

Part 2

Some important concepts of modern Philosophy of Language.

Jacques Derrida Of Grammatology,

Some concepts:

Heidegger

Being is indeed the final signified to which all signifiers refer. It cannot be contained by, is always prior to, indeed transcends, signification.

“The end of philosophy, according to Heidegger, is to restore the memory of that free and commanding signified, to discover originary words in the languages of the world by learning to waylay the limiting logic of signification, a project that Derrida describes as “the other side of nostalgia, which I will call Heideggerian hope... the quest for a proper word and the unique name.”

Derrida

He seems to show no nostalgia for a lost presence, like Heidegger. He sees in the traditional concept of the sign a heterogeneity “the other of the signified is never contemporary, is at best a subtly discrepant inverse or parallel – discrepant by the time of a breath – of the order of the signifier” (31.18). It is indeed an ineluctable nostalgia for presence that makes of this heterogeneity a unity by declaring that a sign brings forth the presence of the signified. Otherwise it would seem clear that the sign is the place where “the completely other is announced as such – without any simplicity, any identity, any resemblance or continuity – in that which is not it”. (69, 47)

Word and thing or thought never in fact become one. The sign marks the place of difference. To “deconstruct the transcendental signified” – that the sign, phonic as well as graphic, is a structure of difference, Derrida suggests that what opens the possibility of thought is not merely the question of being, but also the never-annulled difference from “the completely other”. Such is a strange “being” of the sign: half of it is always “not there” and the other half always “not that”. The structure of the sign is determined by the trace or track of that other which is forever absent. This other is of course never to be found in its full being. One sign leads to another and so on indefinitely.

The structure of the sign is to be a **trace-structure** in Saussurean linguistics, as in the Freud’s psychoanalysis the structure of experience is to be **trace-, not a presence-structure**. So, Derrida puts the words sign and experience “under erasure”.

Derrida does not see in the method of the so-called exact sciences as epistemological model of exactitude. All knowledge, whether one knows it or not, is a species of bricolage, with its eye on the myth of “engineering”. But the myth is totally always other, leaving an originary trace within “bricolage”. Like all “useful” words, “bricolage” must also be placed “under erasure”. For it can only be defined by its difference from its opposite – “engineering”.

“Without that track [of writing under erasure],... the ultra-transcendental text [*bricolage* under erasure] will so closely resemble the pre-critical text [bricolage plain and simple] as to be indistinguishable from it.” (90.61) This undoing yet preserving of the opposition between bricolage and engineering is an analogue for Derrida’s attitude towards all oppositions – an attitude that “erases” (in this special sense) all oppositions.

Nietzsche

“Radicalizing the concepts of *interpretation, perspective, evaluation, difference...* Nietzsche, far from remaining simply (with Hegel and as Heidegger wished) within metaphysics, contributed a great deal to the liberation of the signifier from its dependence or derivation with respect to the logos, and the related concept of truth or the primary signified...” (31-32, 19)

Already in 1873, Nietzsche described metaphor as the originary process of what the intellect presents as “truth”:

“The intellect, as a means for the preservation of the individual, develops its chief power in dissimulation.” (...)

“A nerve-stimulus, first transcribe into an image! First metaphor! The image again copied into a sound! Second metaphor! And each time he [the creator of language] leaps completely out of one sphere right into the midst of an entirely different one.” (NW III. ii. 373)

“that impulse towards the formation of metaphors, that fundamental impulse of man, which we cannot reason away for one moment – for thereby we should reason away man himself...(NW III,ii 381) Later he will give this drive the name “will to power”. ...”the so-called drive for knowledge can be traced back to a drive to appropriate and conquer.” “in our thought, the essential feature is fitting new material into old schemas,... making equal what is new.”

Derrida. “Linguistics and Grammatology”

The definition of trace:

“*The trace is in fact the absolute origin of sense in general. Which amounts to saying once again that there is no absolute origin of sense in general. **The trace is***

a differance which opens appearance and signification. Articulating the living upon the nonliving in general, origin of all repetition, origin of ideality, the trace is not more ideal than real, not more intelligible than sensible, not more a transparent signification than an opaque energy and *no concept of metaphysics can describe it*. And as it is a fortiori anterior to distinction between regions of sensibility, anterior to sound as much as to light, is there a sense in establishing a “natural” hierarchy between the sound-imprint, for example, and the visual (graphic) imprint? The graphic image is not seen; and the acoustic image is not heard. The difference between the full unities of the voice remains unheard. And, the difference is the body of the inscription is also invisible.” (p.65)

“The (pure) trace is differance. It does not depend on any sensible plenitude, audible or visible, phonic or graphic. It is, on the contrary, the condition of such a plenitude. Although it does not exist, although it is never a being-present outside of all plenitude, its possibility is by rights anterior to all that one calls sign (signified/signifier, content/expression, etc.), concept or operation, motor or sensory. The differance is therefore not more sensible than intelligible and it permits the articulation of signs among themselves within the same abstract order – a phonic or graphic text for example – or between two orders of expression. It permits the articulation of speech and writing – in the colloquial sense – as it founds the metaphysical opposition between the sensible and the intelligible, then between signifier and signified, expression and content etc. If language were not already, in that sense, a writing, no derived “notation” would be possible; and the classical problem of relationships between speech and writing could not arise. ...

Differance is therefore the formation of form. But it is on the other hand the being-imprinted of the imprint.”

“And for modern linguistics, if the signifier is a trace, the signified is a meaning thinkable in principle within the full presence of an intuitive consciousness. The signified face, to the extent that it is still originally distinguished from the signifying face, is not considered a trace; by rights, it has no need of the signifier to be what it is. It is at the depth of this affirmation that the problem of relationships between linguistics and semantics must be posed. This reference to the meaning of a signified thinkable and possible outside of all signifiers remains dependent upon the onto-theo-theology that I have just evoked. It is thus the idea of the sign that must be deconstructed through a meditation upon writing which would merge, as it must, with the undoing [solicitation]

on onto-theology, faithfully repeating it in its *totality* and making it *insecure* in its most assured evidences. One is necessarily led to this from the moment that the trace affects the totality of the sign in both its faces. **That the signified is originally and essentially** (and not only for a finite and created spirit) **trace,**

that it is always already in the position of the signifier, is the apparently innocent proposition within which the metaphysics of the logos, of presence and consciousness, must reflect upon writing as its death and its resource.” (p73)

“**All dualisms, all theories of the immortality of the soul or of the spirit, as well as all monisms, spiritualist or materialist, dialectical or vulgar, are the unique theme of a metaphysics whose entire history was compelled to strive towards the reduction of the trace.** The subordination of the trace to the full presence summed up in the logos, ... such are the gestures required by onto-theology determining the archeological and eschatological meaning of being as presence, as parousia, as life without difference. ... Only infinite being can reduce the difference in presence. In that sense, the name of God,...is the name of indifference itself. Only a positive infinity can lift the trace, “sublimate” it. ... **the logos as the sublimation of the trace is theological.** Infnitist theologies are always logocentrism, whether they are creationisms or not.” (p71)

Saussure. On the sign. (p. 63)

“It is well-known that Saussure distinguishes between the “sound-image” and the objective sound. (p.98) ... The sound image is the structure of the appearing of the sound. It is the sound-image that he calls signifier, reserving the name of signified not for the thing, ... but for the “concept”, ... let us say for the ideality of the sense. “I propose to retain the word sign to designate the whole and to replace concept and sound-image respectively by signified and signifier”. The sound-image is what is heard; not the sound heard by the being-heard of the sound. Being-heard is structurally phenomenal and belongs to an order radically dissimilar to that of the real sound in the world.

“The latter [the sound-image] is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychic imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses. The sound-image is sensory, and if I happen to call it ‘material’, it is only in that sense, and by way of opposing it, to the other term of the association, the concept, which is generally more abstract” (p.98)