in the cultural sphere. (Bhattacharyya 1984: 384)

According to Bhattacharyya, under colonialism, the Indian mind was in a state of paralysis. We either imitated the west or impotently resented them. We had failed to have estimates of our own, wrung from an internal perception of the realities of our position. What is 'our position'? Who is this 'we'? What is the mode of access to this reality? Ideas such as tradition and culture cannot provide answers. As Bhattacharyya says, the 'we' of those times was a 'we' who/which did not exert itself in the cultural sphere—a 'we' which lacked historical and cultural effectiveness. We had a soulless thinking which appeared like real thinking. Western ideas that sprang from the rich life elsewhere induced in us a shadow mind. It is important that Bhattacharyya did not appeal for a return to our blood and soil or any authentic 'we' to revitalize ourselves. Instead, he demanded that we bring the powers of a new vitality to all that is 'we.' He did not ask us to go back to our ancient texts. Instead, he wanted us to produce Indian appreciations of Western texts.

Pollock (2001) too attests to this general intellectual paralysis on the eve of colonialism. Even in the 19th century, there was no dearth of intellectual production in Sanskrit in the areas of literature, logic, etc. However, they were lifeless repetitions and not renewals. The Sanskrit scholars were busy "wasting their learning and powers in weaving complicated alliterations, recompounding absurd and vicious fictions, and revolving in perpetual circles of abstractions never ending still beginning" (Pollock 2001: 414).

Pollock gives a novel account of the temporality of this culturally paralyzed intellectual consciousness. First of all, this paralysis is not a consequence of any external invasion. It was also not the case that by the time the British arrived, the classical Indian tradition had died due to internal ailments and Indian intellectual consciousness was eagerly waiting for the new spirit. The degenerate Indian consciousness caught up in endless repetitions without renewal had no life left to wait and anticipate a new life. It simply absorbed the Western ideas into its repetitive grind.

The Indian tradition on the eve of colonialism was not a living one. It was dead in a sense more radical than what phenomenology can ever bring to life. That it was dead, seriously, and severely dead, is no negative judgment. No rational creature endowed with memory allows the dead to rot and disappear. The dead does return in ghostly and spectral apparitions. The dead does not cease to surprise us. The dead can be directly efficacious in the creation of the new. The creation of the new in the present establishes its link not with the dead old but with the 'old new' which the mnemonic practices preserve. How do we understand this mode of persistence of a dead tradition? How many times did Indian philosophy die?

Pollock's history of Indian knowledge systems indicates the complex nature of the historicity of Indian thought. Thought in India died twice. By 12th century AD, the centers of Sanskrit culture collapsed abruptly. This decline can be distinguished from the slowing down of creative process that had happened in earlier

centuries. “In the 12th century, by contrast, a decline set in from which there was to be no recovery, contingent on new extremes of royal dissolution and criminality for which it is hard to find precedents” (Pollock 2001: 398–399). Between mid-15th century and the advent of colonialism in 1750, we find a spurt of creativity in Sanskrit intellectual traditions. This period witnessed new formulations of old problems in new genres. Here, we also see scholars who called themselves new (*Navya*). The second death is the death of these ‘new’ intellectual formations under colonialism. From this perspective, Indian philosophy is not a philosophy of the twice born, but a philosophy that is twice dead. Any attempt to think again with Indian philosophy should first of all recognize and affirm these deaths. How does time unfold through this double death? How can contemporary thinking take hold of this archive of the twice dead? A step in the direction of an answer is to question the very idea of a living tradition. What is it that continues to live in the dead? Freud had an answer—death drive! This survives beyond life and death. In fact, death drive was Freud’s concept for immortality. Is there anything like that behind the insistence and persistence of a dead tradition?

2.3 Thought and Context

The valley of death called colonialism is often understood as a rupture. What is the mode of subjectivity that is a correlate of this rupture? To talk about philosophy under colonialism is to explain the works of this thinking subject in the context of a rupture or of a ruptured context. Ganeri (2008: 551–562) in a recent article addresses the significance of context in studying India’s intellectual cultures. He brings out the complexity of the context in a discussion of Quentin Skinner’s attempts to take the context seriously as part of the theory and method of studying intellectual history. Skinner (2002) uses Austin’s speech act theory to study texts, including philosophical texts as performative utterances. To understand a text is not merely to understand its literal meaning but to understand what the text as a performative utterance intended to do. To understand a text means to follow its illocutionary force. To produce an utterance is to make an intervention. Skinner opposes the attempt to abstract particular arguments of thinkers from their context and constructing them as contributions to the perennial debates on eternal philosophical ideas.

According to Ganeri, Skinner’s study of the intellectual cultures is based on the following assumptions. It is possible to recover the illocutionary force of past utterances. The illocutionary force is an evidence for what sort of thing the author was up to. We recover the illocutionary force by situating the act in a context. In other words, the context supplies the evidence for the illocutionary force. Ganeri finds many problems with using the Skinnerian contextualism in studying Indian intellectual texts. First of all, not much information is available about the socio-political contexts of pre-colonial Indian texts. However, there is a superabundance of literary or textual material. The primary context of Indian writers was a literary/intellectual context. These are inter-textual contexts. In fact, ‘not to be distracted by physical

contexts' could be part of the intentions of the illocutionary act. Definition is one such inter-textual illocutionary act. A definition could be an act of consolidation. However, Ganeri wants only a modest contextualism. He wants the contexts to supply some extra but minimum information and leave the philosopher free to deal with the definitions. Ganeri, in my view, wrongly thinks that the Skinnerian context is a physical–socio-political one. In fact, Skinner would readily agree with Ganeri on the importance of the intellectual context to the study of intellectual utterances. However, as we shall see later, contexts whether physical or intellectual do not stand toward speech-acts in the way Ganeri expects them to stand.

Ganeri finds that the Skinnerian context is too poor to account for the illocutionary act where the philosopher makes an utterance to make an intra-systemic intervention. Here, the philosopher tries to anticipate future critics and sympathetic interpreters. The actual intention in writing a text is to be interpreted creatively by future interpreters whose nature he does not know. Ganeri thinks that Skinner has failed to take notice of these 'intentionally proleptic illocutionary acts.' Skinner rejects two mythologies of historical interpretation—mythology of prolepsis and mythology of the doctrines. Prolepsis interprets a text more in terms of the retrospective significance of a given episode than in its meaning for the agent at the time. The mythology of the doctrine involves the presumption that there is a set of doctrines that constitutes a field that then tempts the historian into trying to find out what each classical author had to say or has failed to say about them.

Rejection of these mythologies will be a disaster for the approach of Matilal, Ganeri, and other contemporary interpreters of classical Indian philosophy. So Ganeri tries to defend these mythologies. According to him, both prolepsis and anticipation were part of the intentions of the Indian writers. The Indian writer intended his work for the unknown future readers. The mythology of the doctrine too is part of Indian intellectual reality. Philosophers encountered *sāstras* from the past not as historical documents but as current statements of philosophical knowledge. Each interlocutor regarded his interpretation as anticipated by the early writings. This would allow Ganeri to treat classical Indian texts as if they anticipate his Anglo-American interpretations. Ganeri realizes that Skinner's rejection of prolepsis and anticipation, if accepted, will undercut his access to the classical Indian thought. He finds a way out by making both these as part of the intentions of the illocutionary act. Here, Ganeri ignores a distinction Skinner has always insisted upon—between the intention of the agent *in the* illocutionary act and the plan the agent had while undertaking the act. One may say something with the intention of warning someone. This intention has to be recovered. However, my objective in warning someone is not part of the illocutionary intention. When I make an ironical utterance, I do not mean what I say. However, detecting irony works not at the level of meaning but at the level of the illocutionary act. The potential prolepsis of the classical Indian writers is not to be located at the level of meaning but at the level of the illocutionary act. In other words, the prolepsis as part of the speaker's intention does not escape the present of the utterance. Ganeri's defends the typical hermeneutical strategies of prolepsis and anticipation hoping that they will enable him to maintain a gap between the socio-political and intellectual contexts.

He hopes to recover speaker's intentions in uttering a statement from its context-transcending meaning. Skinner's criticism of these hermeneutical strategies is aimed at such a hope. We need to know a lot more about the context even to recover the context-bursting intention of the speaker.

Ganeri finds the Skinnerian context too narrow in another sense. He thinks that Skinner's appeal to context is merely evidential. The context provides the historian with the evidence for the kinds of illocutionary acts being performed. According to Ganeri, the context has another function—reference fixing. 'Tomorrow will be sunny' 'refers out' to tomorrow when the truth-value of this utterance will be decided. According to Ganeri, Skinner misses the distinction between the context of utterance and the context of evaluation. Indexical utterances may refer out of their context of use to another context with respect to which they will be evaluated. Our most normative expressions are cultural indexicals which refer out. Proleptic illocutionary acts are a special case of these references fixing illocutions. They may refer to future or to broad features of a culture.

Ganeri discusses Matilal's *Perception* as an example of studying intellectual culture. Matilal's context of utterance is contemporary Anglo-American analytical philosophy and his context of evaluation is the intellectual culture of classical India. It is that culture with respect to which the truth and falsity of specific utterances will be made. For Ganeri, these illocutionary acts show that Matilal was immersed in the classical culture of India. How is this possible? Ganeri (2008: 560) emphatically says "Matilal was responding to the obvious fact of colonialism." In other words, language or speech act already contains enough resources to jump over the mere fact of colonialism. The latter accounts for the fact that Matilal wrote in English and taught in the West instead of writing in Sanskrit and teaching in a traditional *pāṭhaśālā* in India. The colonial context of his utterance does not affect the truth of what he says. The context of evaluation that matters for the truth is the intellectual context of classical Indian philosophical discussions. Through this distinction, Ganeri hopes that he can get rid of the socio-political context from evaluating philosophical utterance. However, he misses the fact that for Skinner and also Austin the radical nature of speech act theory lies in the very idea of context and not in any specific kind of context such as socio-cultural one.

How is it possible for a post-colonial intellectual to jump across the rupture of colonialism and get in touch with the pre-colonial Indian intellectual culture in terms of categories of a post-rupture context? For Ganeri, this pole vaulting is not a new or serious problem. The pre-colonial Indian culture was full of such ruptures. Jumping across the rupture while continuing to be indelibly marked by it, reconceptualising the pre-rupture past in the categories of a post-rupture present—these are among the most characteristic mark of Indian intellectual practice. Matilal can jump across contexts because what awaits him on the other side is nothing but such ruptures and jumps. Quoting J.L. Mehta, Ganeri (2008: 561) argues that the distance introduced by these ruptures is an enabling condition for accessing 'the what' that is on the other side. Hermeneutic patience demands that we see their things in their way and our things in our way while jumping across the rupture of colonialism. But the colonialism has created a rupture between our

thing and our way. Journeys in their world would eventually allow us to close the gap between our things and our ways. If colonialism created a distance, it also gave us fast trains to cover that distance faster than ever!

Let us notice that Ganeri is endorsing a modern concept of tradition and the idea of a productive distance from past acts as the very opening for our access to that tradition. Tradition as a hermeneutical idea captures the essential historicity of modern consciousness. It is a relationship with an origin which at once approaches and retreats. Like horizon, it sets the backdrop of our approaching but recedes as we get closer. This concept of tradition is available only to an effective historical consciousness that affirms the essential historicity of thought. This affirmation demands more than the fallibilist self-understanding of theory construction, argumentation, and debate. It is one thing to hold that ideas evolve in time. It is another thing to say that the sense of an idea is the history of its sense. A historical consciousness which affirms the latter is already always modern.

Ganeri endorses this radical hermeneutic conception of tradition so that he could limit Skinner's appeal to context to evidential value. In fact, Skinner does not look at context for the kind of evidence which Ganeri thinks he is looking for. Ganeri's expectation about this context can perhaps be traced to a certain picture of speech act theory circulated by P.F. Strawson (1964). According to Austin, for the success of a speech act of warning, the agent should secure the uptake of the act as the act of warning. What does securing the uptake mean here? Strawson demands that to secure the uptake, the agent should make some difference to the existing state of affairs as a result of that action. Skinner disagrees with this analysis. Success of a speech act need not cause any change in the surrounding state of affairs. In some cases such as warning, it may be part of the intention of the speech act that it produces no visible change in the state of affairs. To warn someone, I need to point out to him that he is in danger. To succeed in warning, I need to succeed in adverting to that fact. The uptake involves this event of adverting and not anything new in the state of affairs that can be represented as brought out by the successful performance of that act.² In case such as warning and informing, the change brought about by a successful speech act may just be the event or happening of the act. In other words, the context does not play the evidential role Ganeri thinks it does in Skinner's account. Had he been right about Skinner then his hermeneutic notion of context would have been a radical alternative to latter's naïve notion. However, in reality, it is Ganeri who fails to see Skinner's radical use of speech act theory. Skinner reaches his illocutionary act after suspending the claims to truth and also about meaning. The intention in warning is the intention to warn seriously. The context seeking entity is not the correspondence seeking proposition nor the meaning seeking and context-transcending text. Language registers context only at this level beneath the proposition and text. Utterances of intellectual culture at this level are neither arguments nor interpretations. They are acts which are meant to be taken seriously.

² A student in a classroom wishes to warn his fellows who are busy talking among themselves that the teacher is likely to notice them. To succeed, this warning act must call the attention of the talkers to the act of warning without leaving any evidence in the context that which the teacher could possibly notice.

2.4 Textures of Time

Pollock's review (2007) of *Textures of Time* (Rao 2001) is another occasion where the historian of intellectual culture disavows this context registering element of intellectual creations. *Textures of Time* interprets a score of texts from 15- to 18-century South India to demonstrate the emergence of sense of history. The authors see this as a counter to the Eurocentric claims that Indian did not have a sense of history. What makes these texts bearers of a historical consciousness? According to *Textures of Time*, this historical sense lies in their intention to be historical or in their style of being matter of fact or in their texture which a native speaker can easily identify as history and not story. Pollock is surprised by the naïveté of this claim made by three well-known historians. If the sense of history too is historically constituted, how can the native speaker so easily pickup the texture of history? Can the native have such immediate access to the text? Pollock wonders how the authors could; even in this hermeneutical post-modern times, hold that the historical is a register of language that is simple, direct, unadorned and factual.

Pollock quotes Barthes who allegedly denies any difference between narrative of past events and imaginary narration. He goes on to say that for Barthes, the closer we get to the factual, the closer we get not to the historical but to the effect of the real. This is a serious misunderstanding of Barthes' realism. For Barthes, 'effect of real' means reality as in the effect and not a mere effect of or an illusion of being real. It is the bare real that even the worst simulation or manipulative digital photograph would attest to. For Pollock, events become historical facts only when embedded in a narrative. Factuality is a narrative feature and hence cannot be used to identify a narrative as historical. Pollock thinks that authors of *Textures* hold a naïve notion of factuality that can be overcome with the hermeneutic notion of narrative embeddedness of all facts. However, the historical factuality which *Textures* upholds is neither that of brute facts nor of narrated and embedded facts. It is a 'rubbing with reality' which cannot be understood at the level true propositions or of meaningful narratives.

Pollock seems to worry that *Texture's* claim on direct access to historicity implies an objectivist conception of history as knowledge of facts. Such an objectivism, according to Pollock, would reintroduce the dichotomy between history and myth. Hence, he thinks that the texture surrenders the Indian conceptions of temporality to the Western concept of factual history which is often distinguished from the imaginative narrations of myth. Pollock's worry is unfounded. *Textures* do not pitch history against myth. It shows how the myth itself can directly register reality. This register is not that of narration. *Textures* talks about the dent reality can make on the plane of narrative. These dents are not accessible through an interpretation of narratives.

Pollock's reference to Barthes is a fortunate one. Though I disagree with his use of Barthes, the latter offers some vital insights into some of the issues we have been discussing—context, historicity, and also death. In his last work, *Camera Lucida*, Barthes (2000) speaks about the reality effect of photographs. We can

follow this text and use the photograph as a picture of how the historical discourse refers to historical reality. Neither resemblance nor representation can account for this ‘reality effect’ of the photograph. Of course, the photograph follows conventions and codes and offers room for interpretation. Yes, it is the photographer who frames the picture and decides what is going to be inside the frame. Despite all these, the photograph bears the ‘effect of the real.’ Here, Barthes (2000: 25) introduces a distinction between *Studium* and *Punctum*. *Studium*³ is the conventional, encoded, or narrativised aspect of the photograph which enables us to recognize the photograph as the photograph of something. *Punctum* is a mark of the photograph’s chance encounter with reality. This is not something conventional, coded, or narrativised. It could be a contingent detail or an accident—a singular accident like death. *Punctum*, in Derrida’s words, is a poignant singularity:

... a point of singularity which punctures the surface of reproduction—and even the production—of analogies, likenesses and codes. It pierces, strikes me, wounds me, bruises me, and, first of all, seems to look only at me. ...The singular punctum does not negate the general, the law or the convention. It only arrows it, marks it and signs it. (Derrida 1988: 259–296)

The reality claim of the photograph is not based on the fact that the object photographed was once present in front of the camera and was causally effective in making a mark on the film. Digital photography can do away with any direct encounter between the object and the machine. Still, the reality claim of the photograph would persist. One could say that the reference adheres to the photograph. In the intentional movement of reference, the absent referent comes to haunt the photograph. This haunting or spectrality is the mode in which the ‘effect of the real’ works in the photograph. This adherence implies the ‘having-been-there’ of a unique referent and thus, ‘the return of the dead.’ For Barthes, this is the ‘stubbornness of the referent in always being there.’ The image develops the have-been-there of the noema into an ‘intense immobility’ of pose through the clicking of the camera. The having-been-there of the referent is immediately separated and attached to the present of the photograph. This is the unique time of the referent which persists regardless of photographic reproduction, simulation, or composition. “It is as if the photograph always carries its referent with itself, both affected by the same amorous or funeral immobility” (Barthes 2000: 6). This immobility resists further development, mediation, and interpretation. Barthes distinguishes between the what-has-been of the photograph from and the temporality of what is no longer. This distinction explains the evidential value of the photograph. The authenticity of the photograph is not inferential. It is direct and immediate. A photograph can lie about the meaning of an object not about its existence. It is indifferent to fiction and metaphor. In a photograph, the past is as real as the present—the photograph we hold in our hands.

³ It is interesting that Barthes uses the Buddhist concept of *tathatā* (*That, there it is*) to explain the referential claim of the photograph.

Since the referential implication is intentional and noematic; the referent is partly in me and also in front of me. The photograph's testimony bears not on the object but on time. The referent is the irreplaceable other, the one who was and will no longer be, who returns like that which will never come back. Such is the 'return of the dead.' The photograph marks this return of the dead to the reproductive image. The power of this authentication exceeds that of representation and narration.

Every photograph, irrespective of the subject matter, registers the catastrophe of death. The reference persists as a specter that haunts the photograph. The *punctum* is at once unique and other than itself—heterogeneous. This unique singular induces and is drawn into metonymy. As Derrida puts it, "If the photograph bespeaks the unique death, the death of the unique, this death repeats itself immediately, as such, and is itself elsewhere" (Derrida 1988: 260). The photograph draws together the unique death and the death of the unique. Hence, death is always in the plural—deaths.

Thus, Barthes' 'effect of the real' when seen in the context of the photograph gives us a model to think about historicity. It allows us to acknowledge 'the direct uptake' of the historical demanded by *Textures* without regressing below Pollock's hermeneutical vigilance. This also enables us to think the historicity proper to colonialism which is often couched in negative terms—as oppression and destruction. Pollock's misguided reference to Barthes' 'effect of the real' gives us a clue to former's idea of the twin deaths of Indian's intellectual traditions on the eve of colonialism. The photograph combines the singularity of the haunting reference with the plurality of death. This opens up a new level of engagement with our intellectual tradition. On this level, the tradition is not available as a set of propositions or narratives. The radical potential of Austin's speech act theory lies in opening up this new level. Ganeri's context-bursting potential of speech acts and the referencing fixing function of contexts have to be understood within the intentional movement of photographic reference. Thus seen, colonialism will be more serious than a mere break in history which we could easily bridge through the rational reconstruction of ancient intellectual traditions. Nor was it a period of and total destruction and enslavement that cut us off from our past. The past persists as our spiritless pursuits.

Textures of Time, when seen through Barthian lenses, does not put history against myth. In fact, it takes myth on the same level as history. It is one thing to collapse the distinction between myth and history and another to see both myth and history as registering the haunting reality of the event. Here, allow me to mention Giorgio De Santillana's *Hamlet's Mill*, study of a myth which encodes data on the precession of equinoxes (De Santillana and von Dechend 1977). Why does these data take the form of myth? For Santillana myth is neither failed science nor misguided technology. According to Santillana, myth is knowledge about cosmological events. "Myths can be used as a vehicle for handing down solid knowledge independently from the degree of insight of the people who do the actual telling of stories, fables, etc" (De Santillana and von Dechend 1977: 312). This knowledge is generated and transmitted without involving the subjective conditions of the knower. What does it mean to represent an event? For us, it involves bringing

it under the subjective conditions of space and time. This makes the event into a historico-geometrical fact. The ancients had a different relationship with the event. It is not that the precession of equinoxes threatened the immature science of the ancients forcing them to invent some escapist explanation. They had a cognitive grid that could register barbaric events. To represent time means to set up a theater in which space and time can emerge as characters. This drama stages the very birth of the subject endowed with a sense of history, culture, and science.

Myth is ambiguous and allows a plurality of narratives. But this does not mean that it anticipates and explores an order in the fictional dimension. It is not the stories themselves that maps time but their affect—being appalling, comforting, and fearful. The native in *Textures* is expected to pick up this affect.

So far we have talked about the level of intellectual discourse which could possibly register its historical context. However, as I said in the beginning, talk about colonialism is possible only if philosophical discourse acknowledges a link between thought and freedom. For Hegel, in the Orient only the despot was free, in Greece some were free and only in Western Europe all were free. Insofar as the ideal of Western liberal democratic freedom guides our struggle against colonialism and modernity, it becomes the inescapable framework to relate thought and freedom. Attempt to show that ancient India too had a sense of democracy, sovereignty, and argumentative freedom only expands this framework. Perhaps, we should question this very fantasy of Oriental despotism. Why did Enlightenment reason and its ideal of freedom need this fantasy of despotism? The idea of Enlightenment freedom cannot work without this phantasmatic kernel. Genuine decolonization demands not debunking but an effort to work through this fantasy. This would be the subject matter for another essay.

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