Chapter Five

Feminist Ethics of Representation: Work Without Intention

Introduction: The Other of the Other

Reading Emmanuel Levinas’s later works, Simon Critchley focuses on the usage of the word, “trauma” by Levinas and argues that “the Levinasian ethical subject is a traumatic neurotic” (Critchley 2008, 61). This leads Critchley to propose that the “ethical subject is marked by hetero-affectivity.” ‘Hetero-affectivity’ is the condition where, “the inside of my inside is somehow outside, the core of my subjectivity is exposed to otherness” (61). Such a subject, Critchley proposes would “approve” “of a demand that it can never meet, a one-sided, radical and unfulfillable demand” (61). In this sense, the self would always carry an “imprint” (61) of a demand which it would never understand. This seems very close to the Derridian notion of ‘invagination’, even if Derrida almost always talks about a double invagination. Consider the following, “[double invagination takes place in] the place where the invagination of the upper edge on its outer face […], which is folded back “inside” to form a pocket and an inner edge, comes to extend beyond (or encroach on) the invagination of the lower edge, on its inner face […], which is folded back “inside” to form a pocket and an outer edge” (Derrida in Bloom 2004, 81). It is rather a whirl-like movement of prose curling and folding, as if performing the ‘invagination’. The crucial difference (from Critchley’s description) as I see it, however, lies in Derrida’s use of the concept to describe ‘both the sides’ of a

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division (self-other, or inside-outside), as if the organic as well as the mechanical affects each other. Therefore it is always a ‘double’ invaginations, “redoubled and reversed” (Derrida in Holland 1997, 38). Precisely this is what we have already indicated as ‘cut’ affecting both the object and the intention. In Critchley, on the other hand, it seems that ‘self’ is a location which is decidedly on the side of the ‘known’ or of the ‘inside’. This self is open to an ‘other’ which “imprints” the self, and therefore has a certain machine-like encroachment. Not only the other, but also this ‘opening’ of the self toward the other has a certain mechanicity for Critchley. One is, as if automatically opened to the other (other’s presence is a branding or imprinting which the self cannot understand or ignore). Critchley’s notion, in other words, takes the subject almost for granted, and remains fundamentally an effort to think subjectivity. But as Tina Chanter points out, in the case of the Levinasian ethics, “At issue is how the I can remain a subject in the face of the other, or how the subject can remain a subject without either absorbing the other or being absorbed by it” (Chanter 2001, 178). The ‘opening of the self’ therefore is to be interrupted at the register of its very articulation with the question: **but if the opening precedes self then who opens to the other?** In the words of Levinas, the question would be: “How does subject takes leave of itself to attain object?” (Levinas quoted in Chanter, 176)².

Judith Butler is textured and supple in her reading of Levinas when she wonders, that if “the face of the other” is “not a representation” and “a demand not open to interpreting” then how does one “distinguish between a fascist demand and one which somehow affirms the ethical bonds between humans that Levinas understands as constitutive of the ethical subject?” (Butler in Garber and Hanssen 2000, 18)³. Her recognition of the risk of an unconditional openness to the ‘other’ calls for a different notion of subjectivity where the subject is “from the start split by the wound of the Other” (18). This ‘wound’, as I have already argued, is like a ‘cut’

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² See Chanter’s detailed discussion in Chanter 2001, especially 170-188. I do not go into a close reading of the corpus of Immanuel Levinas for consideration of limited space and argumentative focus.

that bleeds with a persistence (as the other persists in self), a cut which is neither of 
the self nor of the other. The cut instead stays in-between. This persistent cut which 
is other than the self, and other than the other, can also be thought as a ‘third’, what 
Derrida has termed the ‘witness’ after Levinas,

the Third is not a person, not a terstis, a witness who comes in addition to the 
two. The Third is always already there in the dual relation, in the face-to-
face. Levinas says that this Third, the coming of this Third that has always 
already come to pass is the origin or rather the birth of the question. It is with 
the Third that the call to justice appears as a question. (Derrida 2007a, 444)

This figure of the ‘third’ then, is also the (non)place of the question of justice or 
ethics which lingers between the self and the other. This ‘wound’ being “a wound 
that the Other somehow is, prior to any action” (Butler, 18). But how can one be 
(something) even before acting, and therefore before any self-representation? This 
propels us again to the problem articulated above (‘who’ opens to the other if the 
opening precedes the self). The wound, it follows, must have a trace of authority, 
even if itself coming under the authority of none. The witness does not come instead 
of the two, but it is the very condition of the two, “there is no witness for the 
witness”, as Derrida writes elsewhere⁴ (Derrida 2005a, 83). The wound or the cut 
works like a “sovereign” which is also the sovereignty of (the work of) a question of 
ethicality (Derrida, 83). We have already encountered the metaphor of the ‘third’ in 
discussing the deconstruction of the notion of the ‘limit’ in Hegel’s Logic⁵. It has 
been our effort to ask, how one situates this ‘third’ at the margins, can it’s work be 
read like a structure of intentionality (and therefore claimed for a certain politics), or 
is it radically different from any such structure?

The figure of the witness indicates not only an ethicality but also to a 
representation. Any representation is impossible without the coming of the third, or 
the witness, which is not simply the other but the “other of the other”⁶, a step away,

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⁴ In relation to Paul Celan’s poem, which goes, “No one/ bears witness for the/ witness” 
(quoted in Derrida 2005a, 75)
⁵ See ‘Chapter Two’.
⁶ Derrida 2007a, 444. Also see Derrida 2009, 126.
at a remove from both the self, and the other, cutting self-presence to less than full, and making the other both appear and remain as other. The witness, therefore, makes ‘justice’ emerge as a question as long as it both protects and interrupts singularities (of self and the other). It also is a condition of ethicality since it makes the impossible’ *more than mere opposite* of the ‘possible’. Derrida offers the following insight on this issue: when one says one can think the possibility of an impossibility then “this “possible” is not simply “different from” or “the opposite of” impossible” (Derrida 2007a, 445), it is rather the distance created by the ‘third’. One might think here the following theses:

I. ‘Impossible’ is to ‘possible’ what the ‘other of the other’ is to ‘self’ even if true impossibility cannot be grasped.

II. If the ‘self’, the ‘other’, and the ‘other than the other’ are three terms then only two of them can be thought as coming into a relation, where the third must be thought as something which both authorizes and deconstructs this relationship between the two. All three cannot be thought as belonging to the same register, in the same way. In short, this can be seen like a structure of representations where the third is the necessary yet separating ‘distance’ (work of representation) of the two, which can also take a critical distance from the two.

III. This is not a spatiotemporal series where ‘self’ – ‘other of other’ – ‘other’ follow like in a sequence. Instead, it is rather more of an unpredictable game where the three exchange places. It is a thought-experiment which starts from a basic model of representation which is staged with two terms. But it immediately follows that to think any two, the third must appear as that (witness) which both authorizes the place-switching between ‘one’ and the ‘other’ (re-presentation), and stutters the limitless free-play by being the material trace (since full re-presentation is not possible). Consequently, representation cannot repeat the same as same, neither can it be totally free of a trace of the previous moment. Re-presentation then, is a matter of ethicality in a fundamental sense.

Next section discusses further this idea of representation as ethicality, trying to insert into it the crucial category of ‘gender’. It is done through the exemplary
mythical figure of the ‘Echo’, and indeed an analysis of the ‘act of echoing’, following Spivak.

‘Echo’ as Quasi-Analyst: Precarious Foothold of Ethics

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak reads the staging of ‘Echo’ (the mythical character) in Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* as what she calls an “ethical instantiation”. Her reading intends to question and critique the readings of the same

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7 Echo is a nymph in Greek mythology who is cursed by Hera, and is later entangled with the fate of Narcissus. More on the Narcissus-Echo storyline below, also see the next note. Classical sources about Echo is chiefly Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* and Pausainas’s *Description of Greece* (see Roman and Roman 2010, 141).

8 Publius Ovidius Naso (43 B.C.E. – 17 or 18 C.E.), poet of Latin, was born in Rome almost a year after the murder of Julius Caesar, another event that comes down to the modern reader as highly textualised (Anderson in Ovid 1996, 3). *Metamorphosis*, a work of poetry, might have been written in the “final decade” of Ovid’s life, around 8 C.E., in exile (Anderson in Ovid 1996, 4). The philosophical, or the “original metamorphosis” is put at the very beginning, as the text starts with an account of ‘change’, as it describes how “formless mater” turns into “visible world” (Anderson, 7).

9 “Ethical instantiation” is Spivak’s term in understanding the reading technique psychoanalysis deploys (chiefly Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan) in reading narratives, myths, literature or the statement of the analysand in a clinical situation by re-plotting it as a series of ethical instances and double-binds. Even if Spivak would have reservations about that narrative where the reading would be staged between two individuals in a clinical closure with some claim to scientificity and truth. Furthermore, for her, ‘Ethical instantiation’ is not reducible only to the psychoanalytic practice, as other traditions, both western and non-western, have deployed this in different ways in both modern and pre-modern times (the narrative of the Indian epic *Mahabharata* being Spivak’s example). However, one assumes that Spivak uses the term in a very specific sense too, when she uses it for her own kind of deconstruction. Here, the work of deconstruction takes a step further and reads other narratives as ethical instantiations, even if its own stance remains guarded, e.g. when Spivak reads Ovid’s narrative as ‘ethical instantiation’. This is not very dissimilar to what we have already encountered as Spivak’s way of making a text ‘practicable’ or ‘literary’ (see previous chapters).
textuality by the psychoanalytic tradition which also reads by reconstructing the text as a series of ‘ethical instantiations’, only that Spivak is aiming at a different lineament of the ethical binds. The psychoanalytic, and indeed most canonical readings of the Ovid’s text have put the character of ‘Narcissus’ at the centre, Spivak contends. She specifically has the Freudian reading of the story, and re-reading of the same by Jacques Lacan in mind, both of which, she thinks, ignores the “framing” of the story in terms of its female protagonist Echo, her birth through the “sexual violence” of rape, as well as the disruptions and suspensions her character introduces in the narrative. Psychoanalysis, in its generality, tries to read narratives received as myth, literature or analysand’s account by rearranging them as instances of ethical binds, even if these readings are tuned to produce conclusions and closures which are too assured in their force of knowing and intervening, being “at least implicitly diagnostic and taxonomic” (Spivak 1993a, 18). For Spivak, the “cultural critique” which a dominant strand of psychoanalysis tries to perform, other than setting up institutional clinical practices, is suspect in its ignorance of “geopolitical and historical detail”, and in its scientific claim of “making group

10 About the central critique practiced by the psychoanalytic tradition, Tina Chanter has this to say, “By insisting that desires cannot always be reined in, that the subject is essentially fragmented, and often driven by desires that are not necessarily identifiable as consciously defined goals, psychoanalysis questions the usefulness of a model which places the subject at the center of the world and construes it as a controlling being, successfully able to manipulate objects around it, and to subordinate its desires to rational ends in a way that satisfies its desires” (Chanter 2001, 164). The question in our argument is however, if the internal logic of a specific text of psychoanalysis can undergo the scrutiny of its own logic.

11 Narcissus is son of the river god in the world of Greek myths who fell in love with his own reflection and perished in consequence. Classical sources are same as in the case of Echo (Roman and Roman, 337).

12 Spivak specifically singles out the “early Lacan” (Spivak 1993a, 22). We cannot go into a detailed commentary on Spivak’s critique of the psychoanalytic reading of the Narcissus myth, our focus rather being the alternative staging of Echo that Spivak puts forth.

13 Spivak’s critique of the ‘scientific’ also seems to be a re-turn to the working of the Freudian text which has an internal mechanism of unsettling itself through the weave of trepidations and uncertainties about its previous moments. It is on this provisional nature of Freudian closures, that Spivak concentrates. She calls Freud one of her “flawed heroes”.
behavior intelligible” (18). However, this does not take away the specific charge of psychoanalysis in setting itself up as a technique of reading narratives and re-staging them as “instantiations of socioethical problems”, a “popular model” which is not exclusive to western psychoanalytic tradition, but can be identified in its generality as a “rather global phenomenon” (19). It is this specific technique of reading that Spivak wants to work with as “a challenge to systematic moral philosophy” as well as to the assured scientific interventions that clinical psychoanalysis claims of making in the closed space of the clinic, where the analyst actively intervenes in the experiences and mind of an individual, the analysand (19). We try to follow, how Spivak critiques and yet retains this model of the ‘two’, self and other, analysand and analyst in their ascribed asymmetry, in setting up her own staging of the figure of Echo and the ethical instance such a figure opens up. But before that, one needs to probe more into a possible critique of the scene of the psychoanalytic clinic from the side of deconstruction.

Spivak has made the point that “Of the three great European critics of ideology and rationality – Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud – Freud is the only one who worked within an institution” (Spivak 1999, 217). Therefore, she opines that Freud’s work is ever conflicted between “the critique of the intending subject and the work of instituting a “science”” (217). In the scene of the ‘clinic’, as Spivak explains elsewhere, “The analyst interprets the distorted énonciation (speech event) of the subject’s symptom into the true énoncé (narrated event) of the unconscious”, where the ‘fiction’ works as “as a clue to truth” (Spivak, “Translator’s Preface” in Derrida 1997, lxiv). Spivak adds that Derrida would have it otherwise, and would not let ‘truth’ slip out of the textual, and therefore would propose any such ‘truth’ as “being constituted by “fiction”” (Spivak, ixiv). ‘Fiction’ here indicates the (analysand’s) ‘text’ with which the analyst is confronted, or the text as he confronts it. The

who, in spite of his “engagement with ethics” could not adequately account for gendered situations (Spivak 1993a, 18-19). Spivak also has certain closures in mind, namely, feminist and postcolonial, even if they are thought as persistent rather than as stasis.

14 Spivak is careful to mention that for Derrida, ‘truth’ and ‘fiction’ are provisional words, we might add that these terms work as long as one is only attentive to their relational nature in a given texture of paleonymy.
analyst’s claim to ‘truth’ lies in going beyond the ‘fiction’ of the analysand. What Derrida deconstructs here is the Lacanian disentangling of ‘truth’ from ‘fiction’. For Derrida, this move enables Lacan to affirm ‘truth’ “through” the passage of fiction but beyond it (Derrida 1975, 89), even if this argument merely plays upon the commonsensical reality-fiction division, (the Lacanian) ‘truth’ being only another name for the operation ascribed generally to ‘fiction’ in the reality-fiction dyad. ‘Truth’, proposes Derrida, in Lacan’s argument is different from ‘fiction’ in naming but not structurally beyond the working-logic of fiction as such:

Lacan insists much on the opposition truth/reality which he advances as a paradox. This opposition, as orthodox as can be, facilitates the passage of truth through fiction: common sense will always have made the distinction between reality and fiction. (Derrida 1975, 89)

Derrida seems here to chide Lacan for calling a part of fiction: ‘truth’, and still claiming it to be radically different from fiction. This prepares Derrida to formulate a critique which interests us, since it is a critique of a logic of propriation. This Lacanian logic apparently sets itself up at a distance from the self-presence of (the analysand’s) ‘speech’ only to reclaim that presence-as-truth through the detour of ‘fiction’ (retrieved by the analyst); in effect making a circular loop which enables itself in creating a distance from itself. The analyst, as if gives the ‘voice’ its truth back. This scene, seemingly open to a disjunction between ‘speech’ and its other (one who listens) is therefore, ultimately about “propriation, hence of proximity, presence and preserving the very same provided by the idealizing effect of speech” (89). The “master value” of propriation is settled the moment ‘truth’, via the tripped circuit of ‘fiction’, “is determined as adequation […] and as unveiling” (89). This propels Derrida to make a critique of the “mastership of truth” enjoyed by the “Lacanian analyst” (Spivak 1993a, 27). Derrida tries to catch the swift-footed analyst who desires always to be “the other one”, the one looking, listening,

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15 See “The Purveyor of Truth” (Derrida 1975).
16 Even if this discourse would claim to access truth not from ‘reality’ but from “elsewhere”, or from what Lacan calls the “Word”, for Derrida, that is achieved only by ignoring the fragments of text irreducible to such a scheme (see Derrida 1975, 89).
knowing the “true strategy” (Derrida 1975, 81), who “sees everything, from the place from which all psychoanalysts are addressed” (72). But this other one, the analyst, “he” no doubt, is caught in a series of displacements as he goes through each subject-position in the text (the text in contention here is Edgar Allen Poe’s short story “The Purloined Letter”17) trying to take a distance from each in order to analyze, shadowing each, but only ending up in the next figure, never quite getting outside the text:

[when] he cuts short the identification with the Dupin who is the recipient in order to keep only the other one […] it is at that very moment that the analyst (which one? the other one) most resembles Dupin (which one? the other one) when the chain of identifications has sent him in the opposite direction, through the whole circus, has made him repeat automatically, compulsively, the minister, the Queen, the King (the Police). (Derrida, 81)

Apropos this Derridian critique of the “Lacanian analyst”18, Spivak poses ‘Echo’ as a ‘quasi-analyst’, because she is also the one who listens, but from a distance. But how is that staging different from the ‘mastership of truth’ enjoyed by the figure of the psychoanalyst? We attempt to understand below how Spivak sets up Echo as a quasi-analyst.

Spivak starts to read the much discussed myth around the figure of ‘Narcissus’ and notices that the other player in this tale, ‘Echo’, has largely gone

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17 “The Purloined Letter” is published by Poe in 1844 (Poe in Muller and Richardson 1988, 3-27). This story has been commented upon by Jacques Lacan in “Seminar on “The Purloined Letter”” in 1956 (Lacan in Muller and Richardson 1988, 28-54).

18 One should be very aware of the fact that Derrida applies this critique only to an “early Lacan”, he even fixes certain dates and limits his critique to some texts of Lacan only:

“Whatever the case after 1965-1966, all the texts situated, more accurately, published, between 1953 (the so-called Rome Speech) and 1960 seem to belong to the same system of the truth [discussed here]. That is, quantitatively, almost the totality of the Ecrits, including, therefore, the Seminar (1955-1957); “works of the early Lacan,” might say future academics in a hurry to separate what cannot stand partition” (Derrida 1975, 82).
As if she has either been overlooked or has defied narrativization, leaving a “singular” trail of “absence” (Spivak 1993a, 22). Freud’s narrative epitomizes the death of Narcissus in his effort at an improbable consumption of self, fading Echo out of focus without much attention20. Moreover, this has resulted in a curious displacement where not men but women have been identified with having a ‘narcissistic’ passion for self-love. This is a consistent ‘mistake’ not limited to psychoanalysis21, even if Freud’s capitulation to that same tendency22 after going

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19 Spivak is generally following the story as told in Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*, which is also the *Urtext* for Freud, and therefore for the psychoanalytic tradition.

20 See Spivak’s detailed charting of this absence in Spivak, 1993a, 40n22.

21 Spivak tabulates many of these mistaken readings of ‘Narcissism as feminine’. I am tempted to add one representative moment of this short-circuit which appears in one of the most important texts of ‘modernity’. In his *The Red and the Black* (*Le Rouge et le Noir*, 1830, the subtitle of this novel is “A Chronicle of the Nineteenth Century”), a novel which, for many, marks the advent of the new bourgeoisie Europe away from the clutches of the sovereign power of the monarchy, Stendhal portrays the narcissistic woman ‘Mathilde’, who is “deeply wrapped in herself”, and who, “like all women [...] looks at herself instead of looking at you, and so she doesn’t know” (emphasis added, Stendhal 1998, 409).

22 Freud’s first use of the mythical proper name ‘Narcissus’ (and the kind of self-love it signifies) is to be found in 1910 (in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*) with reference to the “homosexuals”, in explaining their “object-choice” (Laplanche and Pontalis 1988, 255). Even if he would soon “postulate a primary narcissism in everyone” (in *On Narcissism: An Introduction*, 1914, see Freud 2012, 18), the boy-child is increasingly projected by Freud as more capable of developing ‘anaclitic’ or other-oriented object-choice through the waning of the ‘Oedipus complex’ and therefore is more adept at forming an ‘ego-ideal’ (later called super-ego). The woman, however remains caught in the ‘Oedipus complex’ (she is “excluded” from the ‘castration complex’ because she cannot have the fear of losing what she does not have, the penis). Explaining sexual difference through the dissolution of Oedipus complex is a view Freud puts forth in 1924, in *The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex* (see Freud 1989, 665). The woman is said to go into a ‘secondary Narcissism’ till in her child she would “confront” a “part” of her “own body […] like an extraneous object” (a view already there in *On Narcissism*, see Freud 2012, 20; also see 17-25). Spivak likens the fateful trajectory of the woman in Freudian cannon with the placing of non-European cultures in certain Eurocentric narratives “Asia and Africa are always
through all the calculations of ethicality that a psychoanalytic reading presupposes, marks an important failure. Read from the vantage point of its male protagonist, the “story of Narcissus is a tale of the construction of the self as object of knowledge” (23), or the impossibility of it. The flower marking Narcissus’s death, and the tantalizing stasis of his desire remains as physical representations of an itinerary of self-appropriation which is intrinsically and figuratively male. As the flower “nods at the water”, it stages the narcissistic gaze ever fixed on self-image. This gaze, always stalled at the limit of self, trying to make an impossible re-turn seems only too sure in its inscription. That certainty is inherent to its materiality as a beautiful flower, albeit the material flower is also ever caught in the equipoise of its desire which trembles before the limit of self, and yet it does not remember the other. I read this exclusive investment in the ‘self’ of an intentionality that cannot think of ‘materiality’ other than referring to itself as necessarily a ‘male’ desire for self-appropriation. This is an important move, which I want to single out and re-iterate not only as a ‘deconstructive’, but also as a ‘feminist’ intervention. This intervention amounts to proposing that the desire whose trail is necessarily of self-appropriation can be called a necessarily ‘male’ desire. Therefore, the ‘writing’ (impure materiality) or the deconstructive ‘mark’ which interrupts the itinerary of such a desire, which Derrida calls the “the nonpresent remaining of a differential mark cut off from its alleged ‘production’ or origin” becomes that which deconstructs maleness as such. It is not merely about (re-)claiming the ‘deconstructive mark’ for feminism (or, as we will see below, for a postcolonial feminism), but to think of the work of deconstruction as a necessary undoing of the desire of man. This undoing, of a desire for full presence has a generality since the “structural possibility of being severed from its referent or signified (and therefore from communication and its

supposed to have had trouble with Oedipus. (Very broadly and irreverently speaking, if as a man-you can't get to Oedipus, you are stuck with Narcissus. Women can’t pass through Oedipus, and therefore the secondary narcissism of attachment to the (boy) child saves them from themselves, from penis-envy and so forth.) Their growth is arrested on the civilizational scale” (Spivak 1993a, 17-18). Even if this “racial misuse” of the Freudian moment is not adequately shown textually by Spivak, at least not in “Echo”.

content)” is the condition of “every mark”, indeed of “a grapheme in general” (Derrida quoted in Spivak, 26). At stake therefore, is not only a feminist review of some available readings of the figure of Echo, but an effort at making the deconstructive mark work for a feminist ethicality. We can now come back to Spivak’s representation of Echo as quasi-analyst.

Spivak performs a reading of Ovid’s narrative where the figure of Echo gets a “foothold outside of the subject-position” held or aimed at by the “psychoanalyst [cum] cultural critic” (26). This other ‘foothold’, which Spivak contends would be “precarious” reminds one of her proposition made elsewhere that the “‘philosophical’ justice is the minute foothold of practice”, in effect making a text “practicable”, the “making literary” of a text (Spivak 1989, 57). That operation similarly tries to think of an im-possible position from where one might intervene into a text, even if the positioning of that ‘reader’ cannot be a proper subject-position outside of the text. It is the notion of such an impossible foothold, that Spivak brings in here as well, this time, through the figuration of ‘Echo’. Therefore, it is not merely about ‘philosophical justice’ anymore, but rather a question of a feminist ethics. But how can Echo be dissociated from the text intended by the subject (Narcissus)? Indeed, how can she step outside the very trope of subjectivity as such, and still retain a certain fold encroaching on the inside? In other words, how can she embody a critique of intentionality and yet be devoid of any intention? One notes here that in Spivak’s reading, Ovid’s Echo is “staged as the instrument of the possibility of a truth not dependent upon intention”, and furthermore, she is a returning-voice as “reward” “uncoupled from, indeed set free from, the recipient” (Spivak, 1993a, 24). The ‘recipient’ who thinks he is the actual sender or the giver of ‘intention’ (in the story, Narcissus) comes in effect, undone. Echo is staged as not fully dependent upon any intentionality. She signifies the structural im-possibility of a voice fully re-presenting itself at the same place and same time. I want to repeat here a problem raised at a previous moment of our discussion, which is the following: the impossibility of re-presentation without spatial or temporal variation. It is confronted as an ‘im-possibility’ since, ‘what the subject may never choose is to re-present without any displacement, to re-present in the ‘same time’ or at the ‘same

24 See ‘Chapter Three’.
space. The figuration of Echo in the text of Ovid, as well as the structural placing of the act of ‘echoing’ gives us another opening to consider that problem. In the narrative of Ovid, Spivak reminds,

We remember that even if Echo had been able to echo and act according to mere punishment with no difference of subject-position, the response would have been a refusal to answer or (we cannot be sure) a suggestion that this particular respondent is inappropriate. (26)

Spivak notices that Ovid uses two narrative tools in articulating Echo’s voice. In some cases he “quotes” Echo, and in other occasions, her echoing retort is not quoted, but just reported “in the name of Narcissus”, as he hears it (25). Among those instances, Spivak is particularly interested in the one where Narcissus asks, “Why do you fly from me?” (24). It is structurally impossible for Ovid to give Echo her voice in this case, Spivak argues, since the Latin interrogative (“fugis”) cannot be echoed without change, to get the echoing effect (repeat of the same) as the imperative of the same word is different (“fugi”). “Caught” in this “discrepancy between second person interrogative (fugis) and the imperative (fugi)” Ovid cannot give Echo any voice (24-25). The Latin language is incapable of holding on to the logic of her ‘being-in-echoing’ (as repetition of an originary voice and nothing more). Ovid, as Spivak puts it, “cannot allow her to be” (emphasis in original, 25) 26. Ironically therefore, Echo can have her own voice only by ceasing to be (within the given structure of voice and its echo), by risking to have an intention (failing to repeat), even if the trace of that intention always already haunts her repeating gesture (‘echo’ is already deferred in time). It has been remarked that hers is a

25 See ‘Chapter Two’.

26 It is also a question of linguistic closure, as Spivak mentions that in “English, Echo could have echoed “Fly from me” [in reply to Narcissus’s “why do you fly from me?”] and remained Echo”, and therefore ironically this “discrepancy is effaced in the discrepancy of translation” (25, also see Spivak, 41n27). I am tempted to add here that it could also have been possible in Bengali (translation), and that might have been closer to Latin in the economy of word-usage, where Echo could have remained within her logic by echoing, “pālāo [amār theke]” in reply to Narcissus’s “keno pālāo [amār theke]”. Another Indian language, Hindi for example, however, would have kept the discrepancy.
“speechless speech” or an “empty voice” of an “ethereal being” (Bandyopadhyay 2012, 450), even if we argue otherwise. Following Spivak, we propose that the apparent ‘emptiness’ of repetition also retains the crucial ‘foothold’ of an intention which is not merely a materiality, but an opening into ethicality as such. Echo’s is a sensuous nonsensuous\textsuperscript{27} body, and therefore not merely constituted by an “empty voice” as Bandyopadhyay would have it (Bandyopadhyay, 450).

Here, a question confronts us, which concerns the discussion of representation as we have been pursuing it. Echo cannot be different, but even in repetition, does she not already differ in the sense of repeating in an-other voice and in an-other time (and by extension, another space, which is also the place of another name, name of a woman most crucially)? What then of this difference which is inscribed in the very structure of echoing or repetition, and how is this distinguishable from the “discrepancy” that Spivak talks about, which would enable her to have her own voice, beyond merely echoing? What of this more palpable difference that the structure of repetition resists, how is it distinguishable from the difference always already inherent in the repeating gesture? To put things together, we have two contending problems: I) is her alterity already prefigured in the act of echoing the same, in her ‘being echo’ (which amounts almost to a non-being and yet secures a minute \textit{différance}), or II) does her alterity reside in her ‘not being echo’, and therefore in claiming a more radical otherness totally independent of the (Narcissistic) ‘voice’, in an otherness radically free of the self-presence of speech?

It is here that Spivak’s reading of Echo as talking a step beyond and yet being tied to the figuration of the ‘analyst’ (as master of truth) becomes decisive. For Spivak, Echo occupies the “position of something like an analyst” a quasi-analyst, as I have already mentioned above (Spivak 1993a, 29). She does not completely defy the position of a subject, rather her “traces” are set to work in deconstructing a self-presence that desires full materiality without any recourse to the memory of the ‘trace’, past or future, which it tries to sublate as merely mediating moments. In her repeating work, Echo keeps the self-presence of the voice (of man) at bay not by merely affirming it, but also by dividing it (in her

\textsuperscript{27} See ‘Chapter Three’.
affirmation from a distance), cutting it from its origin, and moreover claiming the ‘cut’ by making the trace of the voice survive. Even within the logic of echoing then, Echo’s work is never entirely mechanical but machine-like (which corresponds to her analyst-like placement ‘quasi-analyst’), hers is a ‘work’ which congeals into neither full subjectivity nor is it a complete absence or non-place. The echoing reply, which never errs, and is “persistent” in that sense, is “her mark or guarantee that she will be around” (27). This is the figure of the “persistent female” which undoes the “Freudian Narcissus”, or a ‘work’ which keeps to the persistence of the undoing of male desire.

The Paradigm of ‘Work’: Deconstructing Intentionality

The Spivakian re-reading of Echo enables one, I propose, to think of the crucial ‘work’ that interrupts any desire for full presence or self-adequation without re-presentation. It is also a way of thinking change and intentionality that radically breaks from any concept of subjectivity constituted as a locus or even as a ‘name’. The crucial departure of this ‘work’ lies in its conception as an ongoing persistent ‘doing’, rather than a stasis, re-presentation rather than a node where presence organizes itself. The ‘work’, as I have tried to articulate it, is to be thought in the ‘time of calculation’ (of différance) and not in the ‘time of decision’ (a time which is not thought as différance, but rather as a static point). Can it then not be said that ‘subject’ or ‘decision’ oriented discourses which suppose presence and calculability of things, are always pressed for solutions and hence judged by their end-products? If this is a paradigm of thinking that focuses solely on the ‘product’ as an end in itself, the thought that tries to stay with the work that goes on in making up different productions must be radically different. The former can be called the paradigm of thinking in terms of end-products (a specific kind of finite decisions) and the latter the paradigm of ‘work’ which tries to deconstruct any decision as ‘de-cision’ and stays with the process of production. A thought of the ‘work’ stays with the time of

28 “Persistent female” is a phrase Spivak borrows from Samuel Weber (see Spivak 1993a, 38; also see next chapter).

29 Spivak 1993a, 38.
production (or of the ‘cut’ that persistently interrupts presence) and therefore works both within and beyond the horizon of calculation, never giving into calculability or getting solely defined and conditioned by the law of the ‘end-product’ (calculability). The ‘work’, conceived thus is not caught within the time of decision. Every decision logically must go through a temporality stretched extension along the duration of calculations\(^\text{30}\) that lies before the decision as product. And therefore, can it not be proposed that any discourse that compels one to assume a definite subjectivity or take a decision, only forces one to forget that duration or that time when calculation goes on? Those discourses, which are driven by a ‘metaphysics of decision’, articulate every ‘present’, each ‘now’ as the moment of decision. However, by stressing on the calculability of things and telos of the product of calculations, this tendency ultimately denies decision its ‘experience’ of production. In this specific sense, deconstruction puts ‘experience’ back in the agenda. When one is always forced to live by deciding, become subject by deciding, then when does one survive (as de-cision) and ‘experience’ the decision? This line of argument enables one to think of ‘doing’ without getting tied to a grammar of decision-making. This is in line with the Derridian distinction between “doing” and “action” (mentioned in the previous chapter), a “doing that would not amount only to action and a rendering that would not come down just to restitution” (Derrida 1994a, 32). It is also similar to the way Spivak distinguishes between the ethical intervention intended by the “Lacanian analyst” and “Derrida’s description of ethics” which is “the experience of the impossible” (27). But I faintly differ from Spivak when she writes that it is the “mastership of truth [which] is the experience of the impossible” (emphasis in original, 27). I understand Spivak as making the point that the ‘indeconstructible justice’ can be that ‘mastership’ of truth which remains ever incomplete. I agree with the caveat that such a mastership is a desire for full presence, but the Derridian notion of the ‘incalculable’ is similar to and yet not reducible to such a desire (for full presence). I think one of the crucial differences lies in the way the Derridian incalculable is thought to be eluding any desire for full mastery, even if it would always risk such a temptation. Experience,

\(^{30}\) The ‘point’ and the ‘line’ set up metaphorically the double bind of time and therefore of ‘being’, see ‘Chapter Three’.
as I understand it, on the other hand, is what happens, in any calculation, any living. The incalculable can only be experienced through calculation in the present, or in what Derrida calls the ‘given time’. It is in this sense that I have already proposed that any aporia is always already thought in hindsight, and there cannot be any ‘pure aporia’, and Derrida concurs: “it is impossible to have a full experience of aporia, that is, of something that does not allow passage” (Derrida in Cornell, Rosenfeld, and Carlson 1992, 16). But that is precisely what experience claimed as work would be, a ‘passage’. This ‘work’ cannot radically do away with a desire for subjectivity and therefore for the mastership of truth, and yet, it is not reducible to it, since merely such a desire, “whose structure wouldn’t be an experience of aporia would have no chance to be what it is, namely, a call for justice” (16). Echo, we must note, retains and works with a trace of the analyst as listening/replying-subject, without which she cannot even communicate with Narcissus as the sender-subject, nor can she elude his mastery without acknowledging her own share in that ‘desire for mastery’. “If we move to Echo as the (un)intending subject of ethics”, writes Spivak, “we are allowed to understand the mysterious responsibility of ethics, that its subject cannot not comprehend” (emphasis added, Spivak 1993a, 32). The “(un)” within brackets as if works like a negative supplement to the “intending subject”, and therefore to subjectivity as such, even if it cannot totally nullify intentionality, working always already under cover, as staged, as something both theatrical and mechanical. Echo therefore takes a position which ceaselessly folds back upon itself, tries to ‘experience’ itself as writing and not “only as [subject, or self] of a knowledge that cannot relate” to the self (32). The crux of what Spivak calls the

31 See ‘Chapter Four’.

32 One remembers here the Derridian description of how the “the law of quotation marks” (or a bracket, we might add) works in both effacing and disclosing a word, or a concept-metaphor: “Two by two they stand guard: at the frontier or before the door, assigned to the threshold in any case, and these places are always dramatic. The apparatus lends itself to theatricalization, and also to the hallucination of the stage and its machinery two pairs of pegs hold in suspension a sort of drape, a veil or a curtain”, a curtain which is not “closed, just slightly open” (Derrida 1991, 31). The context: Derrida is talking about the trail of the word ‘Geist’ in Heidegger.
“mysterious responsibility of ethics” is this self-folding which does not only claim a certain authority and mastery, but at the same instant takes responsibility for the same. An uncoupling of the two (authority and responsibility) would pave way for a desire for full mastery or full responsibility, both of which amount to the same thing. This coupling however must go by the way of uncoupling (of the self from itself). The male voice of Narcissus vying for a self-propriation cannot take ‘Echo’/the echo only as an affirmation of his own self, since hidden in that repetition is an-other indication which points to a radical asymmetry. And yet, he cannot bypass this experience either, since this is the only route that promises him a re-turn. Echo works as the deconstructive ‘gift’, but with this twist that in this narrative, not only the gift works, but the name of the woman claims that work too. The gift of ‘echo’ turns on a trace of subjectivity: Echo. Not only this implicates Echo in the matrix of presence, and in the desire for propriation, but it also gives her an opening to responsibility. A responsibility that cannot be acquired without taking part in the desire for a name or for a place. Everything would therefore hinge on the ‘(non-) intention’, the “a-phonie” that both shapes and gives lie to “Echo’s responsibility” (33).

In a strikingly similar reading of Metamorphosis, Derrida also sees in the act of ‘Echo’ a deconstruction of the ‘present’ of intentionality. “Although she repeats”, without simulacrum, what she has just heard,” opined Derrida, “another simulacrum slips in to make her response something more than a mere reiteration” (Derrida 2005b, xii). For Derrida, in this fundamentally “unequal correspondence” lies the crux of any promise, of “democracy” for instance, or the “origin of politics” (xii). This origin itself cannot be merely political since it stretches politics toward a future anterior, or to a ‘to come’-ness. But Derrida crucially remains silent about the gendered nature of the repeating echo. But it is precisely that gendered promise then, or the promise which re-inaugurates a sexual difference at the very origin of the political, that we are tracing33.

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33 For a detailed discussion of how the name ‘woman’ is to be thought in tandem with an ethics of sexual difference, see Das 2010, especially 109-132. The question of how a politics woven around a ‘name’ can still negotiate with the ‘ethical’ is foremost in Das. I have not
‘Echo’ bears a name, and she is identified with the woman who is immediately written off the scene by a narrative that tries to cover over her presence. But she surfaces as the other of that very attempt at an erasure. This surfacing gets a foothold, even if im-possible, in the ‘name’, in traces of a subjectivity, even if hers is a “self that cannot accede to an “I”” (Spivak 1993a, 33). Only at the point of failing in self-adequation, that the ‘I’ knows its own echo as belonging to an-other. Likewise, only at the risk of knowing the echo as ‘of the other’ that the ‘I’ starts to plot a self. The ‘speechless speech’ bestowed on the woman, or tagged as feminine, therefore, is rather an opening of the self to its own failure, where desire for self-knowledge unwittingly sets off a “live autopsy” of that very self. The ‘live’ nature which prefigures this autopsy presumes an ongoing transmission and a decipherment at a distance. It is an “ambiguity” that “self-knowledge inhabits” (33). This habitation is ambiguous precisely because it exceeds any placement and unfolds as a deconstruction in time. The ongoing nature indicates that it is a ‘work’ and therefore not reducible to any logic of naming or placement. It cannot be thought from within any (what I have called the) paradigm of end-product. Narcissus therefore is not “necessarily a stalling of/in the self where there should be a passageway to others or the Other” (35), since this ‘passage’ is not understood as a charity or an amnesty that the self gives to the other. This passage is not of the self to give, not even of the other to claim in full. It is what Spivak somewhat enigmatically calls, “a contentless, enclitic, monstrative vector, its definitive responsive character unfilled with the subject’s intention” (35). An enclitic word produces the shortest possible emphasis in an articulation, which gives it the effect of clinging to the word that precedes it (‘n’t’ in ‘can’t’) even if it has a separation as well, and therefore “the intentional moment is not [totally] absent” (35). The question however remains, as Spivak articulates it, how to “read” this “narrative” as the “specific ethical burden of the feminist in decolonization”? (34). This question is important not only because it

34 Spivak 1993a, 33.
raises the problem of a feminist politics of representation, but also in the way it tries to argue with *two subjects*, the scholar who represents and the one to be represented. How can this be thought in the context of ‘Echo’ surfacing as a quasi-analyst? It is to this question we would attend in the next chapter, albeit in the present, I would indicate in brief how the logic of ‘Echo’ can be plotted into the Spivakian situation of the (postcolonial feminist) scholar representing the subaltern woman.

In her revisiting of the canonical “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak has tried to think of the intentional moment of representation also as the moment when the feminist scholar does a “distanced decipherment” in re-presenting the subaltern other as woman (Spivak 1999, 309). But she also stresses that these two positions (of the scholar and the subaltern woman to be represented) are not fixed, but on the contrary, the ‘I-slots’ is to be filled in. As in the piece “Echo” we are told that, “Once there is an effort to engage in the politics of subalternity-on-the-move who questions and who answers “fly from me” is not at all clear” (Spivak 1993a, 28). Spivak points to a possible overturned situation where the feminist “just might” take the position of the Echo, and deconstruct the desire that tries to produce her merely as an extension of its own itinerary, where “both the self-knowing Ovidian and the deluded Freudian” would be complicit in such a male desire (28). But the text of the feminist scholar gets furrowed within, as she tries to place herself at the place of the ‘I’; since any such construal of responsibility would come with a claim to authority which is ‘male’. And therefore, the feminist text is also open to a possibility where “the subaltern herself is also sometimes caught in the desire for Narcissus” (28). All these possibilities however are variations of a pattern best understood through the expression: “subalternity-on-the-move”, and therefore from within what I have called a ‘paradigm of work’, of ‘de-cision’. At the register of representation, the scholar who cannot ignore the desire to be Narcissus would do well to disrupt her own work through the rider that, “‘be like me, be my image’ can never be on the agenda, *from either side*” (emphasis added, 28), i.e. from the side of the subaltern, where even this construal of the ‘other side’ itself would necessarily remain unsure. This is what Spivak christens the “homeopathic double bind of feminism in decolonization” which fails since it takes up the position of the ‘analyst’ in being
ethical even if that position is prefigured by the desire of the man, failing to “cure the poison of patriarchy with the poison of the legacy of colonialism” (37).

How then, does one think of a feminist ethical, and that too from the side of postcolonial critique? This is the question that might take our argument back to the figure of the native informant and beyond, which is tried in the next chapter. In the present, however, I go into a discussion of a literary text, a short story (located in the historical context of India under colonization). This exercise, I hope, shows how the logic of ‘echo’ can be tested against a (male) desire for self-presence inscribed within the weave of a literary text. The story, which is written in Bengali and is titled “Paylā Nambar”35 (“House Number One”), is by Rabindranath Thakur36 (1861-1941), first published in 1917 (published in a book in 1920).

‘Paylā Nambar’: Openings to a Story

The unthinkable happens, the woman abandons her place, her husband’s (man’s) home, leaving only a short note written across the face of a torn piece of paper:

I leave. Do not try to look for me. Even if you do, you won’t find me.37

(Thakur 1991, 382)

35 “Paylā Nambar” is first published in 1917, in the Sabuj Patra (“The Green Leaves”), which was a path-breaking “avant garde journal” edited by Pramatha Chaudhury (see “Introduction” by P. K. Datta in Datta 2003, 2). The same journal also published several other short stories by Thakur that dealt with what can be termed broadly feminist issues other than serialising Ghare Bāire (during the monthly issues of 1914, published in book form in 1916, see Datta, 2) the much discussed novel by Thakur, which also deals with the ‘woman’s question’, juxtaposed with the question of nationalism.

36 Rabindranath Thakur (1861-1941). I am following the more phonetic transliteration ‘Rabindranath Thakur’ (rabindranāth thākur) to the anglicized ‘Rabindranath Tagore’ generally used in English texts and confirmed by Rabindranath himself.

37 “আমি চলস্য। আমাকে খুঁজতে চাও কেহো না। করবেও খুঁজে পাবে না!”
The man in question, her husband, in whose first person narrative the story is told, resides in the ‘house number two’ (the setting is early twentieth century Calcutta). This house is inevitably placed beside the ‘house number one’ (‘Paylā Nambar’), which is, most properly, owned by another man. Former suspects the latter, his suspicion deepens when twenty five love letters written by the other man (of the ‘house number one’) to his wife is found. He reads them over and over, he is strangely attracted to them, “those letters became my letters, they are today the hymn of my life”\(^{38}\) (384). A lot is going on here. There is a similar moment in Gustave Flaubert’s \textit{Madame Bovary} (1856), where, after the death of Emma Bovary, her husband discovers the love letters written to her by her lovers, and he “devours” them, “to the very last one” (Flaubert 2004, 309). And indeed the narrator of “\textit{Paylā Nambar}”, who is a man of knowledge, knows all major European languages and addicted to books, does remember, after his wife left home, how he had once read and analysed “similar events” in the stories of “Flaubert, Tolstoy, Turgenev” (Thakur 1991). But whereas in Flaubert’s novel the husband meets one of Emma’s lovers and they reconcile, “\textit{Paylā Nambar}” ends with yet another twist (one extra turn of the metaphor\(^ {39}\)). As if Rabindranath Thakur is making a marginal comment on an available motif played out in the textuality of European modernity, that of the woman who leaves, metaphorized in the name, ‘Madame Bovary’. When the two men meet in “\textit{Paylā Nambar}”, the husband discovers to his utter surprise that Anilā (his wife) has left an identical note for the other man, the aspiring lover, as well:

That [same] inscription, that writing, that [very] date and this piece [of paper] is just the other half of the same blue paper whose one half is with me.\(^ {40}\) (Thakur, 1991, 384)

Let us step back and follow how this moment is slowly built up in the text itself. How Thakur’s short story sets up this moment and through what delineation of metaphors. In the story, one notices that the male protagonist (who is also the narrator) is addicted to books, or more exactly, to reading (“\textit{bai parār neshā}”), and

\(^{38}\) “মাযাতের দেখ নিদর্শুৎ লেখা ইইচিঠিগুলি আমারই চিঠি হয়ে উঠল - ওগুলি আজ আমারই প্রাপ্তের হবনো।”

\(^{39}\) See ‘Chapter One’.

\(^{40}\) “দুই অক্ষর, দুই লেখা, দুই তাজিক এবং দুই নিদর্শুৎ চিঠির কাগজের অর্থক্ষণা আমার কাছে এই তুকরোটি ভারই বাকি অর্থক।”
knows most of the major European languages which enables him to ride the “express train of modernity” (376). He reads everything that make up the cannons of his time, generic divisions do not matter. Scattered in the account of his readings we hear, “Huxley”, “Darwin”, “Ibsen”, “Maeterlinck”, “Mandel”, “Eugenics”, “Evolution” and many such other pointers which make up the figure of an upper class bibliophile who, as a voracious consumer of printed words, is placed in the twilight zone of those books which lay out the sometimes strong sometimes vague but always heterogeneous and multi-voiced discourse of ‘European modernity’. Being part of a colonized elite class with a lot of leisure (it is clearly stated that he does not have to ‘work’ in order to sustain himself), his is the class position assigned to the proverbial Bengali bābu who thinks he can weave a modern self only by accessing the printed words. These printed and therefore material signs present to him what Partha Chatterjee has called “foreign goods, displayed on the selves” (20), even if his own location writes him as part of a colonial modernity that violently inserts the ‘colony’ into the textuality of European capitalist circuit. This insertion produces the con-text of the bābu, his world as apparently discontinuous with the conditions of the production of European modernity. And yet, one can also not

41 It might be conjectured that the narrator is placed in that upper crust of Bengali bhadralok class which is comprised chiefly of absentee landowners (see Spivak 1999, 86-87).
42 Even the usual Marxian account inserts the “non-Europe […] into an Eurocentric normative narrative” (Spivak 1999, 72). For a critique of such an account and other ways of thinking capitalism and colonialism in tandem, see Spivak, 67-111. She chiefly bases her argument on three “secondary” sources: Guha 1963, Anderson 1979, and Amin 1979, and tells how at the inception of this insertion, the “protagonists” of imperial economy saw “the case of [the violent restructuring of land ownership and rental system in] Bengal as a laboratory experiment” (87).
43 Partha Chatterjee argues about a ‘different modernity’, production of a colonial history, which he terms “our modernity” in an article of the same title (Chatterjee 1997). It is a “modernity that is national” and therefore the “history of our modernity has been intertwined with the history of colonialism, we have never quite been able to believe that there exists a universal domain of free discourse, unfettered by differences of race or nationality” (Chatterjee, 14) promised by the programmatic text of European enlightenment, Kant’s “What is Enlightenment” (1784). Chatterjee thinks that the colonial subject is never fully deluded by the “chimera of universal modernity” (14) and is always aware of its limits.
ignore the ability of conceptual tropes to travel between worlds, their generalizing force in articulating other life-worlds, especially if one is attentive to the working of the colonial violence as a disruption that affects both the colonizer and the colonized (Spivak 2012, 4). Indeed in the story, when personal tragedy strikes the narrator, he regrets ignoring not the foreignness of the textual instances (that he encounters in the books written by European authors), but rather their familiarity.

The historical location of a fictional character in a literary text is only a ‘possibility’ and is not same as the representation of a specific individual or event in a narrative of ‘history’. The attributes of a fictional character (like the narrator of the story) can be fashioned as a typicality, and not as an average, as the ‘literary text’ cannot work with a broad ‘sample’ or cannot represent every subject-position separately. Therefore it might prove futile if one tries to exactly locate the character of the short-story, the male protagonist in our case, in terms of historical time and class or try to relate all his actions to a certain pattern, subject to his historico-social location. The literary text tests many different possibilities and experiences against a system that it creates as a closure. This is done, to put it simply, by first investing a character with an array of typical attributes and experiences, and then taking the character through a series of ethical instances, where the outcome of these encounters cannot always be calculated but is experienced in the text as an exercise in imagination. Formations of both the characters and the instances do indeed carry traces of historical time and are to an extent determined by it, but neither is reducible to the other, where this ‘surplus’ of the ‘literary’ (that puts irreducibility to work) is to be articulated by ‘imagination’44. The short story under consideration goes

44 I follow Das in conceptualizing ‘imagination’. Das writes, “Imagination is a metaphor for ‘figuring’; giving figure to the other who is radically different from the self. One has to
further, in testing not only the characters and events within its boundary but also the boundary itself in the text of the other, in effect questing its own limits. Does it also not question the name of the author, a male author, whose signature (‘Rabindranath Thakur’) remains structurally outside and yet tied to the circumference of the text? A slow reading of this text may point to an answer.

In the story by Thakur, the ‘narrator’ is more adept at ‘reading’, ‘talking’ (“bokuni”) and ‘discussing’ (“alochonā”) books and ideas, which he calls his “second addiction”, but not at, ‘writing’ (“even if writing makes me feel lazy”, Thakur 1991, 376). Can this inability to ‘write’, an incapability in producing markedly material inscriptions of his own be linked to the precarious positioning of that upper strata of the Bengali bhadralok class, who could only amass wealth chiefly from their landed property, but were violently cut out from the course of capitalist ‘production’ leaving them only a place at the site of ‘consumption’? Also

45 The ‘bhadralok’ is “almost entirely severed from the production-process” of the colonial capitalist circuit, leaving him little option for investing his wealth in becoming ‘capitalists’ re-generating money (See Bandyopadhyay 1991, 28). Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay famously opines as early as in 1875 (in “Bangadesher krishak”) that the ‘permanent settlement’ (cīrasthāyī bandobasta) has resulted in “a class of unproductive landlords” (Chatterjee 1993, 63). The Bengal land question which was set up by ‘The Permanent Settlement’ proclaimed in 22 March, 1793, had had a long lasting effect on the formation of this class, and class ideology, and is richly commented on (see for example, Guha 1963, Bandyopadhyay 1991, 18-34). Spivak’s account in Spivak 1999, to which I have already referred, is concise and critical and most relevant to our discussion (Spivak 67-111). For Sudipta Kaviraj, the “Sub-Brahmin groups seeking quick upward mobility through the pathways opened by colonial administration, newly-endowed landlords under the Permanent Settlement, and those armed with a university degree” could get a foothold in a new system of society and life largely conditioned by colonial policies which “did not allow to subject Indians any option in this matter” (Kaviraj 2010, 143-144). In delineating the production of a new upper class in Bengal, fed on landed property, who does not have any say in his ‘production’, Kaviraj however sounds a bit too deterministic.
note, the protagonist spends all his money in buying books. If we articulate such a bare-bone historico-social question, the literary text would not yield any definite answer (even if the possibility of asking such a question remains also in the literary text). We stay however within the logic of the literary and the textual. As I argue below, the inability to write finds a parallel in the inability of the man (typically exemplified in the narrator of the story) to communicate with the woman who is nevertheless slated in the place of the ‘wife’ and therefore has an assigned role of being re-productive (of the conditions of production of the man’s everyday), and to that extent being transparently accessible. Even if the couple is childless in the story, the wife Anilā is shown to be untiring in re-producing the conjugal everyday as her husband understands it. She also does take care of her younger brother, which marks another site where she obeys the dictate of the man, this time of her father. She then, as if echoes the ‘reproductive hetero-normativity’ into which she is assigned. Such a placing does not disturb the narrative which takes it for granted that the access of the man to a certain kind of knowledge and its manipulation places ‘him’ at a remove from the mundane.

At the end of the story however, it is the woman who wields ‘writing’ in such a way that even the act of ‘reading’ becomes, for the man, an impossible exercise. The voracious ‘reader’ fails to read (the writing of the woman) since his prior practice of reading (metaphorically) worked only within the assured limits of the given possibilities of meaning. It is here that reading in the narrow sense collapses into a broader and more textured sense of reading, or reading as writing. This writing which can stand for both reading and writing, sabotages and cuts short the desire of man bent on conceiving meaning as full presence. But let us not presuppose our argument. I first chart below my reasons for picking up on the metaphors of reading and writing and deconstructing the story using them as levers. As we shall see, such a deconstruction is also deeply ‘literary’ in its work.

46 Her upbringing of her brother, through the prevailing educational system (she refuses when her husband offers to ‘educate’ him in unconventional methods) with a disciplining severity shows her performing her womanly role, in the world of colonial modernity as well.
Detour: ‘Writing’ and Deconstruction

If one starts with a rule of thumb distinction between a ‘literary’ and a (decidedly lose construal of) a ‘non-literary’, then the former, it can be said, is a textuality where the author tries less to pull metaphors from their free slide to restricted meanings, allowing more free play. In the latter (non-literary), precisely these restricted assignments take place more rigidly and urgently. This distinction admittedly, is a static analytic one, but articulated in tandem with what I have called a ‘paradigm of work’ (which focuses in this case, on the text not as a finished product but on its ongoing production). This distinction might take a more fluid and critical shape, if the ‘making literary’ of a text is seen as a work re-organizing metaphors and meanings. Here again the question of the ‘who’ occurs: who makes the text literary, ‘authorial intention’ or the intention of the reader? Let me unpack more the scheme we are proposing.

One starts here with the basic assumption that any text is produced by an ‘intentional cut’ performed in a field of limitless dispersions. Once the cut has acted, the affect of this insertion cannot control the work of the ‘cut’ fully. But this cut is not only manifested through the authorial intention. ‘Reading’ is another intentional act which both unties some of the restrictions put by the authorial intention, and, tries at the same instant to put some new restrictions of its own into effect (in constructing an-other text through reading). That way, ‘reading’ also falls short of mastering its production (reading as a text) in its entirety, of producing exactly the text it intends (to read). Evidently then, neither the ‘authorial intention’ (writing in narrow sense) nor an ‘intentional reading’ can produce a text fully determined by intentionality. No intentional insertion is capable of wholly representing itself in and as a text. Where does this put the ‘author’ and the ‘reader’ in relation to each other?

Even if traditionally the ‘author’ and the ‘reader’ are at loggerheads with each other, both can be shown to work within the same desire of a production which can be fully controlled and prefigured by the subject’s intention, I contend. The author-reader binary then, seems to be a false one. Roland Barthes’s paradigmatic text “The Death of the Author” (1968, in Barthes 1977) which is celebrated in critical theory as ushering the death of the author argues that to ‘give a text an
Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing”. Barthes seems to talk of a ‘writing’ which promises “multiplicity” rather any “secret” or “ultimate meaning”, even if for him that ‘writing’ would eventually indicate the coming of another subject, “the birth of the reader” (see Barthes 1977, 147-148). We are not told by Barthes how the reader, who is conceived as merely another organizer of meaning, can actually authorize free play. Michel Foucault’s text “What Is an Author?” (1969, in Foucault 1994), written only an year after Barthes’s declaration of the death of the author, endeavors to study this figure of the author more carefully, and is more attentive not to the ‘name’, but to how the ‘name’ works. Foucault crucially asks, “If an individual were not an author, could we say that what he wrote, said, left behind in his papers, or what has been collected of his remarks, could be called a “work”?" (Foucault 1994, 207). For Foucault, ‘death’ cannot be the complete effacing of the “author function” which still works in organizing “subtly” a certain “notion of writing [écriture]” (208). This, Foucault seems to suggest, must propel one to a series of questions generalizable not to a ‘who’ but to a ‘what’, basically the question of production and circulation rather than intention of a subject. But it remains unclear as to who does Foucault refer to when he articulates a programmatic conclusion in the name of a certain “we” (“We would no longer hear the questions that have been rehashed for so long: who really spoke?”, 222). Foucault’s text is transparent about this “we” on behalf of whom, or to/addressing whom Foucault speaks. One can vaguely guess a community of likeminded scholars, or readers in arms. Therefore ultimately, the act of reading, or the following of the logic of production itself cannot get rid of the question ‘who works’. It seems here that Foucault answers his question quoted earlier, in the negative. He implies that no ‘work’ is possible without reverting back to an ‘author’, only that he replaces the ‘individual’ with a plural pronoun ‘we’. In our discussion, the effort is however not to answer the question (if a work can at all be conceived without a subject) either in the affirmative or in the other way. Instead the point is to stay with the ‘question’, trying to think the impossible limits of an affirmation, incalculable costs of a work which spills over the intentional matrix. It is a concept

47 For Foucault’s usage of the expression “author function” in this text see Foucault, 211-213.
of a work which takes part in the undoing of the intentionality that tries to regularize the slide of metaphors, deconstructing both ‘author’ and ‘reader’ as master of their texts. In that sense any intentional weave is a text that comes into being by cutting a piece out of endless dispersions, and therefore a text cannot house full free play as such. Two related movements can be proposed here.

Firstly, ‘intention’ cannot master the ‘cut’ which goes beyond it, and therefore the regularization always falls short of an excess metaphorical slide. And secondly, a point I have been trying to flesh out in the previous chapters, the ‘cut’ itself cannot fully shake off the traces of an intentionality, and in this sense remains material and ontologized, never quite becoming a pure cut of the ‘outside’. Thought from the paradigm of ‘work’, deconstruction tries to intervene at the material–nonmaterial margins where the intention vanishes into something like a mechanistic folding. I am trying to argue that such a work of deconstruction might stay with an undoing of intentionality without getting fixated itself by any subject-predication. The work of deconstruction consists in persistently affirming the ‘cut’ and at the same time following the sur-vival of the unshakable trace of intentionality. Deconstruction in this sense is neither ‘reading’ nor ‘writing’ (in the narrow sense). It cannot even be that ‘writing’ in the broader sense of being the ‘inscription’ or ‘trace’, which is the writing of the ‘cut’. It stays always a step behind such a pure writing, or full deconstruction. But, in being a ‘work’ it does not lose the ‘trace’, does not ever fully know, if it can ever touch the trace, it stays with the question ‘can it be touched?’, with an affirmation ‘yes, yes’.

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48 Following Foucault’s notion of ‘regularity’ (see Foucault 2005, 53).
49 As discussed in ‘Chapter One’ through a reading of Derrida’s “White Mythology”.
50 Sara Ahmed refers to Spivak to make the point that for “communicative language in general […] the centering of the subject is irreducible and inevitable” (Ahmed 1996, 73), even if Spivak’s exact stress was not on the inevitability of a ‘centering’ of the subject, but rather on the necessity of “subject predication” in any articulation (Spivak 1987, 154). Does Ahmed miss this nuance because she is not attentive to ‘Spivak’s prose’ as staying with the question (of the subject), instead of making a proposition about subjectivity and moving on?
51 For a detailed discussion of this affirming gesture, which affirms the ‘question’ without answering the question affirmatively, see Derrida 2007a, 442-444. I discuss it further below.
Therefore, to repeat, in thinking a deconstruction beyond mere reading, two questions are needed to be kept alive even if complete affirmations are impossible. One, if it is at all possible to think of a ‘work’ without a ‘subject’. And two, if a deconstruction can ever touch an outside devoid of intentionality. An impatient and quick negation would leave these questions behind. It should be noted that affirming is not same as answering. Affirmation affirms the gesture of questioning, not being simply passive (as discussed in the previous chapter) it can undo that which it affirms as well (as I will discuss with reference to Derrida’s reading of Nietzsche in the next chapter). It is chiefly in this sense that Derrida writes about a “certain “yes” at the heart of the question”, which comes “before the question” (Derrida 2007a, 443). Thinking from within the paradigm of ‘work’ therefore, aims at a very different critical production.

Admittedly, my broader argument about writing is built chiefly around Derrida’s concept of deconstructive ‘writing’, which I have referred to as the ‘writing in the broader sense’. ‘Writing’ in its broader sense is a metaphor for any trace of presence, and therefore can stand for both ‘speech’ and ‘writing in the narrow sense’. ‘Ordinary writing’ is a metaphor which is (inadequately) used to refer to the ontological writing and also one of its instances. This Derridian proposition makes the point that it is through a violence that such a ‘writing’ has come to be repressed (as writing in the narrow sense) as different from, and subordinate to ‘speech’. It has passed “from trace to the graphie”, and the “science” which studies this shift and retrieves it as a shift merely from “one graphic system to another” is called “grammatology” (Derrida 1997, 74). It is in this sense that deconstruction is “the graphematic structure” where the “adjective “graphematic” comes from Derrida’s analysis that writing is historically the structure which is supposed necessarily to operate in the presumed absence of its origin, the sender”

In a somewhat different context, Spivak reminds that “Affirmative deconstruction says ‘yes’ to a text twice, sees complicity when it could rather easily be oppositional” (Spivak 1993, 143).

52 See the discussion on ‘passive resistance’ of a text in ‘Chapter Four’.

53 This priority is however, “is neither logical not chronological” but instead “embedded in the question itself” (Derrida 2007a, 443).
(Spivak 1993, 130), or the voice/speech. Deconstruction can work only as a “positive science” in retrieving the generality of grapheme in any act of reading, writing, remembering. It does not end up proposing a mere obverse of the binary it undoes (speech-writing) but tries to show how the repressed term, once freed, can come to represent both sides of the binary and therefore remains attentive to the aporia between. Yet, it is a positive science in siding with the repressed materiality of the grapheme.

Can the metaphor of ‘writing’ in such a decidedly deconstructive sense be used to account for its occurrence in a text historically located in the early twentieth century Bengal? In approaching this question I start by proposing the following, that one encounters the very metaphor of ‘writing’ placed at crucial junctures in the short story by Thakur is more and less than a coincidence. ‘Less’, because only an intentional placing of that text in our argument produces it as such, organized around the metaphor of writing. It is also ‘more’ than a coincidence because the metaphor is already in the text, and our reading only follows its itinerary in thinking how one might reorganize or furrow the text along that trail. As I endeavour to show in my reading, the metaphor of writing or inscription does not depend on the use of the word ‘writing’ (lekhā, or likhan in the story under consideration), but can also be traced in following the labor of other metaphors (especially the ones signifying body/embodiment) within the knit of the textual. We can now trace the metaphor of ‘writing’ in the short story under consideration.

Continuing the Story: The Writing of the Woman

The story is interrupted by the news of a death. Anilā’s brother commits suicide which also marks her failure in inserting him into the prevailing system of education, a responsibility entrusted to her by her father. The boy kills himself following his sister’s severe scolding for failing in an examination. This incident is

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54 Grapheme is the smallest semantic unit of writing, even if for Derrida it also takes the added meaning of being the impossible unit or instant of writing as being in time, therefore a material nonmaterial trace.
not exceptional but exemplary of the fact that she stays put in her allocated womanly duties, no matter what. Neither in her management of the household nor in her handling of money matters, does Anilā show any sign of being anything other than a model housewife, perfect foil to the city-living educated gentleman. We are told that she even plays the role of the avid listener to her husband’s ideas when he is not surrounded by his flock of male intellectuals. One can say that in conforming to all her responsibilities with almost a religious rigor, Anilā plays the role into which she is slated within the structure of reproductive heteronormativity. The violence she performs to her brother is part of her conformity to the system, as she tries to (re)produce him through the grind of (colonial) ‘education’, playing the stern disciplining mother-figure, a figure to which she is assigned by her father. The reader is not given any access to her thoughts, and there is no way of knowing how the death of her brother might have played in her mind, but one can suggest that this death is caused by a violence she performs as much to herself as to her brother. She, in other words, takes part in the ‘writing’ of the ‘system’ which writes through her, using her as part of a mechanical work of reproducing the same. I am calling this phallogocentric writing, a writing structured like the desire of man, which tries to reproduce the same and re-appropriate meaning, acting like a ‘writing-machine’. This ‘writing-machine’, metaphorized in, and seen through the writing of the man in

55 Phallogocentrism is a term Derrida uses to indicate that the structure which represses writing with a preponderance given to speech or voice, is inextricably linked with the system which puts phallus as the master signifier short circuited with the male sex organ. There is a definite crossover with psychoanalysis here (see Derrida 1975, 94n33). Derrida would remind that, “Phallogocentrism is neither an accident nor a speculative mistake which may be imputed to this or that theoretician. It is an enormous and old root which must also be accounted for. It may then be described, as an object or a course are described, without this description taking part in what it operates the recognition of” (95-96n33). Therefore it becomes crucial that one tries to go beyond merely describing the working of phallogocentrism, even if that going beyond is an im-possible task. Freud also did “nothing else but describe”, Derrida contends (96n33). In a later interview Derrida would explain phallogocentrism as “the complicity of Western metaphysics with a notion of male firstness” (Derrida in Holland 1997, 29). Also see the note on phallogocentrism in ‘Chapter One’.
the story, is able only to access Anilā in so far as it writes itself through her. The writing-machine (structured like man’s desire) knows her only as she presents herself to it, and therefore is incapable of accounting for any ‘event’ she may produce on her own. The most extreme possibility this system can think of, is her deviation from the norm in running away from her conjugal life with another man. But if adultery is the limit of disruption that ‘reproductive heteronormativity’ (RHN) can deal with and secretly desire, then the other ‘writing’ that goes beyond such a limit, and disrupts the writing which tries only to re-produce the same, must be the undoing of the male writing-machine. This other ‘writing’ which exceeds the very binary of speech-writing, and in effect the “male firstness”56 is nevertheless signified by the concept-metaphor ‘writing’ since deconstruction tends to side with and keep the ‘name’ of the repressed term. This ‘other writing’ I contend, can be identified with the inaccessible ‘work’ that Anilā produces in the story. Even if, as I will try to explain, this inaccessibility is not pure incalculability, it is rather a materiality which is not totally free of calculation and yet not calculable. May be it is even necessary for it to remain within the logic of calculation and retain the trace of materiality in order to deconstruct the ‘desire of man’ (that tries to be fully present and proper to itself). Ironically, what places the writing of the woman beyond the writing of man, is the very materiality of the former. But what figure might such a sensuous non-sensuous materiality take? Can the work of such a writing at all be ‘placed’, a work which deconstructs the very properness of placement as such? We are now set to revisit and confront the final scene of the story.

Anilā reportedly tears up the first letter of the (man who tries to play her) ‘lover’, but then reassembles the torn pieces and reconstructs the letter physically. From there on, all subsequent letters are kept by her in one place, perched into a bunch tied with a red silk lace, with apparent care. This (chronological) account is however another reconstruction, by her husband who discovers this archive of letters after her departure. There is no way of knowing if Anilā really read any of the letters. What is however indicated in the story is that all those letters are accessible to her at least physically, materially. She could tear them up at will and still be able

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to re-construct, re-‘write’ (in the narrow sense, where writing refers merely to a materiality).

But when she makes her own ‘cut’, presents the two men each with a part of a letter torn in half, or two letters torn from a sheet that is one, letters which read the same, and therefore seem identical, both the husband and the lover prove incapable of reading, if reading means knowing the meaning of a text. The story does set up a moment of possible reading and ‘reconstruction’ when the two men meet (an apparent parallel to the successful reconstruction of the lover’s letter by the woman), and find out that the two letters are actually part of the same page cut in half. But at that point, with that revelation, the story ends, and does not go further to conjecture on a possible dialogue between the two men. As if the narrative stuns itself by going out of its margins by a sudden jerk, and can continue no further. It cannot go on, also because it is dependent on the account of the man (the husband) for its being and body. But can one read into this abrupt end something more than the generic convention of the short-story form?

It is commonplace that the ‘short story’-form ends with a ‘moment of truth’ or what James Joyce has called the ‘epiphany’, and that this is almost a generic rule. Mary Louise Pratt claims that “One of the most consistently found narrative structures in the short story is the one called the “moment-of-truth”’, which “focuses on a single point of crisis in the life of central character” (Pratt 1981, 182). What I am proposing here is nevertheless different. Pratt’s proposition does not exhaust the particular ways in which the ‘moment’ is brought about in each story. Thakur’s short story does not merely end with a crisis in the life of its narrator, but instead the crisis is revealed to be more pervasive, not only of the man who weaves the story, but a crisis which questions the very limit of a narrative which tries to both forget and desire full knowledge of the woman, and yet is limited to the desire/writing of man. Therefore the story in fact faces a moment of its own inauthenticity and annulment, I argue. It is as if the ‘truth’ which sustains the story in the form of a narrative conceived by a man encounters a void at the end which it cannot either ignore as

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57 Pratt locates the cause of this pattern in the form and brevity of a short story which, unlike a novel, tells not a “life” but a “fragment” of one (Pratt 1981, 182).
completely foreign, or confront as completely unknowable. It also cannot be ‘used’ like a ‘sublime’ which would perform a short-circuit and send the man back to a respect for the authority of a reason which is internal to him.\(^\text{58}\)

It is here, that the inability to write takes up a more generalized form and becomes more than the ineptness of a particular individual, or of a class. Instead it becomes a metaphor for the limits of that desire, structurally and historically male, which is inept at mastering the writing of the ‘other’ and therefore is always already interrupted by ‘writing as such’. Such is the force of abstraction of this last staging which arranges the husband and the lover to meet, equally speechless before the onslaught of the ‘sensuous-nonsensuous cut’. The woman is staged as both writing and becoming writing, or, in other words, the writing-work becomes the woman or the systematic undoing of the instrumental name: man. Consequently, a general comment is made about ‘writing’ (in the broader sense) here which works like and for the ‘other’.

The figure of the ‘third’ comes to haunt the account of the narrator (and therefore the body of the story) at many levels. The ‘cut’ along which the paper is torn, to produce identical letters addressed to two men, works as the ‘third’. The ‘cut’ is not really another letter, and yet, determines and disrupts both in a crucial way. The woman, as if talks from a non-place, which is also indicative of the fact that the houses number ‘one’ and ‘two’ can only be ‘owned’ by two men. Therefore the staging of this non-place is (abstract-conceptual) indicative of the pattern of distribution of private property in the real world. What overarches all these stagings, is the mark of the ‘third’, which is not really a figure but the very condition of the ‘two’. This third makes full re-presentation between self and its self-same other impossible. This incompleteness comes out most palpably in the last scene, when the husband and the lover confronts the ‘third’. The story ends with the revelation of the doubling of the letters, and therefore it cannot merely be an end, but an end that lingers. Can we not propose that this scene then, as if, stretches an instant to an

\(^{58}\) Like the Kantian notion of the sublime does. Even if the sublime is encountered in the nature, man actually is reverted back to a reverence for reason inherent to him (see next chapter, for this Spivakian reading of Kant).
infinite ‘freeze’\textsuperscript{59} (if we propose that the ‘freeze’ is not without time, it is a stretch that makes the instant linger). Therefore, what the ‘two’ also confront here, is the very persistence of the work, as they are suddenly transferred to the paradigm of decision.

Now the two, someone (the man) and (his selfsame) other, husband and lover must sit facing each other. They might remain silent or start a dialogue. But structurally their discourse cannot affirm each other by turning on the hinge that is the metaphor of the woman. A sublation would be denied to the man, he would not be able to sublate the sign of the woman anymore, even as indeterminate. Not because the lady vanishes, but because she affirms herself by working on the limit itself, which is neither full absence nor full presence. She is not silent, she has left written words which do not only double themselves, but also as if are persistent in interrupting the speculations of the man. The words left by the woman, which end the story, and at the same time do not let it end by claiming its limit, may remind us of the phrase ‘persistent female’ that we have encountered in relation to the ‘work of the ‘echo’’. Interestingly, Anilā does echo herself in writing (same letter written twice), in effect becoming other of the other, producing a materiality that is shot with absence, just like the mark of the cut which is not existent in any of the letters, and yet, which determines them both, constitutes and breaks them at the same time. There are three letters, or, the third is the ‘cut’ which is not really a letter but constitutes the other two, in effect constituting materiality and writing. What is stressed here is not pure indecipherability but a materiality which cannot be grasped fully, and an absence which cannot be relegated to pure nothingness, and therefore even more telling.

The materiality of the cut is persistent, since the woman articulates from the line of the cut, that mark of violence along which the blue paper is torn. She speaks, and she mimics the man’s desire in being ‘invisible’, without an address. But

\textsuperscript{59} I am referring to the cinematic tool ‘freeze’ which introduces not still-ness but rather ‘time’ in stuttering the flow of frames. I specially refer to the freeze with which Satyajit Ray’s film \textit{Charulata (The Lonely Wife, 1964)} ends. That film, incidentally is based on another story by Thakur: \textit{Nastanīr}, 1901.
crucially she also doubles it, fakes it, fakes the fake, they cannot figure which of the two notes speaks the truth, they read the same. She whispers along the line of the cut but that limit cannot be sublated by the two men, self and other, to gain knowledge, that complicity is denied to the man. The limit now takes over, one that resists sublation, does not give into either side of it, but plays with them and itself. ‘She’ “is not affirmed by man, but affirms herself [...she is] recognized beyond that double negation” of the dialectic of man (Derrida, quoted in Spivak, 58). The key theoretical implication of this reading is a possible complicity between deconstruction and feminism, or, to be more exact, a setting to work of deconstruction as a feminism understood from (what I have called) the paradigm of ‘work’.

Conclusion: Feminist Ethics that Persists

The figure of the ‘echo’ (exemplarily represented by the mythical figure ‘Echo’) in Spivak’s account, articulates a work of deconstruction without any position or proper placement. Yet, she cannot be totally indeterminate either, that would merely be the inverse of the ‘full presence’ that the (male) voice desires. The “deconstructive [feminist] philosopher” wants to usurp “the place of displacement” (Spivak in Holland, 46), the scene of the trace, but she does not just wish away this gap by giving it a certain presence, not even through representing it as ‘indeterminate’ which would be another way of ontologizing the name of the ‘woman’. Instead, making the voice both sur-vive and cutting it off from its origin, the différance of ‘echo’ wields that surplus metaphor at the margins which the (male) intention cannot master. Within this scheme, as long as the authorizing voice desiring self-preservation and a ‘mastership of truth’ can be identified as that of the ‘man’, its persistent deconstruction can be organized around the name ‘woman’. One might object here that this act of naming reduces the ‘work’ of the ‘cut’ to a location, to a name, and therefore subjects the ‘work’ to a moment of (political) decision-making. We, however, cannot agree with this position. Imagined within the ‘paradigm of work’, as I have tried to argue, the point would be to stay with the
If the work of ‘echo’ cannot be claimed for a feminism without at least partially ontologizing it, then it can also not be thought as fully de-ontologized. But then, what is that materiality, that ontology that remains, lingers, instead of intention, at the cost of intention? It is from this other extreme, not merely from a notion of the non-material, or absence, but from the thought of an irresistible materiality that one starts to plot a feminist ethics, I argue. Intention needs this ‘cut’ to survive, to start the circuit of representation. Representation cannot only be a way of self-propriation. It also does deny origin by the cut of re-presentation, and therefore makes a return to the origin impossible by that very ‘cut’. The ‘cut’ works very much like the logic of the deconstructive ‘gift’, which both gives life and kills, ceaselessly.

If intentionality desiring mastery over its production is inherently male, then what is that ‘materiality’ which resists such a desire from fully vanishing into itself (realising self as its own production)? Two possibilities may arise.

I. The ‘cut’ is unwittingly produced by intention (/desire for self-presence) itself. In which case the objection arises: how can intentionality still always fall short of fully mastering the ‘cut’?

II. The ‘cut’ is of the ‘other’, where this other cannot be thought as an intentionality. This ‘cut’ is an excess of any intention understood as male. The cut is however also a material cut, in so far as it cannot fully elude ontology and intentionality. Even the very effort of ‘understanding’ locates it and gives it an intention, and therefore it remains a ‘possible impossibility’.

From the propositions above, the following inference can be drawn. The second proposition can be rephrased as a question, ‘can this cut be claimed for a name (Echo/woman)?’ Plotted from within the ‘paradigm of work’, this question is not simply to be negated and left behind as a previous moment, but instead, to be repeated even at the risk of repeated failures. The production of this question can be the persistent task of an im-possible feminist ethics, as persistent as the ‘cut’ itself.

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60 I articulate one such question below.
This is an affirmation, which affirms the gesture of questioning, which is different from answering the question in the affirmative (the question, the way it is set up, cannot be answered in the affirmative). Spivak aims at this, when she stages Echo “as the instrument of the possibility of a truth not dependent upon intention”, to claim a “foothold outside of the subject-position” (Spivak, 1993a, 24). This foothold is necessarily impossible and yet that proposition cannot be the end, but instead is the beginning of a ‘work’ or ‘calculation’ of feminist ethics. If one stalls calculation and intends to plot a politics, then the best one can hope for or is left with, is a quasi-cut, or the Spivakian figure of the quasi-analyst. These are the limits of a feminist ethical in thought.

I want to end with an example which might (admittedly, in a lose way) explain the distinction I have made between ‘answering a question affirmatively’ and ‘affirming the question as persistent work’\(^{61}\), with which I identify the labour that a feminist representation must go through, if it wishes to stay with the impossible ethical. The example is of ‘life’ as a persevering production against the abyss of ‘death’ which is not only meaningless but also not totally derivable from a notion of ‘living’. If one thinks of ‘life’, constituted by the question, ‘is there a meaning to life’, then surely, this question can only be answered in the negative. But does that make life void? And then, how does one explain the act of ‘living’ as such, which seems to be a general ‘choice’? Or, to be more specific, what kind of choice is the ‘choice to live’? A way out of this quandary can be glimpsed, if one proposes instead that when one lives, one does not answer the question (of the meaning of life) affirmatively (or in the negative). In other words, one does not have to endow

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\(^{61}\) When Tina Chanter talks about the “distinction between the said and the saying” in “Levinas’s later philosophy” (Chanter 2001, 145) and the impossibilities of articulating such a bind through the tool of analytic distinction, her logic is somewhat similar to ours. She writes, “merely to assert that there is a distinction between the saying and said, and to assume that this distinction can be grasped conceptually as the difference between a verb and a noun [...] is to misunderstand both the significance and the difficulty of the movement and functioning of language – and ultimately of philosophy itself” (Chanter, 145-146). She stresses that this distinction defies “thematization” and that it is a “difference that can be stated only at the expense of misinterpreting it” (146).
life with any positive content to produce a living, instead, one lives by **affirming the question itself**, by staying with the question ‘is there a meaning?’ The answer cannot be ‘yes’ (or a certain content ‘x’), for only an affirmation that affirms the question (‘yes’, to the questioning gesture) can think life as always already a work which negotiates with its other (death as absolute meaninglessness) persistently. Only an affirmation that stays with the question (yes, yes..), can think life as a work that confronts the double bind of ‘singular instants’ and ‘repeating sur-vivals’ continuously. The materiality of lived experience, in this sense, is produced by stalling the answer, and guarding the question from the absolute void of death. And it can be argued that this is all the materiality one can think of from within present calculations, which is always calculations from the paradigm of life understood as sur-vival. Next chapter discusses a more nuanced way of thinking the metaphor of ‘life’, in the context of feminist ethics.