CHAPTER IV

FURTHER ASSAULTS ON AUTONOMY

In this Chapter, I have taken up thinkers whose work in literary criticism largely contributed to the break-up of the autonomy of art, in one way or another. Each thinker's work, except Riffaterre's, constitutes an assault on the autonomy of art from a peculiar angle of its own. These thinkers are Michael Riffaterre, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Fredric Jameson. Of these, Michael Riffaterre's work is least provocative and still formalistic and so I have considered it first, and then gone on to the others.

Thinkers of the formalist tradition such as Suzanne Langer and Riffaterre address themselves purely to the problem of art, while each of the other thinkers whom we consider in this chapter reveal its ramifications in different directions.

A) Michael Riffaterre

Though Riffaterre drew on structuralist thought, he took a formalist position. This theory is rather closely related to that of Langer's. To begin a study of Riffaterre's thought, I refer to an explanatory note by Raman Seldon. He writes:

"Michael Riffaterre agrees with the Russian formalists in regarding poetry as a special use of language. Ordinary language is practical and is used to refer to some sort of 'reality', while poetic language focuses
on the message as an end in itself". (Seldon, 1989, p.126).

Riffaterre took much of this formalist view from Roman Jakobson, but he also criticized Jakobson and Levi-Strauss in a famous essay. Riffaterre was of the view that the structural elements they discover in Baudelaire's poem, "Les Chats" cannot be seen by most readers, however well-informed (Seldon, 1989, p.126).

In his "Semiotics of Poetry" (1978), Riffaterre shows how competent readers do go beyond surface meaning. The reader uses only his ordinary linguistic competence in a first reading, during which he grasps the poem's or text's (literal) meaning. But here he encounters difficulties, in the form of unusual, or ungrammatical uses of language. As he grapples with these, usually through a second reading, he grasps the real message, the poetic meaning or significance of the poem.

The Matrix and its Versions

Ultimately a structural "matrix" is uncovered, which can be expressed in a single sentence, or even a word. The matrix must be deduced indirectly and is not clearly stated in the work. In the poem what one does find, which points to the matrix, or relates the poem to its matrix, is versions of the matrix, in the form of familiar statements, clichés, conventional associations. Selden explains that Riffaterre calls these versions of the matrix 'hypograms'. (Selden, 1989, p.127). To my understanding, the hypograms mediate between ordinary language and the poem's significance.
Unlike Barthes and other post-structuralist thinkers, who are not concerned with the unity of a text, Riffaterre holds that a work of art has unity and that it "achieves unity", as Selden explains, "by reworking (these) commonplaces in an unexpected way from a basic matrix". Seldon writes, and I am inclined to agree, that Riffaterre's theory seems appropriate for reading difficult poetry which goes against normal grammar and conventional use of language. But not all poetry answers to his conception of poetry. For instance, we can have straight-forward poetry, with a socio-political message.

One can see, on reading Riffaterre's "Semiotics of Poetry" (1978) that this thinker does not subscribe to the post-structuralist theories which deny the unity of the work of art, as well as denying that definite significance is enunciated by them.

Riffaterre shows how significance is created in a poem, how its structure is a closed circuit, limiting rather than opening up the imagination of the reader. Perhaps he is able to do this because of the kind of texts he chooses as examples to illustrate his theory. Barthes would call these texts "lisible" rather than "scriptible".

One might say with Barthes that "scriptible" works, rather than 'lisible" ones are truly beautiful. But one finds Riffaterre's argument rather convincing too.

In the preface of "Semiotics of Poetry", Riffaterre says that till the year 1971 his work had been concerned with the
surface structures of poetry, which the reader may recognize and identify as style. But in a paper of that year and since, his focus has been on the poem as a finite, closed entity and as a unit of meaning. The former approach was linguistic, the latter semiotic, he explains.

In his endeavour to understand poetic discourse, Riffaterre consciously allows universals about literary language to emerge. He is convinced, moreover, that all theory worth the study should be based solidly on the phenomena it seeks to elucidate.

One question, however, that engaged Riffaterre both before and after 1971, is how the language of poetry differs from ordinary language, and he is convinced that even the most unsophisticated reader senses instinctively that poetic language does in fact have some special characteristics.

**Indirect Use of Language**

Poetry has swung between having its own grammar and special usages of words, and using the same grammar and words as do everyday languages, in various periods of history, according to changing tastes, and yet has retained poetic quality.

"......whichever of the two trends prevails, one factor remains constant : poetry expresses concepts and things by indirection. To put it simply, a poem says one thing and means another". (Riffaterre, 1978, p.1.)

We must, therefore, try to understand how a poetic text carries meaning. This is its distinguishing characteristic. And from the point of view of this thesis, anything that distinguishes a work of art, helps to make it stand apart – lends
it a degree of autonomy. In Wordsworth's famous "Daffodils":

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er hill and dale
When all at once I came upon
A crowd, a host of golden daffodils,
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

the focal point, from which beauty emanates and fills the whole text, is the sudden vision of a great number of yellow daffodils. There is no shift here from mimesis to semantics. But nor is this pure mimesis. It is utterance. This example serves to show that Riffaterre's theory is not always applicable.

The Basic Characteristics of the Autonomous Text

When Riffaterre speaks about the poem, he takes it as synonymous with 'text', and he takes 'text' as a concept to mean a closed entity. He argues that no discussion is possible unless the reader perceives some meaning definitely in the poem, and this meaning is accessible to discourse and unless the poem is perceived (by scholars who wish to discuss it) as a special, finite context. These, then, are the basic presuppositions with which Riffaterre begins to build his semiotic theory of poetry. And all these basic concepts work towards the view that a work of art is autonomous.

Indirection, which is the genesis of poetry, Riffaterre explains, can take one of three forms - displacement, distortion and creation of meaning, (Riffaterre, 1978, p.2). In
displacement, a sign shifts from one meaning to another, as in metaphor and metonymy. In distortion, there is ambiguity, contradiction or nonsense. And in creation, a new kind of signification comes into being which makes sense only in the context of the poem.

All kinds of indirection have this in common, that they threaten the literary representation of reality, or mimesis. The poem may simply lead the reader to the unexpected or it may persistently alter representation. Or it may engage with a deviant grammar or lexicon which Riffaterre calls ungrammaticality.

Mimesis, Riffaterre holds, is a representation of reality which is full of variation and multiplicity, because reality is itself so. Mimesis produces "a continually changing semantic sequence", and a poem differs from mimesis by producing a unity of its own, both formal and semantic.

The poem's unity is intimately tied up with its significance. Here Riffaterre's theory is in agreement with Langer's, who also links the significance of a work of art with its unity. Meaning in a poem, on the other hand, Riffaterre holds, remains a plurality and occurs on the mimetic level within a poem. A poem thus exhibits a string of meanings, or information units. All the signs in a poem function in two ways, on the level of mimesis as well as significance.

From Mimesis to Significance

As I understand Riffaterre's theory, mimesis represents variation in nature, and poesis is a variation of mimesis. For
the purpose of this thesis, it may be said that a work of art gains autonomy as it creates its own difference from mimesis.

In Riffaterre's example of two lines from a poem by Paul Eluard,

"of all I have said of myself, what is left ? I have been keeping false treasures in empty wardrobes."

(Riffaterre, 1978, p.3).

the unity, or significance inhere in the unspoken word, "nothing", and the text is an expansion of this word, through repetition, through varying images of this word. "What is left ?" induces the answer "nothing"; "false treasures" and "empty wardrobes" are images of "nothing".

There is an ungrammaticality here : if one keeps even false treasures in wardrobes, the latter are no longer empty. The contradiction, however, exists only in the mimesis. There is a periphrastic statement of nothingness, the phrases each being a variant of this constant.

The ungrammatical signs at the mimetic level are eventually integrated into another system. The reader gradually becomes aware of their common trait, or common significance, and then, these signs signify as components of a different network of relationships. This level of signification or semiosis is, according to Riffaterre, a higher, more developed level. Signs in the signifying unit - the poem - are integrated from the mimesis level into a higher level of significance.
This shift in the semiotic process really takes place in the reader's mind, and results from a second reading. Thus, we must distinguish carefully two levels or stages of reading. "......before reaching the significance", Riffaterre writes, "the reader has to hurdle the mimesis" (Riffaterre, 1978, p.5).

In the first reading, the reader apprehends meanings. This reading depends on the reader's linguistic competence, which includes the knowledge of language as referential. It includes the reader's ability to perceive incompatibilities between words and to recognize that a word or phrase does not make literal sense, but makes sense on another level.

Again, the reader's perception, or production, of irony or humour consists in his bilinear deciphering of the text. The text makes this double decoding possible because of its ungrammaticalities. The reader must perceive the linguistic irregularities in the work of art, but Riffaterre points out, he is not free to by-pass them. It is precisely at this point that the text exercises control, or, in the terminology of this thesis, autonomy.

Riffaterre goes to the extent of saying that here the control exercised by the text is absolute.

I beg to differ with Riffaterre, for, at the site of the shift of meaning, a play of imagination becomes possible. There is an open space here, even though the play is not unlimited and arbitrary. By open space in a text, I mean the site where there is some obscurity, making multiple significances possible. For instance, in the line, "I have been keeping false treasures in

199
empty wardrobes", the words "false treasures" mean, not physical objects but treasures of the being, or mind. There is an obscurity here. One can imagine memories, mental constructs, or qualities of the being, and all these somehow false. Each reader imagines differently.

The second reading, Riffaterre explains, is retroactive, and truly hermeneutic. As the reader progresses through the text, she recapitulates what she has already read and decodes what she is reading further in the light of the earlier parts of the text. She makes comparisons and integrations. She first notices and then assimilates ungrammaticalities, seeing them as variations of a hypogram, which is the significance of the text.

The hypogram is the basic structure of the poem, and this together with its variations, which are equivalences, form the total structure and significance of the text.

According to Riffaterre, there are several units of meaning in a text which consist of words and phrases, but only one unit of poetical significance. The climax of the poem comes at the end. Most often the end or "clausula" is paradoxical.

Often, it is the clausula which suddenly induces the reader to see the text in a new and different light, changing the meanings of mimetic details, leading the reader from mimesis to semiosis.

While Riffaterre does not enunciate a theory of free interpretation of texts by readers, he does acknowledge that the
reader is the one who makes the connections in a text, and she is the one in whose mind the semiotic transfer takes place.

A text is produced when a word or sentence, the hypogram, is expanded and transformed or converted into a larger whole, Riffaterre explains, (Riffaterre, 1978, p. 19). This expansion is a form which is created, and which is felt to be a detour or a circuitous path around the significance. The form is felt to be an artefact, and may look like a ritual or game, even while it can be seen as a means to convey sense.

The significance of the poem is understood by the reader as an equivalent form of the mimetic structures. She also tries to appropriate this significance or context as a colloquial or ordinary language version of what he or she is reading.

There is a paradox in the development or unfolding of the poetic form, Riffaterre explains, it is felt to be a detour or a departure from a norm, but what it departs from is known only at the end. The norm is deduced only later. Now, this 'norm' that underlies the poem is an "imaginary, non-literary" construct. It is not to be found in the grammar of the language.

The poem consists of texts or fragments of texts integrated into a new system. This "raw material", consisting of texts, of the poem is not the raw material of ordinary language. It is already stylistic, already cultural entities and fragments, an overloaded discourse. Thus, words in a poem have resonances in cultural texts, and these may be meliorative or pejorative.

Riffeterre says further that a work of art, far from freeing the imagination of the reader, invites him or her to participate
in its own texture, (Riffaterre, 1978, p.165). One is once again reminded here, of Langer's theory. Langer also holds that the work of art draws the viewer into its own world. Riffaterre says further that the equivalences set up in the poem are resisted instinctively by the reader. The reader naturally resists ungrammaticalities. But their strangeness ensures that he cannot ignore or by-pass them.

The Question of Control

Even the dual signs, Riffaterre elaborates, do not refer to an unlimited number of texts, but to two specific ones. And the textual borrowings embedded in a work belong to a cultural discourse. In this way, "the reader is under strict guidance and control as he fills the gaps and solves the puzzle" (Riffaterre, 1978, p.165). Though a scrambled transmission comes across through the poem, the reader recognizes the forms and hallowed symbols of a culture. Her interpretation constitutes the practice of a lore, of a culture.

But, according to Riffaterre's theory, the reading of a poem is unstable, even though controlled. Interpretation is never final. The durations and detours of a text cannot be corrected to conform to a norm. The ungrammaticalities are always present as obstacles or hurdles. They may block understanding, or just look like abnormalities, an error, a violation of a code. They remain present as threats to language as representation. The reader seeks relief from these abnormalities, the dubious words, by trying to return to conventions, to safe reality. This is
possible only if the retroactive, the proper reading process is ignored. The latter, however, continues to engage the unwilling reader until suddenly a revelation of significance occurs. This difficult process is repeated with each reading, because every time the reader is tempted to stay with the easy mimesis and resist the difficult semiosis.

A "see-saw scanning of the text" occurs (Riffaterre, 1978, p.166), and is induced by the dual nature of the signs themselves that are embedded in a text. Significance is continually revealed and lost, and relived, which is what makes the poem, Riffaterre says, endlessly fascinating.

To my understanding, beauty is itself a plurality. There are, at least, two kinds of structures that inform works of art. There is one kind of structure which is closed, and circuitous, in which the significance is rather definite, but not entirely so. Riffaterre's theory is pertinent to this kind of structure. Even in such a structure there is a play of meaning, which consists in a shifting from the mimetic to the semantic, which becomes a source of delight and fascination forever.

There is another kind of beauty, in which the signifying structure is open and multiple meanings are possible.

In both cases a work of art both exercises and relinquishes autonomy. In the first case, it exercises greater autonomy and in the second, it relinquishes autonomy to a greater extent.

Autonomy is never complete, meaning is never entirely fixed, because there is always some open space in the structure of the work of art, as well as in the signification of language itself.
Riffaterre points to the site of the shift of meaning in a poem, as the site of openness where signs or words refer not to one, but at least two texts or two significances.

But autonomy is never completely relinquished by the work of art, because the work is always an existential entity, and its material or physical sign-system is always a definite, a concrete basis upon which interpretations, however varied and numerous, are created. This concrete basis of interpretation is a limiting factor. Semantically, some meaning is communicated through language and commonly understood.

It is not definiteness or ambiguity in a work of art, but the presence of both in interplay, which make it beautiful.

Language signifies reality to begin with and as it grows in complexity, signifies itself, that is, concepts within its own structure. To take a very simple example, the word "stone" at first points to an actual stone, but later there is the idea of a stone to which the word "stone" refers. But now, ambiguity enters the referential process, for, there can be many concepts which the word "stone" calls to mind. People can imagine stones of varying sizes, colours, shapes and texture. There is now also the possibility of metaphorical use. One can say, "The man has a stone in his chest", using the word "stone" to refer to the heart, where even the heart stands for feelings. Here "stone" means 'hard heart'.

Reality is vast and the signifying process, to my understanding, is always inadequate to it. It is, therefore,
always metonymic, saying part of reality, and leaving much unsaid. Reality can never be fully articulated.

A parallel inadequacy exists on the conceptual level. The signifying system is inadequate to the conceptualization, to the world beyond the empirical, to human thought, experiences and feelings. It, therefore, suggests only a part of this world.

There is a two-way process here: when the conceptual has to be articulated, the material signification is always less than the signified, always inadequate to it. On the other hand, when the material sign-system has to be understood, the conceptualization that is built on it, is always more than the meaning the original user of the sign-system was able to convey. Thus, there is an excess of meaning or significance on both sides of the signifying system. The excess on both sides never coincides completely, but does have an area of overlapping, which is vital to communication. Discourse goes on with a degree of success because of this area of overlapping.

Because the world of significance, which term is perhaps better than "conceptualization", is always in excess of the sign-system, and forever beyond its full grasp, a free-play of significance is always going on.

Thus, the relinquishing of the possibility of complete autonomy, or complete control, both of the empirical reality and of the world of significance, is inherent in the very nature of language or any signifying system. Failure is built into language.
Yet, this does not lead to the conclusion that communication of meaning is impossible. Meaning travels along signifying systems always in part, and the partial communication that does take place, where meaning worlds overlap, is enough for human purposes, and keeps discourse flowing.

The physical being of sign-systems limits the arbitrariness of interpretation, of the construction of meaning, and retains a minimum level of autonomy of the work of art, as in the semantic dimension, overlapping of semantic worlds makes a minimum definiteness of significance possible. This definiteness of significance, made possible by the meeting of subjective worlds, and the physical existence of the work of art, goes to constitute a degree of autonomy of the work of art. It enables the work to stand by itself and say something definite, something that resists arbitrary interpretation.

But the above is only one way of speaking about autonomy of the work of art. Where the work of art escapes, slips away, from definite significance, where it tantalizes the reader with obscurity, there it may be said to exercise a kind of freedom or autonomy. It resists being caught in a definite meaning. One thinks of innumerable abstract paintings here. It becomes opaque, it refuses to yield its secrets, it refuses to supply the pleasure - "jouissance" - of reading. Some texts do not even lend themselves to free and varied interpretations. They simply block all possibility of unified significance. They leave the reader with questions and do not offer the slightest hint of
answers. They do not attempt to tie up loose ends within their texture. They, thus, go against the very ideas of unity and significance in art. But some readers may enjoy the obscurity in such works of art, the sense of mystery, and may find a kind of "jouissance" in these texts.

B) Jacques Lacan

Lacanian theory draws connections between certain concepts, which concepts as well as their interactions are both interesting and pertinent to this research. Jacques Lacan rewords Freudian psychoanalytic theory and takes up certain strains of thought where Freud left off. Language, literary forms, the unconscious, the self, the other, these are the main concepts that concern Lacan, and are interlinked in his theoretical writings.


The Unconscious: Structured like Language

Bowie writes that while Freud said dreams arising from the unconscious were like a language, Lacan also drew a similar analogy. The latter said the workings of the unconscious were like the rhetorical forms of language. The discourse the analysand speaks during psychoanalysis has rhetorical forms of language as its main motifs. Through this observation, Lacan showed that the unconscious, far from being "primitive", "brutish" and "anarchic", as it is usually thought of, is highly civilized and sophisticated.
This quality of the unconscious, Bowie writes (Sturrock [Ed.], 1979, p.138) was noted by both Freud and Lacan. Both thinkers were fascinated by the sophisticated nature of the unconscious as it revealed itself in their studies.

What I note then is that there is a blurring of margins here. There is no rigid boundary between the unconscious and the conscious, highly developed psyche, which is capable of creating complex structures. Literary and other artistic creativity also cannot be attributed solely to the conscious mind. The unconscious is refined, complex and creative enough to be, equally, the source of aesthetic creation. Lacan went further to state that the unconscious underlies all discourse.

Both Freud and Lacan, therefore, held that the analysts must have a good knowledge of the literary heritage of mankind when they try to understand the individual psyche of an analysand.

The psychoanalytic theories of both thinkers reveal basic, universal principles which are useful in understanding individual cases. The most important generalisation is that the unconscious is structured like a language, or is, simply, structure, as Lacan put it.

Lacan, Bowie reports, is highly skilfull and original in his interpretation of Freud. His work abounds with new senses for Freud's texts, as well as serious reservations at some points about his ideas. Lacan's work is, writes Bowie, (Sturrock [Ed.], 1979, p.139) full of a "turmoil of parantheses, asides, or qualifying phrases".
Lacan puts forward the view that the unconscious and the subject designated by the sign 'I', are to be understood as not in conflict, but as related beneficially. The ego, 'I' has the power of organization, control and coercion. But, rather than exercising such a power, it should allow the unconscious to enrich it through its plenitude of structuration. The unconscious is, thus, a source of enrichment for the subject, through language, and therefore, for literary and other art forms.

Freud had hesitated about the nature of the ego. He had seen it as having a tendency, an urge to repression. The ego desired mastery over the Id. But he had also been dismayed by this vision of the nature of the ego. Lacan clarified the ambiguity in psychoanalytic theory, inspite of his abstruse style of writing, by definitely advocating a non-coersive, beneficial relation between these two agencies of the psyche.

The Empty Signifier

Lacan referred to Edgar Allan Poe's story, "The Purloined Letter" as providing an analogy of the role of the signifier. Nobody knows the contents, but as the letter in the story, and the signifier in its migrations through discourse, move from subject to subject, they have serious implications for all.

I have my own comments to offer at this point. The fact that the envelope in Poe's story is never opened, and its contents are never known, does not mean that it was empty. So, also, the signifier in discourse is not empty.

An envelope is, in fact, most often opened, its contents become known : communication takes place. Signifiers do reveal
meanings though perhaps never completely. Poe's story, and Lacan's pointing to the analogy, do serve to show the disturbing possibility that signifiers travel between subjects and are not wholly understood, that they refer to inner worlds, which are inexhaustible mysteries, which may never be wholly resolved. The signifier 'I', as it travels, though not wholly understood, has deep implications and differing ones, for each subject.

Bowie points out another aspect of Lacan's argument. In explaining the dynamics of the letter and the signifier, he has engaged in meta-language about language, and said something meaningful: a strange consequence of an argument, which says that the signifier is empty of content. This, I would point out, has often been the outcome of sceptical arguments, as the history of ideas or thought reveals.

Bowie continues by pointing to the writerly quality of Lacan's work: it abounds in word-play, paradox and counter-logical thinking. I would like to clarify here that art simply has a way of its own, of saying things, which is a way of play and detour, of indirection, which is itself the joy of the engagement.

Ambiguity in Art and Life

There is, however, an important difference between the two modes of thinking and discourse. A wholly logical discourse works upon a basic presupposition that all truth can be expressed through a systematically arranged word-construction. Literary discourse, however, tends to allow for spaces, ambiguities and
gaps and this is more in keeping, paradoxically, with the facts of life. There is here a serious philosophical position: all realities cannot be expressed in fullness through logical language. Therefore, art does not aim at clear and well-argued truth, and delights in detouring around realities. It is the way of art which is more in keeping with reality than logical languages.

Not only is reality ultimately ineffable, it is also polysemic—yielding several meanings, multifaceted and multidimensional. A work of art, therefore, is polyphonous.

There is a question of resonances here and the possibility of several voices speaking. The resonances are likely to relate the work of art to several aspects of human life, the social, the psychological, the political and so on. In each sphere, the same signifying structure, which is the work of art, suddenly organizes material into meaning, and thus, becomes a source of light, a source of new understanding. We cannot help seeing the aptness of the analogy of "The Purloined Letter", or Lacan's "mobile signifier" here. The work of art is like an empty structure, which gains meaning in each context as it travels.

A privileged singular meaning and any autonomy based on it is what is under attack when the work is seen to be polyphonous. The Plenitude of the Unconscious

Bowie shows how literary works have access to a superabundance of sense, originating in the unconscious:

"........literature not only owns up more readily than other forms of language to its unconscious origins, but rejoices in the superabundance of sense to which it has access and in doing so offers the psychoanalyst a
working model of the unconscious........Poetry in particular is exemplary in this role". (Sturrock [Ed.], 1979, p.142). He goes on to quote Lacan in "Ecrits". "But one has only to listen to poetry......for a polyphony to be heard, for it to become clear that all discourse is aligned along the several staves of a score....". (Sturrock [Ed.], 1979, p.143).

There is posited here, not so much the ambiguity or emptiness of the sign, as rather its opposite--overdeterminedness. It is loaded with multiple meanings. However, first an ambiguity can dissolve the rigid, singular meaning, and the ambiguous sign can then become loaded with several meanings. The ambiguity of meaning of a sign or sign-system undermines its autonomy.

Lacan's style of writing seems to exemplify his theoretical position that if the unconscious is "like poetry", the writer who makes the unconscious the subject of his works must become "like a poet". The overlappings, knotting together and linking of signifiers in his work will show the reader what the unconscious is like. This links with Barthes' theory that textual analysis must be like the text which is being analysed, and should not present itself as a meta-language. Lacan follows the paths opened up by the meanings of words, rather than limiting words to a fixed meaning, predetermined and intended. Thus, word-play abounds in his work, and that, he tries to show, is what the unconscious has in its nature to do.
The unconscious, Lacan seems to say, flourishes in an atmosphere of play, in which signs are mobile and the signified is constantly slipping beneath. Lacan especially favours portmanteau words and phrases. For instance, the phrase, "en possession de", which can mean "in possession of", as well as "possessed by". In his view, the signifier is the symbol of an absence and also becomes a symbol by means of an absence.

Lacan was particularly fascinated by prepositions, as seen above, for they become knots of various significances, in a signifying chain. They are the sites of shifts from one relationship to another, as also sites where psychological displacement and condensation may be seen to occur.

The word-play, the multiple connections that fill Lacan's work, Bowie writes, show "the signified as a palely fluttering presence behind the rampaging signifier" (Sturrock [Ed.], 1979, p.145). Lacan even goes to the extent of courting nonsense, for, the unconscious often delights in defying sense. And then, Lacan sees irony and contradiction as inherent in language, because inherent in the life of the unconscious.

For, indeed, it seems to me here that polar relationships are inherent in life itself, and extremes are, in fact, held together in (dialectical) relation. Discourse flutters between poles of meaning. It is for this reason that meanings in art cannot be rigidly delineated. The occurrence of unstable meanings undermines the ontology of the work of art.

Impressed by the Surrealist movement, Lacan supported their method of automatic writing. He said the nonsense of this
writing was in fact the plenitude of the unconscious. Later, his own methods became more subtle than theirs. Nonsense later came to mean for him a play of meanings promised but not given, and also, a provocation to rationality and persuasive argument. The responsibility of poetic as well as unconscious discourse is to "dire toujours Autre-Chose" : to say always an other thing, in Lacan's view. He felt that to say something simple and straightforward, and be satisfied, is to be misguided. Discourse must provoke change and strangeness. Truth lies in the contradictory process of language, all else being a falsehood.

This is an important philosophical position, we can see. It implies constant change in reality as well as a strangeness of reality which the nonsense of language can best point to. It implies also that reality is inherently contradictory.

This is perhaps an extreme way of pointing to the inadequacy of language.

To some extent, Lacan's view concurs with Riffaterre's, the latter holding that poetry must always say an other thing, other than mimetic presentation of reality, and that, in poetry, ungrammaticalities make reality strange to us. But Lacan goes further in this direction, unravelling orderly meaning-structures on several levels of the human mind and language, with implications about empirical reality as well, and never positing a process by which they are reconstituted into a unity, as happens in 'Riffaterre's theory.
Lacan's Epistemology

Lacan's writing is designed to prevent facile grasping of ideas. There is almost an effort, intention, or natural tendency, to be unreadable. Through all this, Lacan offers a new conception both of science, and of truth, and therefore a distinct philosophical position. Verification in the scientific manner is not valid, according to Lacan, for the kind of truth he is speaking about. And the truth-to-the-unconscious is the only truth worth knowing, is Lacan's stand.

The unconscious is wily and whimsical as it seeks to speak in the face of repression, concealing itself or slipping away when directly attended to.

Bowie writes about Lacan's view of the unconscious: "The desiring unconscious, and language which is its structure, are plural, layered, involuted, uncodifiable and unstoppable; arguments directed towards a terminus are falsehoods." (Sturrock [Ed.], 1979, p.148).

Thus, definite statements do not convey the truth about the unconscious.

Lacan held that not only is the language of the unconscious metonymic, paradoxical and so on, all language has the same structure as the unconscious. All discourse is, or should be, like that of the unconscious. There is, he repeatedly wrote, no meta-language, which, solving the puzzles and undoing the tangles of the unconscious, says the truth in simple, clear, unequivocal terms. The meta-language would be the truth about the truth of the unconscious. But, there is no such language, Lacan says.
Meta-language is continuous with language. There is no truth about truth, no other for the other.

**Criticism of Lacan's Theory**

The criticism of this position is that if the matrix of the unconscious is everywhere, how is it that we do have logical, univalent language, conceptual analyses, empirical descriptions, and so on? And how can we urge human beings to move closer to the unconscious when, as Lacan posits, it does in fact permeate all their beings, and doings and discourse? Yet, another criticism is that Lacan does not support with cogent arguments what he puts forward. He does not subscribe to the method of logical argument at all.

However, it is possible to extract certain of Lacan's important ideas from the maze of his writings, and test them in the practical work of understanding the unconscious. This has been done by scientists, and Lacan's work is seen to be a valuable contribution here. But eventually, his contribution cuts across the domain of psychoanalytic theory and practice into all spheres of intellectual activity, where certain of his ideas are seen to distill, from his writings, as important. One of these pertains to the subject, which he says knows, or must know herself or himself, fundamentally as a region of lack and incompleteness, and therefore, always moving, always in process. This idea is reflected in the field of linguistics, as a lack in the signifier, which therefore always moves. The movement of the signifier can mean various things. The same idea I would

216
translate in the aesthetic sphere as a lack of fixed meaning in the work of art, literary or other.

In the field of conceptual analysis and systems, Lacan warns against building systems of thought, or conceptual monuments. For, no such system can be destined for permanence.

There is thus, as I see, a definite philosophical position in Lacan's works — all is impermanent, everything is in movement, in process, and the knowing subject knows in the centre of his being, an irremediable lack or inadequacy. The lack in the subject is echoed in the work of art, and so, one cannot speak here of an autonomy of a work of art. When its being is hollow, can it be said to stand autonomous?

Lacan's writing, knowing itself to be impermanent, inadequate, always in process, constantly deconstructs itself. Instead of standing complete, autonomous, certain of its own strength of being, its ontology and its meaning, it gives itself up willingly to disintegration, for the process of discourse will go on and new things will be said, though these too will be inadequate.

The levels of subtlety, complexity and delicacy, however, of this discourse that does not resist disintegration, and of a thinker who faces the irremediable inadequacy of the subject with unflinching courage, are of a high order. That is the quality of Lacan's thought, as comes across from Bowie's essay on Lacan.

There is, however, an aspect of the autonomy of art that distils from Lacan's thought, and though touched upon last of all in this essay, it is not of the least importance for this thesis.
Lacan's theory makes the unconscious the basis of all language, and poesis the mode in which the unconscious speaks and directs itself. Seen in this light the poetic, or the aesthetic becomes omnipotent and omnipresent. The poetic unconscious, though not taking up an autonomous position, is, in fact, at the heart of everything in human life, according to Lacan's theory.

Even though individual works of art are doomed, by Lacan's theory, to disintegrate sooner or later, art in general underlies and informs all discourse. It not only enjoys an autonomy of its own, but reigns supreme. In his strong resistance to logical modes of discourse, Lacan perhaps put forward the most thoroughgoing autonomy of the aesthetic.

I would not go along with Lacan in his complete rejection of logical-conceptual discourse. In my view, this remains a valid and fruitful form of human communication and intellectual activity. Yet, Lacan's theory is helpful, in that it reveals the wide-ranging and deep influence of the aesthetic-unconscious on human life and discourse.

From the body of Lacan's work, the essay I have taken for study here is a brief talk delivered at Baltimore, published in V.S.Sethuraman's anthology, "Contemporary Criticism", (Sethuraman, 1989). Lacan's essay is titled "Of Structure as an Inmixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever" (from "The Structural Controversay", 1970). Though brief, it is an abstruse and difficult piece of writing, for which Lacan is well-known.
Messages from the Unconscious

In this essay, Lacan speaks about "the message" of language. "The message", he says, meaning as I understand him, everything a language conveys, "in all cases comes from the Other" by which I understand," from the place of the unconscious". (Sethuraman [Ed.], 1989, p.322). He says, this other is not the usual other in every day life, and so he has given it a capital 'O'. Then he switches to talking about the structure of language. He points out that in almost all of Freud's writings, we can see that he looked to words "for a way to handle the unconscious. Not even the meaning of words, but words in their flesh, in their material aspect. A great part of the speculations of Freud is about punning in a dream, or 'lapses'......the division of a word into many parts with each part taking on a new meaning after it is broken down. It is curious to note, even if in this case it is not absolutely proven, that words are the only material of the unconscious." (Sethuraman [Ed.], 1989, p.323).

Lacan thus shows how words, the units of language are absolutely essential to the unconscious. He clarifies that he does not mean that the unconscious is an assemblage of words, but that it has a precise structure. He says further, "Properly speaking this is a redundancy because 'structured' and 'as a language' for me mean exactly the same thing." (Sethuraman, [Ed.], 1989, p.323).
And so Lacan shows here that the unconscious is a language. And what kind of language, is the next question which naturally comes up. Not any special language, not like a mathematical or semiotic language, but simply an ordinary language, Lacan holds.

Like Barthes, Lacan holds that there can be no meta-language, for a special language has to be explained in ordinary terms for communication between people to take place. A special language is reduced to ordinary language.

Not only is "the material of the unconscious linguistic material", Lacan says, but it also closely involves the question of the subject. This subject is not only one who speaks an utterance and whom we refer to as an 'I', but is something in existence which always thinks. Freud pointed out that that which thinks is beyond the reach of thought, beyond consciousness. This, then, is the mystery and the difficulty about the subject, I would say.

This, Lacan says, is where the problem begins. There is a barrier, the subject cannot be known wholly, yet we feel a need to cross the barrier somehow.

Divisions Within the Subject

Lacan now attempts to describe this beyond-consciousness-subject. This is the unconscious, and it thinks with words, and is not natural in the sense instinctual. Its thoughts escape the vigilance of the conscious mind. They are twilight thoughts. Lacan says poetically, "The best image to seem the unconscious is Baltimore in the morning". (Sethuraman [Ed.], 1989, p.325).
Thus, the unconscious subject is an other subject within an individual. Lacan says this other subject is the support of the conscious subject, and is like a lost object which is fleeting, escaping and desired by the conscious subject. In the gap between the two, all discourse is born. The effort is to cross the barrier that divides. In crossing the barrier is ecstasy, the 'jouissance', the pleasure of language.

The lost subject may be referred to as the object 'a', and it is an object sought or desired.

There being a division in the whole subject as signified by the pronoun "I", this subject cannot be said to have a unitary structure, symbolized by the circle. There is also a twist in the structure, and this has a parallel with works of art and literature, I would say, which often have twists in their unfolding. The ribbon in the shape of the figure of eight is the kind of structure Lacan shows the psyche to have.

Lacan goes on to say that the relation between the conscious and the unconscious mind is like "one+one" or "one and one more" in Mathematics. But here the integer is an abstraction, which annuls difference. The signifier in language is like the mathematical number. It cannot capture the difference, it fails to refer to specific characteristics. Hence, the unconscious is always sliding away from the signifier.

Language, however, is a collection of different traits, Lacan holds, represented by a collection or set of signifiers. These signifiers constitute the other. The subject is a gap or
loss in reality, represented by a signifier. But this is a paradox, because reality is always full. Because the subject occupies a place of lack, words come to represent a loss. We have then the otherness of language. All language is born out of otherness.

The subject is always running, fading, beneath the chain of signifiers. A signifier represents the subject, not to another subject, but to another signifier. The fading subject yearns to find itself, through the phantasm. It is supported in its effort by the mysterious lost and desired object, 'a'. The relation between the subject and this object (a) is produced and seen in the phantasm which supports desire.

The phantasm is the basis, I would say, according to Lacan's theory, of all works of art. But Lacan goes further to say that desire structures all phantasms and is the metonymy of all signification.

Now there are also the concepts of the "Imaginary" and "the real" in Lacan's theory, and the "symbolic order" or the order of signification mediates between the former two.

Art and Ecstasy

The human organism, Lacan finally says, is governed by the desire for pleasure, and avoidance of displeasure. Between birth and death, it is capable of experiencing the whole spectrum of pleasures, or "jouissance". Language, including all works of art, being governed by desire, aims at making possible pleasure and ecstasy to the organism. I quote Lacan's words at the end of the essay we have considered here:

222
"All that is elaborated by the subjective construction on the scale of the signifier in its relation to the other and which has its root in language is only there to permit the full spectrum of desire to allow us to approach, to test, this sort of forbidden 'jouissance' which is the only valuable meaning that is offered to our life." (Sethuraman [Ed.], 1989, p.331).

We see that Lacan is not at all concerned to posit an autonomy of the work of art. In his theory, art is reduced to the play of the unconscious. But there is, in one sense, an autonomy of art implicit in his theory - all discourse is the art of the unconscious. However, as a signifying system, we cannot say whether on this theory the work of art represents a lack or a plenitude.

C] Michel Foucault

While Lacan held that it is the subject's unconscious other that speaks in all works of art, and indeed, in all discourse, Michel Foucault held that all discourse can be deconstructed to show the workings of political relations.

Michel Foucault is an influential, highly interesting albeit somewhat difficult thinker of this century, but to my understanding, his work is more pertinent to political and psychological studies than to literary criticism. Interestingly, Foucault himself defies the classification of his writing as belonging to any particular discipline of thought. As with Lacan, here also we see a highly idiosyncratic style of
writing. Hayden White explains that "Foucault's rhetoric reflects a general rebellion of his generation against the clarte' of their Cartesian heritage". (Sturrock [Ed.], 1979, p.81).

**Foucault's Nihilism**

Foucault seems to argue against all philosophical positions hitherto articulated by thinkers and his nihilism brings to mind Nietzsche's discourse, which Foucault takes further. But his style of argument is not conventionally logical, and his position is obscure and centreless. In the perception of all positive formulation of knowledge as 'madness' and 'folly', Foucault's position connects with Lacan's. Both thinkers hold that all knowledge is transient.

With these two thinkers we find that we are at the heart of deconstructive discourse, which, keeping in view the impossibility of certain and eternal knowledge, deconstructs all texts and offers even its own textual body, after it has articulated itself, for deconstruction. This I would say, is a 'do and die' philosophy.

And so, the style of writing of thinkers such as Lacan, Foucault, Barthes, the later Barthes particularly, itself enacts their philosophical positions. Foucault's style of writing, or discourse, is obscure, resistant to positioning, to grasp and rephrasing, because he holds that a clear discourse is just what the dominant and oppressive powers of society demand, and require, in order to maintain their positions of dominance.
As I understand the situation, Foucault's style of discourse is the style of the victim's voice, and it is designed to resist, and to escape.

His discourse remains at the level of surface, because he wishes to obliterate the distinction between surface and depth. This connects with Lacan's saying that there is no distinction between an ordinary language and a meta-language. Both thinkers hold that there is no permanent self of the knowing subject to be revealed as depth behind a surface, nor is there an origin of the subject to be recollected.

Discourse and the Politics of Power

Foucault's writings, however, do reveal an abiding and pre-eminent concern, and this is the operations of power, the differentiations of groups into the privileged and the underprivileged, and the discourse through which power operates. In fact, he says all cultural discourse is the machination of power.

In a review of a book on Foucault by Garry Gutting, Linda Alcoff writes that Gutting discusses Foucault's effort to

".... make possible a different imagining than the present discourse allows. The goal here is to put the centre on the defensive, creating a situation in which it must justify itself against the new (or old) possibilities which are no longer invisible or considered self-evidently untenable..... (Sosa [Ed.] 1991, p. 957)."
If one is to go along with Foucault, one must approach all art with suspicion. One must deconstruct all art to show its alignment with oppressive power. One must discern where the voices speaking in a work of art come from—from a position of dominance and oppression or a position of suffering?

If a work of art appropriates a position of autonomy, one must discern the implications of this autonomy in political terms. If it is oppressive, it must be deconstructed to reveal its operations. A peculiar kind of autonomy is, however, advocated by deconstructivist thinkers like Foucault—an autonomy which resists the grasp of power, which through obscuring itself refuses to yield its meaning and therefore, its being, for exploitation. The oppressed gain their own autonomy through obscurity of meaning, which thus becomes a weapon of political freedom.

The difficult discourse, the over-complicated work of art, exercise a kind of autonomy in the face of oppression. This quickly connects, I would point out, with Lacan's picture of the clever unconscious, playing with signs and meanings in the face of the controlling ego, inward or external.

Foucault uses the term discourse to refer to all the forms and categories of cultural life. Discourse includes all art-forms, as well as literary and art criticism.

This connects also with Riffatttere's explication of poesis as a process of indirectness in speech. And finally, there is a connection of political strategy and poesis here—both engage with indirect meaning or intentionality and the one transforms
into the other. A political strategy which sees discourse as the site of the play of power, and aims at obscuring meaning and speaking in indirect modes, connects with the inherent nature of the process of poesis, with the 'tropes' or 'turns' in language which transform language into poetry, as Hayden White explains. White writes,

"I think we will find a clue to the meaning of his (Foucault's) discursive style in the rhetorical theory of tropes, those 'turns' of speech by which language is transformed into poetic utterance." (Sturrock [Ed.], 1979, p.82).

Here political thought or discourse is coalescing into poetry.

Poetry Links in Different Directions

We can see that all these thinkers are approaching the problem of art from related yet slightly differing positions. The process of poesis is of central importance for this thesis. With Lacan, it links with the unconscious. With Foucault, it links with the political. With Riffaterre, the concern remains more purely aesthetic, and the dialectic is between ordinary reality, represented in a straightforward, mimetic manner in language, and other meaning(s), intended poetically.

It is interesting to note here, the etymology of the term discourse which White points out. He explains that the term has an Indo-European root - "Kers", with a Latinate form 'dis' +
'currere', the former part meaning 'many directions' and the latter 'to run'.

At its best, Foucault's style of writing exemplifies his position, which is that intellectual life is constant movement, that there is no meaning that can be centred upon as permanent. There is no privileged centre, there is no truth to be recollected in art, there is no pristine origin to which to return.

As with other thinkers considered in this chapter, Foucault's position with regard to discourse has implications for all aspects of human life, intellectual and practical. I shall speak at this point only for the philosophical and the aesthetic. Philosophically, he is saying that no knowledge formulated, through language necessarily, can be permanent. Ontologically, he is saying, that no concept of the human being can be formulated which embodies an eternal truth. Aesthetically, he is saying that works of art cannot have fixed, rigid and permanent structures. Far from appropriating any kind of autonomy, art must deconstruct itself, and so acknowledge its dynamic and transient nature.

Against Form and Authority

Foucault's work is full of a negative cultural criticism. Under attack are all Western institutions as they have evolved since the Renaissance - humanism, science, 'reason', 'logic' and so on. In my view, it is, however, possible to hold a mirror to his negative discourse and obtain a positive image -- that of a discourse which pleads for an ethics of justice, equality,
freedom, arrest of oppression, exposure of the deceptive and the dishonest, and all cognate values.

Foucault himself does not draw these positive implications. The final visions in his works are dismal, even terrifying.

In favouring movement over stability, grounding and foundations, as White writes (Sturrock [Ed.], 1979, p. 85). Foucault prefers space in discourse to ground, and the free-play of discourse to all authority.

All cultural discourse, Foucault is at pains to show, has attempted to regiment the free-play of desire. He holds that such regimentation must come to an end. Discourse must dissolve its own authority. A work of art must act against its own autonomy, if by this autonomy we mean a being with some kind of stability, exercising some power, occupying some privileged ground and so on. But, if we mean by autonomy of the work of art a freedom to engage in free-play, and to resist appropriation into any hierarchical order, such an autonomy is supported by the Foucauldian discourse, as I understand it.

Discourse, Foucault says, and as I understand him, must align itself with the "silence" of a reality, in which things exist in their difference, resisting being ordered into any sameness or generality.

In reality, no distinctions exist between signifier and signified, sign and meaning, says Foucault. The saying - or the event of discourse - is the moment when distinctions come into being.
There is contradiction in Foucault's writings, we can see here. All things exist in difference, he says, but he also says, distinctions come into being only through discourse.

Most discourse, Foucault goes on to say, masks its arbitrariness. Concealment is part of the style of such discourse. Foucault aims at pointing out the way discourse is and showing how it should be, exemplifying this latter kind in his own writings, as Barthes and Lacan have done too.

Discourse is a play of signifiers which are their own signifieds, and aims at hiding its own origin in play. It is the nature of discourse to try to say two or more things with the same words, and the same thing in different words, holds Foucault.

Foucault turns away from the idea of language trying to portray reality, and favours one in which language is seen to turn back upon itself, and through play of words, lead to unsuspected spaces and 'recover' therein things not uttered before. There is an emptiness in words, in language, Foucault holds, and from this void comes invention.

The mode of play, or recurrent manner, in discourse, characterises style, Foucault explains.

Where Foucault theorizes about language and its role in the wider discourse of a whole culture, his theory is pertinent to aesthetics. But Foucault also holds that all discourse or form of culture comes into being as manifestation of power and desire. Discourse, he says has a beginning and will end sometime in the future. The beginning is effected by the agitation of power and

230
desire. Most of his writings are devoted, it seems to me, almost obsessively, to uncovering or deconstructing discourses to show how they serve the quest for power. Therefore, most of his writing must be termed political.

Discourse serves power, and must hide this fact in order to function, and therefore, falsely professes to serve the 'will to truth'. Power functions through discourse by articulating rules of exclusion. Discourse points out and develops differences, and also carries judgements - this is good, that is not good; this is acceptable, that is not acceptable; this can be said, that cannot be said. Thus, in every society, along with ideas of 'proper' and 'improper' conduct, there are rules of 'proper and 'improper' speech.

Foucault takes a position against such discrimination and privileging. He aims at diagnosing the pathology of the mechanisms of control which act through discourse.

Foucault argues against conventional philosophical and scientific theories of language, holding that these are themselves part of discourses of power, and manifestations of Western logocentrism— that is, an excessive concern with words. The power-play in the world of things corresponds to the relation between the signifier and the signified, the subject and the object, in discourse. The signifier and the subject, or author of a work of art, are all accorded positions of power in most discourses— power over the signified.
Autonomy as Free-play

However, discourse has the capacity to free itself from the machinations of power, and enter the realm of free-play. The project worth working on, Foucault seems to hold, is to be free of constraints and be able to say everything that can be said. In order to make this possible Foucault devotes himself to exposing the dark underside of every discourse which pretends to serve "the will to truth", as Hayden White explains (Sturrock [Ed.], 1979, p.90).

Again, we see that one kind of autonomy of art is under attack, but another kind is sought here. Autonomy in the sense of the privileged positions of signifier over signified, of the knowing subject over the known object, of the author behind a work of art, this autonomy is to be deconstructed. An autonomy of discourse as its freedom of play--of words, ideas, of spaces to be explored or articulated, an autonomy which allows art never to be tied down to any space - such an autonomy is to be sought and practised.

To my understanding it is impossible to talk about art as separate from life in relation to Foucault's work. We cannot speak about the artistic or literary use of language as separate from the ordinary, everyday use of language, here. Foucault uses the term 'discourse', which is language permeating, and more often than not controlling, a whole cultural form. Art is one aspect of a culture, all the other disciplines are its other aspects. Foucault is concerned with the two modes in which
language can operate, as an agency of control, or as an agency of liberation.

In fact, Foucault studied in depth various scientific rather than literary practices, and was convinced that rather than an autonomous exchange, between empirical data and hypotheses, leading to true knowledge and enlightenment, certain presuppositions governed the formulation of knowledge in Western societies. These presuppositions served the will to power in these societies, and conflicted with the free-play of desire. Since knowledge was not truthfully developed, the discourse incorporated further deceptions and duplicity, covering up its true machinations.

Social deception, according to Foucault, is more evident in the way criminals and sexual deviants are treated by social institutions. These social types most clearly threaten the authority or autonomy of social institutions which are first and foremost concerned with maintaining their positions of control and power over others.

One cannot help noting here that when official discourse tends to be inhuman and tyrannical, literature and the other arts often remain the last free spaces, where the human being can articulate truth.

Foucault sees that in society, certain groups are accorded a right to discourse and others denied the right to their own discourse. He does not say clearly that he is himself speaking for the pursuit of true knowledge, and for justice among social groups, as well as for the individual. But one can see that in
all his works he speaks for the victims of the dominant discourse. He speaks from their space. One can draw certain ethical implications from this, though Foucault himself does not work them out.

One can say also that these ethical implications underlie all art which frees itself from tyrannical autonomy, which claims its own space, and so, its autonomy.

But most literary critics and creative writers fight shy of articulating ethical positions. This is because the mode of activity that characterises art is that of free-play, of indirection. The creative must necessarily break form to create new form, break away, break loose of constraints. Even so, I daresay that ethics and aesthetics work in co-operation, and are never mutual enemies. Aesthetics may never admit the friendship, but it is on the side of the ethical rather than the other, the tyrannically autonomous.

Things are not as simple as this however, where Foucault's works are concerned. We must understand further why thinkers like him, and it is Derrida one recalls here, as also the later Barthes, fight shy of drawing out ethical implications of what they say and stand for. A system of ethical values would be necessarily a structure, and one which they fear could become tyrannical. All structure has a potential to exercise a tyrannical power.
The Transience and Inadequacy of Discourse

Even when structures are formulated, these thinkers hold, they must incorporate in themselves a mechanism by which to deconstruct themselves. They must show themselves aligned to truth by admitting their own ephemerality. For such is the nature of language, and of all that can be said. Speaking is always, these thinkers hold, the articulation of differentiation in reality -- a creation of difference, whereas reality is a continuous flux which is beyond the grasp of language.

The honesty of all discourse lies in admitting its inadequacy. In this sense, an honest work of art, a work that avoids deception, though it need not avoid the seemingly deceptive mode of irony, must avoid appropriating the kind of autonomy which makes it rigid, authoritative and pretentious in the finality it tries to voice.

It is difficult to argue against Foucault when we try to understand him in this manner. However, I do hold the view that in all the discourse I have studied, and engaged with in my own participatory effort, there have been certain constant ethical concepts which it is possible to enunciate.

It is to be noted that Foucault accepted and even glorified the discourse of the 'mad' poets and artists of the last century and a half, who have been heralding a new cultural form towards which humanity is moving. These artists have been heroes to Foucault. White names them to be Holderlin, Van Gogh, Rilke, Artaud, among others (Sturrock, [Ed.], 1979, p.92). So we see that Foucault is not completely nihilistic. He does find something to
support in discourse, something acceptable in discourse, some kind of art and discourse which he admires.

I quote White here, for I could not put it better:

"Foucault values the brilliant opacity, the dark superficiality, the casual profundity of those writers who inhabit the silent places left by the discourse of 'normal' men". (Sturrock [Ed.], 1979, p.92).

We may, thus, locate Foucault in marginal spaces and interstices - that is where he is speaking from.

I take up for study here an essay by Foucault, "What is an author?" published in the anthology, "Literary Criticism and Theory : From Greeks to the Present", edited by Lee A. Jacobus, dated 1989. The editor informs us, in an introductory note, that this essay was first published in 1969, and probes the institutional forces that affect writing and knowledge.

We can see here that Foucault takes up the notion of the author, and opens up discourse on it. Most people think that an author is simply one who wrote one or more books, or in a wider sense, originated a piece of music or sculpture, or a painting. Foucault characteristically shows that the notion has various more aspects, such as historical, sociological and so on, and is highly problematic.

At the very beginning of this essay, Foucault takes up the question of individuality, which is closely related to the question taken up in this research. The individuality of the author may be said to be inversely related to the autonomy of a
work. Yet, in giving each a clearly marked space of its own, I would say, an interest in specificity came into being, which was not a general and universal phenomenon but a historical one.

Foucault begins this essay with the words:

"The coming into being of the notion of "author" constitutes the privileged moment of individualization in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy and the sciences." (Jacobs [Ed.].1989,p.720).

Authenticating Texts

The authority of a writer has its roots, as Foucault traces them here, in Christian religious practice of medieval times, authenticating or rejecting a Text on the basis of the saintliness or otherwise of its writer. Saint Jerome had laid down rules by which to tell whether a set of texts were by one and the same writer. Though the criteria changed, we do similar things to 'authenticate' texts. Thus, 'authority' is not just a concept but a function, or relation between a writer and a set of texts, as well as a practice of ascertaining the status of texts. Authority shows that some texts are acceptable and respectable, while others are not. It is an act of privileging some texts, that is, those which have followed the rules and affirmed the values or motifs around which a civilization is built. In other words, authority reveals which texts have played "the game" right. An author is not simply a writer but one whom the critics have found respectable. His name is not just the name of an individual but a name linked to a certain number of texts which are honoured in some way or another.
Foucault shows, however, that the set of works ascribed to an author as original works of art is not clearly definable. What about his tentative plans, rough notes, letters, a laundry list drawn up by him? His tentative plans for a book and his letters could well reveal his motives and his style.

Authority, Foucault writes, was not always a matter of great importance. He says:

"There was a time when the texts that we today call 'literary' (Narratives, stories, epics, tragedies, comedies) were accepted, put into circulation, and valorized without any question about the identity of their author: their anonymity caused no difficulties since their ancientness, whether real or imagined was regarded as a sufficient guarantee of their status".

(Jacobus [Ed.], 1989, p.725).

At this time only scientific texts needed to be validated by the name of a scientist or doctor, say Hippocrates or Pliny. Foucault writes that a "reversal occurred in the seventeenth or eighteenth century". From this time onwards literary discourses have to be validated by the name of an author.

The Self of the Author

Earlier, Foucault shows that the self of an author is not unitary, but plural. There are at least three selves behind a discourse presented in a work. Then he argues that the author is not necessarily a highly creative being from whom springs original discourse, but that such a being is constructed by art
critics and society in general. And while this is being done, the author is in reality used to limit the creativity of discourse. Only valourized authors are allowed to create discourses. These works cannot be tampered, that is, played with. Creative play with a discourse, that is, a work of art, would threaten society. An accepted author is thus a tool in the exercise of power.

I quote Foucault here,

".....he (the author) is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses : in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition and recomposition of fiction. In fact, if we are accustomed to presenting the author as a genius, as a perpetual surging of invention, it is because, in reality, we make him function in exactly the opposite fashion". (Jacobus, [Ed.] 1989, p.731).

Characteristically avoiding optimism, Foucault says he does not visualize a society in future, which would allow free circulation of discourse, but this could occur in the gap when one society is being transformed into another. In such an interstice, he says,

"All discourses, whatever their status, form, value, and whatever the treatment to which they will be subjected would then develop in the anonymity of a murmur." (Jacobus [Ed.], 1989, p.732).
We would then be asking different questions about the work of art than we do now.

"Not 'who really spoke?' but perhaps, 'Where has this discourse been used, how can it circulate, what spaces does it have for various subject functions?' And there would be perhaps an indifference: 'What difference does it make who is speaking?'" (Jacobs [Ed.], 1989, p. 732).

We can say that as the author's self turns out to be plural so does the being of the work of art, and as the author's status is used to limit signification in society, so is the autonomy of the work of art. Its breakup allows free-flow of signification. Foucault holds that this is possible only in the space between two cultures.

D) Jacques Derrida

With Derrida, we explore the hard core of deconstructive practice.

I have referred to an essay by Jonathan Culler to begin to know Derrida's thought and method of analysing works of art. Culler speaks of three Derridas, each of whom engaged in a specific intellectual project - the philosopher, the reader or interpreter of important texts, and the contributor to the movement of cultural criticism which goes under the rubric of structuralism and post-structuralism.

As a philosopher, Derrida called into question the "logocentrism" or the "metaphysics of presence" in Western philosophic thought, linking the two. He showed that metaphysics
persists in the Western tradition, even in the works of those who argue against it, because their arguments themselves borrow terms from the tradition. He himself, however, presents an argument of his own against the metaphysics of presence.

He held that while we cannot bring about the end of metaphysics, we should at least be aware of the conditions and limitations it imposes on thought. We should attend to what it seeks to repress, and should reverse the hierarchies it creates.

As a reader or interpreter, Derrida presents a number of texts in a new light, those of Rousseau, Saussure, Freud, Plato, Genet, Hegel, Mallarme, Husserl, J.L. Austin and Kant. His works in this area, Culler writes, "have become, for those alert to the adventures of intelligence, exemplary analyses, models of a new practice of interpretation". (Ed: Sturrock, 1979, p.154).

Irreconcilable Conflicts in Texts

Derrida engages in a double mode of reading texts, showing each mode to have different strains of argument and implication, which can never be reconciled mutually, but rather undermine each other. Derrida uses concepts from the text itself to show how the text deconstructs itself. It has been said that Derrida and other deconstructivists unravell a text to reveal hidden implications and positions. On reading Culler's essay it becomes clear that Derrida was trying to show that texts deconstructs themselves, or undo their own positions, implicitly or explicitly, intentionally or unintentionally.

Derrida's third project may be said to be part of the structuralist intellectual movement and its aftermath, post-
structuralism. He was one of the group of thinkers who, with their concerns with the structure of language, contributed to a new mode of thinking.

Derrida's contributions in each of these fields can be seen as a major enterprise, and his work considered altogether, appears as a comprehensive theory, and the work of a master thinker spanning the fields of philosophy, literature, and language. But Derrida himself stressed that he did not wish to present any comprehensive or unified theory that would "master and explain", literature, language, philosophy.

The kind of discourse Derrida engages in and would like others to as well, avoids precisely the building of master, or comprehensive, thought-systems. Derrida juxtaposes new concepts with the salient ones around which a system of thought is built, setting up oppositions. The concepts he uses are often non-central ones in the system itself under consideration.

Against a Unified Theory

Derrida would have preferred his work not to fall into a unified theory. But he cannot prevent this. We who read and try to comprehend him, inevitably formulate concepts and analytical methods central to his thought. His particular readings of text can be generalized as examples of analytic practice, of a theory and a method. This, Derrida would himself agree, is the very nature of the intellectual enterprise. I would add that Derrida's concern was to skirt this possibility, even as there is an awareness of it. The skirting of system-building, of unity
and coherence in thought, as also in literary and other art-works, has been the concern of other thinkers as well, such as the later Barthes, Lacan and Foucault.

This skirting has not been for these thinkers simply a whimsical or wilful preference, but an insight into the inherent difficulties, or paradox, of signification, of thought and the exercise of language.

To formulate what Derrida is saying is to falsify his project - to commit the error he is pointing out. But such falsification is unavoidable in the intellectual enterprise, in discourse. Such is the paradox here.

Derrida's first publication, "L' origine de la geometric", of 1962, engages in a dialogue with Husserl. Husserl was interested in how geometry acquires an ideal, universal form in the mind of a thinker. He answers, Culler writes (Ed:Sturrock, 1979, p.157), that language, particularly writing with its impersonality, is the condition of this possibility.

But as a student of philosophy I am accustomed to think of ideas and thought systems, not as writings, but as forms in human minds, only mediated by writing, that is, material signs. To my understanding the sign mediates between the empirical realm, the realm of the particular, and the ideational realm. For, the same sign is used to refer to the empirical datum and the concept of it, which is ideational and universal.

Derrida pointed out that while Husserl held language as the source of possibility of shifting from the particular to the general, it was also itself the source of problems, of paradoxes.
Derrida's later work was devoted in large measure to the problem of dualities such as the empirical and the general, event and structure, system and origin, speech and writing. We can add the pair - the individual work of art and the general medium. "Of Grammatology" of 1967, discusses what is at stake in the hierarchy which privileges speech over writing. Here, Derrida shows that what is considered characteristic of writing turns out to be characteristic of speech as well.

In "Speech and Phenomena", Derrida deconstructs Husserl's theory of signs. Husserl held that signs were derivative and dependent indications of meaning. Derrida shows that by Husserl's own account, meaning can never be a simple presence, but is always a part of a system of "traces" and contrasts, which exceeds any given present instant. Husserl's own theory of time, in relation to meaning, is invoked here by Derrida. For, meaning develops through past time and projects towards the future. It has "traces" of its past, and traces of what it can be in future, and is related to cognate as well as contrasting meanings in the present - thus it is related to other meanings, horizontally (in the present) and vertically (in time, past and future), what Foucault would call, archeologically.

"La Dissemination", Culler explains, is an obliquely written, literary work. It is concerned with effects of language, which escape conceptual determination and are not reducible to concepts, just as in "Speech and Phenomena", meaning is shown to exceed a sign in almost indeterminate ways. The
essay "La Dissemination" gives an account of linguistic or textual productivity which escapes control by concepts.

I must ask, what is this linguistic and textual productivity? We do not combine signs, or produce further patterns of signs from patterns, simply because they look or sound nice together, although an element of "sounding nice together" does play a role, particularly in poetry. Most of the time, I would say, it is a productivity of meaning, through signs.

The Escape of Language from Language

Now, when Culler speaks of linguistic or textual productivity which escapes the domination of or determination by concepts, as a phenomenon which is Derrida's main concern in his "La Dissemination", we have to attend to the statement very carefully. We have said that behind the play of signs is the play or interrelatedness of meanings. But even taking the sign and its meanings together as one unit, as Saussure did, Culler's statement, which we consider here, refers to an escape of language from language, of meaning from meaning -- linguistic productivity resulting from linguistic deconstruction.

Culler says it is not ambiguity in language Derrida is talking about here, but a semantic dispersal, of concepts not being able to ever control meaning completely.

This, of course, has bearing on the problem of the autonomy of the work of art we have taken up. As a system of
signification, the work of art loses its autonomy when it is seen that its signs do not signify in a fixed and rigid manner, but give rise to perhaps endless shades or resonances of meaning, and that meaning arises in profusion and in excess of the sign-system.

All our thinking, Derrida says is based on the metaphysics of presence. But, this has some paradoxes inherent to it. Any person who uses the self-signifier, "I", posits a presence. Time is related to a present. Meaning is taken to be present to someone's consciousness; in speech, to the consciousness of speaker and listener. All reality is held to be a series of simple presence. But, says Derrida, when we examine the situation carefully, we find that there are no simple and pure presences, and that what we take to be such, are complex, interrelated and interdependent realities, bearing traces in each other, and stretching beyond present time as well.

Thus, the non-present inhabits the present. The present is always already complex and differential, having traces of the not-now and not-present. Our language tends to precipitate clear-cut alternatives, not showing their blending and relatedness: either something is present or it is absent.

The Derridean critique of metaphysics, according to Culler, works not so much to discredit this framework as to indicate its limits.
Difference, Derrida held, better characterises things, meanings, present instants, but our language is more disposed to positing presences.

**Structure Makes Meaning Possible**

We also tend to believe without examination, that acts of communication or events determine the structure of language. But when we examine the situation closely, Derrida holds, we find that the acts of communication themselves are determined by the structure of language.

So also with meaning. The possibility of meaning something is determined by already existing language. For signification to operate, there must already be difference or differentiation, Derrida says.

Again, signifying events depend on differences, but differences also depend on signifying events. One shifts back and forth between these two perspectives and never comes to a synthesis of the two. Neither can be shown to be primary, Derrida holds.

Here, we have Culler's explanation of the celebrated play on the term "difference" which Derrida engaged with. In French "difference" and "differance" sound the same. According to Derrida, the two phenomena are inherent in language. Culler writes, 'Differance' thus designates both a passive differance already in existence as the condition of signification and an act of differing or deferring which produces differences". (Sturrock [Ed.], 1979, p.165).
A similar term in English is "spacing", which denotes both an already achieved arrangement and the act of arranging.

Difference, Culler reminds readers, is a term that occurs in the writings of other thinkers like Freud, Nietzsche and Saussure.

Difference, Derrida says in "Positions", quoted by Culler, ".. is a structure and a movement which cannot be conceived on the basis of the opposition presence/absence. Difference is the systematic play of differences, of the spacing (espacement) by which elements refer to one another ...". (Sturrock [Ed.], 1979, p.165).

The term differance, Derrida says, shifts and wavers between the notions of activity and passivity and so indicates something which escapes governance by either concept. He says that the intervals in the arrangement of concepts or signs, make possible the signification by signs, their functioning as signs. The space between signs makes each autonomous or separated from others, I would say.

It may be noted that here Derrida does admit that signs function in some positive way; that all signification is not lost in dispersal of meaning.

All this is highly pertinent to our thesis. We have a view here of the work of art having much of its body dispersed in other texts, while elements of other texts inhabit its own body. It, therefore, cannot be said to stand isolated, complete and autonomous.

248
The Logic of Supplementary

Culler now looks at Derrida's reading of Saussure's "Course in General Linguistics" (trans. 1960). Here, too, Derrida finds a powerful critique of the metaphysics of presence, but also an affirmation of presence, or logocentrism, an affirmation that is unavoidable.

Saussure privileged speech over writing. Derrida counters Saussure's argument with "the logic of supplementarity". Derrida refers to the term as used by Rousseau when the latter wrote about the relation of education to nature. Education is said to supplement nature, but nature is seen to have an inherent lack, which makes education necessary and essential. The logic of supplementarity, says Derrida, is powerful and pervasive. It makes possible all that we consider essential to human nature - language, art, society, passion. Once we begin to look for it, we see it everywhere.

This, to my understanding, is not so problematic, if we see human developments as co-extensive with nature, a further development of nature.

The supplement, Culler explains, as it is treated by Derrida, is something which is considered marginal with respect to a plenitude, but which is also seen as capable of acting as substitute for the principal entity, or as something which can supplement or complete it. Then we find that the characteristics of the marginal are defining characteristics of the main or central entity itself.

249
The marginal, or the other, of an entity is continually rejected, put aside, but continually reappears, because it has the characteristics of the main entity. It threatens the central position of the privileged concepts.

This, however, does not mean that there is a mistake in privileging one over the other, as Saussure privileged speech over writing. This privileging was a part of the movement of history. Speech could be internalized and this became the basis of a whole world-view, characterized by the division of the ideal and the empirical, the inner and the outer. All Western thought came to be based on this division.

And so we have the division, myself and the other. So also, the division of art and non-art or the conception of the autonomous art-object, standing isolated from everything else.

According to Derrida, if one tampers with the privilege of speech over writing, the whole edifice of Western thought gets threatened or shaken.

Speech has been seen as voice, and voice as the direct indicator of a living presence; speech has also been seen as co-existence with one's inner voice. As we think, which is inner activity, in the same way we speak. Writing is something which came later and which is a mere supplement to speech.

But Derrida argues, writing has all the essential characteristics of speech and can substitute for it. Speech can be seen as a form, a supplement of writing.

Both are made up of signs which can be repeated.
Language is, in fact, born from a proto-writing, Derrida says, an early writing, in which presence is both differed and deferred.

Derrida says that instead of a theory of language based on idealized speech, one might think of language as a play of differences, "a proliferation of traces and repetitions which ... give rise to effects of meaning". (Sturrock [Ed.], 1979, p.172).

The writing behind writing, or archi-writing, which Derrida speaks about is like presence, which can never be the object of discourse. This, in my view, is yet another corollary of the inadequacy of language which I wish to posit, as also the inadequacy of all works of art.

The critique of logocentrism must necessarily remain within discourse. Discourse beyond it is impossible, Derrida points out. The logocentric discourse, however, tends to posit concepts as autonomous and self-identical, ignoring the spaces of difference and deference between them and the traces of meaning by which they are inter-related. Derrida attempted to correct this by pointing out that which the discourse tended to suppress or repress.

Derrida engaged in a reading of well-known texts, which reading revealed how the texts slipped from their positions, because of the diffuse, sometimes contradictory meanings of their own central concepts. Derrida could use concepts from the text to build a theory which deconstructed that text. Thus, metaphysical
and critical or deconstructive tendencies, both exist, or "cohabit" in one and the same text.

Here, we are led to the interesting development that the autonomy of the work of art and the possibility of its disintegrating or deconstructing itself are both inherent in the work of art.

Culler presents a criticism of this position when he says that if such a self-contradiction is inherent to all discourse, how can one—and Derrida does—engage in a disparaging criticism of any author? A writer can never command a language wholly, because by its inherent qualities, language is not entirely governable. A reader usually sees the blind spots of the writer, where the language in his text begins to say things beyond his command. Here we see a break-down of autonomy, or the disintegration of a work of art.

All the deconstructionist thinkers have contributed, Culler writes (Sturrock [Ed.], 1979, p.174) to a discourse which "decentres" the subject, or the consciousness commanding autonomy, showing it to be constituted by a play within systems, rather than being in control, as a master and ultimate origination of systems.

Derrida's Critical Rigour

We cannot however, escape the discourse of presence which we criticize. But we can bring to it a critical rigour, Derrida holds. This rigour is to be applied, according to Derrida's demand, not only to the texts one examines, but to one's own
discourse as well, so that one's own concepts are examined for their "otherness", their shiftiness, their changeability. One must realize that when one criticizes the discourse of presence, one is borrowing from the very heritage one is deconstructing.

Philosophy, with its yearning for pure, logical means of expression, has tried throughout its history to protect itself from "the machinations and metaphoricity of words" Culler writes, (Sturrock [Ed.], 1979, p.177). But Derrida is sceptical of the division between philosophy and literature, as he is of that between speech and writing.

I too have often seen philosophy in literature and vice-versa. Philosophy, at its best, is, in my view, poetry and literature has philosophical things to say, directly or indirectly.

J. Culler refers to the literary moment as a philosophical moment par excellence. His assertion, as I understand it, is that here the rationality of philosophy is transcended and this is itself a moment of philosophical truth - the knowing of its limitations.

We have reason to assert that the literary and the philosophical moments most often coalesce. This is a serious dissolution of the autonomy of art. We see that though specially poetic, the poetic text most often has a truth worth speaking which it presents in a startling manner.

Secondly, the double-entendre, the play with words and meanings, makes the poetic text a shifty thing. Here too, there
is a philosophical implication. The reader is led to seeing two or more truths and to the possibility that truth can shift.

We see with Derrida that philosophy must necessarily be rooted in language and language necessarily in rhetorical tropes. Therefore, poetry or art and philosophy have a common foundation, and lead to the same kind of insights.

Philosophy with its overbearing concern for clarity and art with its circumspection, its surprises, its meandering, come to the same insights - the limitation of language, its unravelling, its deconstructing itself, its inadequacy, which leads to cracks through which the unnameable reveals itself.

The Deconstructive Methodology

Derrida's rendering of Plato's 'Phaedrus' is a deconstruction in which we can see his methodology at work. I refer here to Derrida's essay, "The Father of Logos" taken from his work, "Plato's Pharmacy", published in his larger work, "Dissemination" of 1981. "The Father of Logos" is also published in "Literary Criticism and Theory: from Greeks to the Present", 1989, edited by Lee A. Jacobus, to which I have referred here.

Derrida takes an off-centre position in relation to Plato's text, focussing on an issue which is marginal for Plato, that of authority. He then reverses the statement Plato is asserting about speech being superior to writing.

This analysis has bearing on the problem of this thesis, through its challenging of a central authority from a position of marginality and showing how a text can be overturned from within itself. The central authority can be seen as a parallel to the
art-object we see as autonomous, or speech can be seen as the superior discourse of the art-object, or art in general. Then, whatever is seen as the other, as non-art, overturns the hierarchy and the superiority or the isolation of the entity deemed at first to be central and autonomous.

In Plato's "Phaedrus", Derrida recounts, the Egyptian God, Theuth, invents writing and brings it as a gift to the king-god, Thamus. Theuth says to the king-god,

"This discipline, my King, will make the Egyptians wiser and will improve their memories: My invention is a recipe (pharmakon) for both memory and wisdom". (Jacobs [Ed.], 1989, p.750).

Derrida now comments,

"Writing (or, if you will, the pharmakon), is thus presented to the King. Presented: like a kind of present offered up in homage by a vassal to his lord ... but above all, as a finished work submitted to his appreciation..

The value of writing - or of the pharmakon has of course been spelled out to the King, but it is the King who will give it its value... The King or God .. is thus the other name for the origin of value. God, the King, does not know how to write .. He has no need to write. He speaks, he says, he dictates, and his word suffices. Whether a scribe from his secretarial staff then adds the supplement of a transcription or not, that consignment is always in essence secondary.
From this position .. the God-king will deprecate it, pointing out not only its uselessness but its menace and its mischief. The father is always suspicious and watchful towards writing". (Ed: Jacobus, 1989, p. 750).

Derrida says the king-god is like a father in relation to speech, or logos. When he speaks, words come forth from him as children. His own presence is authority, which makes his words important and beyond question. His words are dependent on his presence for their authenticity and sanctity. The king-god is the source of value. He himself cannot be questioned. He is like the sun, which should not be stared at by the naked eye, and hidden or elipsed is even more dangerous.

Authority Threatened

Speech with the father absent is like writing. Thus, writing is tied up with the paternal absence. But this is the father's own thesis, his own point of view, not that of his subordinates, who would find writing useful. The King-god feels threatened by writing. Authority is threatened by writing. Authority is threatened by something very close to speech, something which was intended to supplement the central phenomenon. But the supplement, writing, has many of the characteristics of the main thing, speech, and some more useful ones too, and can take its place in importance, and so overturn the hierarchy and autonomy. In the same way, I would say, the autonomy of a work of art can be deconstructed.
When speech is no longer all-important, the father's authority is no longer needed and nor his presence.

It is clear that Derrida wishes to use elements from the text to deconstruct its main statement. What we have seen here is that Derrida has challenged the authority and autonomy of speech by the new and marginal element, writing. In the same way, the authority or autonomy of a work of art can be challenged, unravelled or deconstructed by a marginal element within the same text.

E) Fredric Jameson


The postmodern literary left, McGowan writes, has been concerned to re-examine the relation of art to radical left politics within the context of contemporary theory. They tend to accept the theory where it accords with their political views and refute it where it does not. For the purpose of this thesis, then, I would have to say that they uphold a primacy, or autonomy, of the political.

McGowan informs us that Jameson's work, "Prison House of Language" (1972) was the first guide book to the new theories. Here, he linked criticism to politics, and evaluated a number of writers, often negatively, for the political consequences of their work. In "The Political Unconscious", he tries to rewrite Marxist theory in contemporary terms.
The Totality and Fragments

Jameson addresses himself directly to "postmodern reality", that is, as McGowan explains (McGowan, 1991, p. 148), contemporary, global, late capitalist reality. He says, this is a time in which individual subjects find themselves part of a set of numerous discontinuous realities. It becomes ever more difficult to grasp this system in its totality. We experience both the world and ourselves as fragmentary, disconnected, schizophrenically decentered and dispersed.

But while, I note, the other thinkers do not go beyond the fact of this fragmentation, and speak of it as a new form of aesthetics, with art portraying the fragmentary social reality, if not in mimesis, in parallel form, Jameson refuses to accept this reality and art as a final, unchangeable one. He is concerned with a recovery of the ability to understand the local positioning of the individual subject and the totality of class structures in which he or she is situated. In this sense, we see that Jameson's theory is optimistic, while those of the other thinkers we have considered are not clearly so. Jameson holds that criticism is capable of providing knowledge of the world, and action on the basis of this knowledge can achieve success. His theory lacks the ironic suspicion of the possibility of successful action.

A text can be deciphered, Jameson held, to reveal the hierarchical and exploitative structures in social life, but criticism can also go further. It can reveal the utopian impulses
in texts. We value works of art for their utopianism, their representation of future forms of society, a society of free people, one without economic market domination. This is how McGowan explains Jameson's view of art in "Postmodernism and Its Critics" (McGowan, 1991, p.149).

Jameson himself is aware that contemporary society is far from anything like Utopia, is in fact a distopia. He also acknowledges in his work, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" of 1984 that the conception of totalizing systems can make individuals feel powerless to act.

Jameson Resists Anarchism

Jameson is determined, however, to resist the anarchical, random difference of post-structuralist theory. In "The Political Unconscious", Jameson speaks against the inexorable necessity of the social order. He asserts that alternatives have existed before in history, and are always available along with the dominant culture.

Jameson's view of texts and their relation to political action is problematic. He sometimes holds that history is available only through texts, but also that texts can be rewritten, visualizing social change and alternative action. But sometimes he holds that textual action is not enough.

Generally speaking, we can say that "There is plenty of theoretical room, then in Jameson's totalized social order for resistant voices and alternative imaginings", as McGowan writes, (McGowan, 1999, p.153). Thus, Jameson conceives the work of art as an autonomous, complete, closed one but with some possibility
of openness to change and this is an important characteristic he postulates.

Jameson refuses to participate in the postmodern tirade against totality. In fact, as McGowan informs, Jameson subscribes to the Althusserian notion of "Semiautonomy". This concept allows for significant differentiation within totality and yet insists on the interconnectedness of the whole.

Postmodern art plays at random with the whole repertoire of images accumulated through history, says Jameson. This random play destroys any site from which meaningful discourse can take place, it destroys the coherent subject as well and also effaces history itself. The subject who participates in this spectacle of random, disconnected images becomes schizophrenic. What we have here is a rubble of unrelated signifiers.

Artists Should Explore the Unknown

There is now an absence of a subject who can organize its past and future into coherent experience. Jameson does not go along with such a cultural production. He holds that this horrendous state of affairs is a state of transition and will lead to at present unknown resolutions.

It is the task of artists and critics to explore this unknown, he holds, and to try to give it representation. Thus, in my view, Jameson accords an important, creative, autonomous role to art, and art and literary critics.
The Floating, Autonomous Signifier

In a lecture of 1974, titled "Beyond the Cave: Modernism and Modes of Production", (published in the anthology, "The Horizon of Literature", Ed: Paul Hernadi, 1982). Jameson calls attention to the "portability" of the written word, as he puts it, relating this quality to the autonomy of art. When the word breaks loose of its context, it floats with an intact meaning, and thus acquires a kind of autonomy, Jameson holds. This happens when words come to be written, and transported in written form.

But such an autonomy - this breaking away from context, and retention of meaning, also leads to an alienation of art from contexts or historical situations, Jameson explains. He refers to such alienation as autonomy and considers it a pathological condition which needs to be investigated.

To my understanding, both spoken and written words retain some meaning, independent of contexts. The difference lies only in the way they travel across contexts. When the question arises of subtle changes in meaning according to context, both are seen to undergo some changes. Here one has the problem of interpretation.

In the case of the linguistic work which is spoken to listeners, greater interpretation takes place at the site of the speaker. The spoken word is a performance, as the written one is not. The written work of art is somewhat fixed in this respect, and greater interpretation takes place at the site of reading.
Jameson's lecture, "Beyond the cave: Modernisation and Modes of Production", which we are considering here, throws light on the problem of the relation to and autonomy from contexts of the linguistic or literary work of art. He examines the pathological autonomy that literary works have been increasingly characterised by, through various periods of history, particularly our own. I prefer to term this pathological autonomy "alienation".

Jameson refers to the condition, in our times, when great literary works no longer speak to us and move us. Mediocre works become best-sellers. The latter express the concerns and values of our times—money, social position, sex and so on. If a work relates to our lives it cannot be great, and vice versa. This is the pathology of the autonomy of great works of art, but also the pathology of our times.

Jameson elaborates on another aspect of the socio-cultural-historical situation of our times, which has reinforced a pathological autonomy of art. In the stage of later monopoly capitalism, every cultural group tries to assert its own identity, and speaks its own language. Language becomes less and less general, more and more specific and restricted. Plurality flourishes, but leads to extreme fragmentation in society. Language becomes increasingly private, individualistic. People are trapped, or imprisoned in ever-narrowing compartments. This is an autonomy of sorts, but can be viewed as a sickness, for the purpose of language is communication, and this happens in an ever-narrowing sphere.
Jameson also elaborates a view of the relation between dominant and repressed cultures, drawing a parallel between this relation and the one between the self and the other. Here, I find a clear picture of the coming into being of any kind of autonomy. Also, one sees here that Jameson's thought is linked with Lacan's in its psychoanalytical character, as well as with Foucault's in its focus on the process of positing and negating various aspects of any phenomenon, in the constitution of a culture.

Jameson holds that a dominant culture demarcates various aspects of life as the self and the other. The self is what it acknowledges as part of itself, and it rejects some aspects of living, considering them to be not-self, or the other. This negating is so strong that even the act of rejection is covered up, or intentionally forgotten. It becomes a blind spot, a blankness and the emotion associated with it is one of boredom. The Western subject experiences its other, that is, the cultures it rejects, marginalizes and eventually dominates, as a source of profound boredom.

The One and the Other

This then is how autonomy is constituted, I would say—something is accepted as the self, and some related aspect of the same phenomenon is rejected as the other. It is a pathological process. What is called for is a realization that something is being rejected unfairly, that something — whole cultures — are being blanked out as "the other".

263
Jameson holds that art which is not autonomous but socially related is a living art. Art must arise out of real-life situations and respond to them. That is why art of another historical period cannot mean to us what art of our own period does. In primitive times, art had this "cultic" function, which has been lost, Jameson holds, over the centuries. Now we study all art, even that of other periods as "Literature", in universities and other cultural centres. We study it as a formal, disengaged entity, picking it out of its historical context. This is an "autonomization".

But, the real function of art is to relate to the living present in which it is created. Jameson's position seems to be that art was always meant to be related to social context, to life. The art which is thus bound is strong and powerful.

The ideology of modernism has made us prisoners. We cannot see beyond its limitations. To understand this ideology and its limitations, we have to somehow get outside it, perhaps through a Brechtian kind of estrangement from it, through a defamiliarization process, Jameson suggests.

He says further, that one way of getting out of the prison of an ideology is to look at its exclusions, at what it considers to be its other and not worth consideration. In speaking about exclusions, Jameson's thought links clearly with Foucault's, as well as Derrida's.

We must look at mass-media culture, which is excluded from literature, at working-class culture, as well as surviving instances of primitive culture, such as oral story-telling. This
must be done without resorting to an imperialistic, assimilative attitude, which characterises the Western ethnocentric viewpoint. The latter is precisely what we are trying to get beyond.

It is precisely in the experience of boredom, of dreariness, of the Western subject with his other—with other cultures—that he can come to realize his own limitation, and that the other is a culture in its own right which must not and cannot be assimilated into the dominant one.

**Three Stages of Cultural History**

Jameson uses a model of social history developed by Deleuze and Guattari in their work titled, "Anti-Oedipe" (referred to by Jameson' in "Beyond the Cave", in the "Horizon of Literature", 1982, p.168) to explain the autonomy of spoken and written works of art produced at various stages of history. He thus posits a definite relation between historical conditions and the production of works of art. In this sense, according to his view, art is not autonomous, except at certain, very limited periods of history, when an ahistorical position was consciously sought.

According to the socio-historical model Jameson refers to, the human world of experience was originally a flux of unrelated instants. In this sense, Jameson refers to it as schizophrenia. This flux was coded, or organized in different ways at various stages of human history. Jameson refers to the well-known triad of historical periods, as enunciated by Deleuze and Guattari in
their French work, "Anti-Oedipe". Deleuze and Guattari had derived this model from Morgan and Engels. The latter had referred to Morgan's "Ancient Society", in which this triad of the historical development of society is articulated.

The undefined flux of human experience is first organized in the savage stage of society, in which period language first makes its appearance along with other simple, physical artefacts. Barbarism, the stage that succeeds the first, is characterised by more complex organization of both society and language. On the basis of the earlier coding, a more complex coding of the original flux comes into being, which Deleuze and Guattari refer to as an "overcoding".

In the third stage of social development, we have the invention of writing, and now a "decoding" of the earlier codes is effected. This is the stage we call civilization and is coincidental with the economic development we refer to as capitalism.

In the first stage of social development, savagery, we have linguistic art-works which consist of a free-flowing, oral storytelling. The second stage, barbarism, is characterised by Allegory, which is a form of story-telling, in which certain concepts come to be "overloaded" with meaning, and are considered sacred and privileged. The earlier non-centered form gives way to form with a centre.

While in the earlier form there is no sense of autonomy, in the latter kind of art, forms begin to acquire a definiteness, a separateness or self-sufficiency, which may be termed autonomy.
These codes, however, are deconstructed in the next stage. This decoding is described by Jameson as a "desacralization and laicisation, the quantification and rationalization of capitalism". (Hernadi [Ed.], 1982, p.171).

Our Own Times

Jameson, however, does not stop at this stage of social and literary development, but goes on to speak about yet another one, that of "our own times", when there have been attempts to recode the decoded flux, that is, recapture or reconstruct the reality which capitalism-realism deconstructed. The attempts are directed towards recoding or reinventing the sacred, the mythical, the magical.

But he also holds, along with Deleuze and Guattari, that the most authentic modernist literature is "schizophrenic" literature, where one witnesses an encounter, and an effort to come to terms with the primordial flux itself. It is easy to see here that rather than an attempt to recode a lost reality, there is a complete breakdown of coding, or a voluntary refusal of coding.

Historical Location of Autonomy

We can see from the Deleuze and Guattari model of social and linguistic-literary development, that autonomy of art was restricted to a particular historical period. It was most prominent in the second stage of the triad--barbarism, in which certain concepts came to have central importance and were seen as privileged and sacred.
But to my understanding, Jameson has his own interpretation of the concept of the autonomy of art here. He is linking it with the first crystallization of form in magical practices and all gorical stories, as well as sacred literature. This crystallization of form took place much earlier in history than the autonomy of art. We have spoken about form in this thesis, which began to take shape after the Renaissance in Europe, and was associated with the autonomy, or dominance of modern Western civilization in the world.

The third stage - that of civilization - was a negation of the earlier two, a deconstruction of preceding codes. In this stage commerce, as Jameson explains, comes to dominate social life. The money-system reduces all things produced in society to abstract, interchangeable, monetary values. Measurement or quantification becomes all-important. So also the ordering or measurement of time.

Thus, measurement, money, ordered time, the realistic perspective in all art-forms, these things gain autonomy.

The period following this represents a revolt against the autonomy of capitalist realism. This is the period Jameson refers to as "our own times".

We come now to the concept of chronology which, it will be seen, plays an important part in realist and modernist literary works. It will be recalled that the realist perspective as well as narrative were attempts to order reality completely in a scientific, that is, non-magical, manner.
In modernism, autonomy rested with the scientific perspective. This included the ordering of time, or chronology. The later modernist narrative, being a revolt against realism, attempts to dismantle chronology. The logical, straight-flowing sequence of events is broken up in many modernist works, comments Jameson.

But, says Jameson, this is only an attempt to break up chronology, which does not really succeed. We do not really return to a primitive or allegorical, non-chronological consciousness. We rather re-interpret the broken chronology of modernist works in an orderly way. And thus, the realist perspective remains in force - gets re-inforced. For the purpose of our present thesis, we would term this as the realist perspective retaining its autonomy. This indicates Jameson's Marxist position again, for Marxism is a stream of thought within modern Western civilization.

Loss of Scientific Perspective

However, I am unable to go along with Jameson's constant negative theorizing. I suspect that at least two kinds of readings of modernist works are possible. Firstly, I would like to clarify that what Jameson refers to as later modernist may be what other critics refer to as post-modern works, in which the scientific perspective has lost its autonomy. My suggestion is that readings of these works can lead to the recapturing either of the realist perspective or of older, primitive or allegorical, even a primordial consciousness, depending on the reader. Which
kind of consciousness gains autonomy here thus remains a question with a shifting answer.

It is my further hypothesis that no type of consciousness can ever gain complete autonomy any more. Perhaps there was a time in history when the primordial flux - a flux, but I maintain, not a disorganization, not a madness, not schizophrenia - was experienced as such, without chronology and without centering and expressed thus in folk art. But this will never again come to pass, however much a nostalgia, with all its beauty and charm, is felt for it. There will henceforth be a play in chronological ordering. Autonomy will remain a shifting phenomenon. There will be varying degrees of spaces in the structures of literary and other art-works, spaces that will always hold a fascination for us.

There will be periodical returns to chronological, scientific consciousness. It is my view that it is impractical and implausible to expect that we will ever escape completely from chronology, having once invented it. The best we can hope for is not to be caught in an absolute autonomy of chronology, in consciousness or in art-works.

This brings us to the question of openness of works of art, particularly post-modern works. It seems to me that Jameson is speaking about this phenomenon - openness - the indeterminate spaces - in art-works when he says at this point in his essay that in these art-works, which he calls "the many modernisms", the main motif becomes really an empty signifier, which can then be appropriated by various people, or social groups, according to
their own sign-systems. The work of art becomes a "multi-purpose object", an open form.

Jameson and Derrida

We have come upon a connection with Derrida's concept of the floating, empty signifier here. In the historical situation of later capitalism, when a number of nations are asserting their political and cultural autonomy, that is, when a singular political and cultural autonomy is breaking up into a plurality, any particular work of art becomes open to a plurality of interpretations, according to the sign-systems peculiar to various social groups.

The particular work of art, which is a complex sign-system, exists as an empty structure, to which various meanings, at least differing shades of meanings, can be attributed. It is not only the spaces in the structure that make it open to different interpretations. The structure itself has become an empty signifier which is given various meanings. The autonomy of its own inherent or specific or original meaning is lost in the process of interpretation.

Jameson acknowledges that this is a "peculiar historical and aesthetic situation". But he does not explore the dimensions of the problem of interpretation. He returns, rather, to the problem of the autonomy of art by which, as I clarified earlier, he means alienation of art from the social milieu, in late capitalist society.
Jameson traces the roots, or causes of the sickness or pathology of this autonomy to the fragmentation that is inherent in the situation of late capitalism. The writer is now faced with an agonizing dilemma - he cannot generalize or universalize his own experience. This, for our thesis, is a strange species of individual autonomy. It tends to reach an extreme, a solipsism, where the writer or artist can speak or create only for himself. Without communication with others, such creation becomes meaningless.

Jameson distinguishes here between great art and an everyday art - the bestsellers which speak the language of the times but are certainly not great works as are those of Hemingway or Faulkner. The bestsellers express the concerns of our times - money, power, sex, social position. Great art does not, and becomes alienated from the historical time.

However, the modern writer whose work expresses the fragmentation of capitalist society remains, Jameson points out, in some sense, profoundly true and representative. For everyone is caught in some way or other, in this fragmentation: thus a generalization, a sharing and communication take place.

We are like prisoners in a cave, says Jameson, and we see things as a shadowy presence, like images of the outside world falling on the inner wall of the cave. Jameson refers here to Plato's evocation of a such a situation. (From book 7 of Plato's "Republic", quoted by Jameson, in "The Horizon of Literature", (Paul Hernadi [Ed.], 1982, pp.180,181)
The Task of Criticism

The task of the literary or art-critic is not so much to change this situation, Jameson says, not to effect a liberation from it, as much as to make a diagnosis. The solution, Jameson says, lies not in literature and other art-forms but in thoroughgoing social change, which aims at the recreation of collective life.

Jameson thus shows his concern, underlying his literary-critical theory, to be socio-political, though he does not expect art to go beyond portraying realities.

At this final point, I tend to agree with Jameson, but I do not underestimate the power of narrative and other art-forms to play a rather more active and positive role. Such a role is possible on the basis of the inherent autonomy of art, one based not on autocracy or control, but on an independence of human vision and creativity. This, without its becoming propagandist. In this capacity, it is truly political as well as creative, and not just a passive mirror of the times.