

2020

Theoretical Effects

Meta Mitrano
University of Maryland in Europe

Follow this and additional works at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/jx>



Part of the [French and Francophone Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Mitrano, Meta (2020) "Theoretical Effects," *Journal X*: Vol. 5 : No. 1 , Article 2.
Available at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/jx/vol5/iss1/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal X* by an authorized editor of eGrove. For more information, please contact egrove@olemiss.edu.

Theoretical Effects

Mena Mitrano

Mena Mitrano has a Ph.D. in English from Rutgers University, and is a part-time lecturer at the University of Maryland in Europe and at the University of Cassino (Italy). She has published in Modern Language Studies and College Literature. Among her work in progress is a book-length study entitled "Visitations: Gertrude Stein and the Act of Writing." She attended The School of Criticism and Theory at Cornell University in the summer of 1997.

When I am in love, there is palpitating, passionate, unique meaning, but only right here and now, a meaning that might be absurd in another conjunction.

—Julia Kristeva, *Histoires d'amour*

Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray to be able to interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit is at prayer but my mind is unproductive. So what is to be done?

—Paul, "The Second Letter to the Corinthians"

At the theater

In *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*, Marguerite Duras writes what might be called the primal scene of tie formation. We are at a seaside town, in a casino. It's night. The public place is brightly lit, full of people enjoying themselves. They are dancing. Food and drinks are laid out; huge plants form improvised screens beyond which people are chatting and moving. The moment comes when Anne-Marie Stretter appears at the door. Michael Richardson looks as she makes her way through the crowd and stands by others. From then on he seeks her. He crosses the crowd in her direction; more than once he misses her just before their trajectories match, swept astray by people moving and dancing. Not long after he reaches her and invites her to dance. They dance without mak-

ing a sound for each other. At the end of the dance, Anne-Marie Stretter leads the way and Michael Richardson, who had been with Lol, follows without turning back. Lol has been watching from the start; when the scene slows down too much for her eyes, she faints.

Lol's amnesia draws out for us the essentially schizoid link of social and private. Lol's loss of consciousness remarks flatly — in what other way could one comment? — on the incommensurability of the two. Shifted to the position of the third as Anne-Marie Stretter comes in and Michael Richardson follows her back with unremitting concentration, Lol's person is taken over by a revolutionary change. She must understand Being as being in a place, a temporary place from which the sudden other removes us.¹ She must know Being as awaiting to be moved to a third position, that of the witness. Through the univocal encounter of Anne-Marie Stretter and Michael Richardson, Lol is now made to watch what Being had so recently meant to her. She must bear witness to a brutal, full meaning that asserts itself without history, precedents, or knowledge (the two are complete strangers until they walk away so obviously as lovers). Lol's amnesia inaugurates a dissociative link: as I say I, the other rises; as I say I, my identity withdraws, shifted at the request of the other that I cannot — what else could I do? — resist. "What is at stake here is the incision of an outside in an inside, a withdrawal of identity in the advent of identity" (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 200). Lol's fainting proves how "inaudible, untenable" (203) is this "strange election of dissociation: the choice of a non-objectifiable object [Lol's splitting from Michael Richardson who chooses Anne-Marie Stretter] which, incorporating itself, divides me," leaving me ravished every time after this (207). In the casino scene of *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*, Duras records a woman's birth into the philosophy of the Other. As she does so, she throws into relief a problem attendant to this birth.

In the third position the witness cedes to the other, and to the primacy of the other — Anne-Marie Stretter's velvet sheet was irresistible! — which she cannot change. The third position is ethical subjectivity, the alternative subjectivity of the dissociative link. Thereafter driven to the witness position in the triangulated space in which she has been newly born, Lol will experience herself in the non-event of being-as-the-object-of-choice, of private love. Duras, or Lol, raises an impossible question, a doubt without answer: must private love die for the Other, that is to say, for the sake of the social tie?

* * *

A woman and a man early in the evening. What kind of leap, and across what kind of abyss, is needed to bring this man and this woman near? Even simply in space, materially close. When I think that this is impossible — it was at hand and so impossible for our man and our woman in the evening — I think about love.

On their way to the theater, he said: "You are already forming schools." The man had uttered the call; the woman understood. From there she, too, could watch Anne-Marie Stretter and her lover coming together. On the threshold of the theater she stepped forth. Uninventively, she said, "You could

start your own school,” submitting to that something between terror and boredom she had not asked to repeat this time. His voice rose at her back, from a larger distance now, “Yes. . . .” Having for sure seen which direction the woman would walk down the theater steps, the man went down the opposite way. He did not follow; he did not sit near. From that place one could watch and tell the tale of Anne-Marie Stretter and her lover.

Che cos'è la teoria?

Why can't the institution speak of love? Would (an attempt to theorize) love fold theory away? Would the institution have to learn of its own retreat? See itself as a grave from beyond which it speaks? And yet, to speak theoretically is, for me, my dearest, to speak lovingly, for when one speaks the truth one falls in love.

—Ewa Badowska, “Amuck”

To be welcomed into a School of Theory automatically means to attempt to write about theory. And writing about theory after a School of Theory invites you in means entering a contract: to give to the institution the practice that exceeds its own institutionalization. If it is hard to make sense of the notion of theory, it is because this notion perhaps appears as theory writes, in unpredictable turns. It would be easy to absolutize the institution and take writing outside a school — writing would be a pretext for the romance of madness, of the drift toward madness with which any institution tantalizes its outsiders. Being given theory by a school turns out to be a more complex affair.

In his essay on schizophrenia, “The Effort to Drive the Other Person Crazy,” Harold Searles recounts the story of a patient who was a brilliant interpreter: “She appeared to find some hidden meaning in almost every word and even in almost every syllable, looking at me significantly, with a sarcastic smile, very frequently, as though convinced I was aware of the secret meanings which she found in all this” (274-5). The woman's exegetical passion is so boundless, it puts beside the point interpretive boundaries and decorum. Where others stop at suspecting them, the woman draws the meanings out in the open of words. Searles may be “aware of the secret meanings” but it is the woman who “appeared to find” them. “What she was doing with me,” Searles concludes, “compares very closely with her mother's taking her to movies, during her childhood, and repeatedly commanding her, ‘Now, think!’ which the patient took — correctly, I believe — as the mother's command for the daughter to perceive the same secret, special meanings in the course of the movie which the mother, an actively psychotic person throughout the girl's upbringing, found in it” (275).

Searles's anecdote gives an idea of the fantasy of symmetry to which the members of the institution feel invited: to know how to read, as Searles's patient demonstrates, at times means to answer a call — “Now, think!” — to match some secret, special meanings already found. Institutions may be con-

strued by their own members as a bit like the schizophrenogenic mother who has found the meanings and asks the daughter to think them. Or they may resemble a liberal father whose permission still governs even the most Dionysian, anarchic carnivalesque. The Digital Dnderground's song "doowutchyalike" ends: "Daddy, can I go outside? / Gowhereyalike, kid." Daddy still grants permission. In both cases — the meaning-granting schizophrenogenic mother and the anarchic father — what stands out is the institution's self-questioning, evident in the gifts it exchanges with its acolytes: unlimited semiosis in the first case, disinhibition in the second. Thus, what the institution gives the moment one comes into contact with it is an anxiety about its own training power: how can I not exclude what I cannot train?²

It would seem a contradiction in terms to think of an institution of theory since theory initially emerged as a place from which to question traditional institutional practices of reading (and writing). To be given theory from its institution has a strange effect: one does not know whether to read the movie or do what one likes. While indecision lasts, one writes. But as one writes, the heady combination of schizophrenogenic power and the father's yes that has come with the institution of theory assails one with a doubt: why does writing about theory seem to remain, even after a School, an improvisation? Why, even after the entitlement of an institution, does writing about theory seem to drift toward a minor plot? Why does it seem as if it were the tongue of a mind unproductive?

In Searles's anecdote the woman's exegetic passion is especially evocative of a view of meaning commonly associated with theory — multiplicity and polysemy. And ambiguity, the offspring of proliferation of meaning that throws the very process — if not sense — of interpretation off.³ This vocation for disbanding meaning, this tendency to assail the reader "with feelings of confusion and unreality," is proof that theory has a pressing story to tell.

Theory rose in the academy when the university began to throw its doors open to all sorts of historical subjectivities previously barred from its halls. Theory has functioned as both the pretext for this opening and a surveilling device of the entrance of the new subjects. Perhaps, it is owing to this dual work that theory, although synonymous with the self-critique of privilege and the consequent disbanding of the unified literary canon, and despite its fortune, has not yet managed to dispel the suspicion of a phylogenetic bond of word and blood. According to this suspicion, linguistic access (linguistic subjectivity) flows from socially inflected symbolic access.

If it has become popular because it wants to do away with any hereditary right to language, theory is still sensitive to the classic charm of a familial, mimetic bond between language and society. Indeed, even structuralism, which for many, especially through its marriage to linguistics, anthropology, and Marxism, marked an initiation to theory as it came later to be known, might be said to have been victim to such seductive closure. As Emile Benveniste has established, subjectivity is an effect of language: I am when I say I. But how do we know that, even when taken as a purely formal universe, language still does not mimic, in incurable servility, history with all its institutions — class, materiality (which means material disparities), and, not least, affects: envy,

hatred, as well as love, etc. — whose origins get lost in the accidents of misfortune? If the signifying chain of differences is at once the chain of language and the circle of society, as an effect of language, subjectivity remains firmly planted in the terrain of justice — in the question of who can rise and who can't in the social circle. If we do not want to think of language in an exclusive way, as a faculty that comes (or does not come) to us through family (therefore, nation, academy, class) blood, then it is necessary to separate the symbolic from the familial transmission of language. (The linguistic and symbolic existences of the subject may not be one and the same.) In order to do this, language, which in its public dimension is voice, must be installed neither through the father nor the mother; it must be given by another. Similarly it can also be taken away, scandalously, unjustly, when the other abandons us.

The abandonment leaves the subject to an unsymbolized impoverishment that wanders through thought without aim; the withdrawal of the linguistic pass from another abandons the subject to an unjust and unhealed disparity. Correcting structuralism, “theory” says that the subject is neither born at birth nor in the mother tongue, but through a pass coming from another. Theory may be understood as the dialectical image of a contemporary tale difficult to bear: the tale about another giving you language or cutting you off from it, telling you that you can pass into it or taking the pass away. This and only this pass satisfactorily legitimizes the subject's citizenship in the country of the Concept.

For so long language and class have been locked in the reciprocal panic of a Hegelian dialectic: one, somehow, needed to kill the other in order to rise. Class has never meant linguistic entitlement or conceptual power; on the contrary, it has wandered through thought quietly withdrawn in the melancholic incorporation of the lost object of language, mourning a lost linguistic fluency. But in the tension between narrative and conceptuality, theory can disband the bond of blood and language; it can turn against a discriminatory Law that entitles, including or excluding, and thus permit the bond between class and language to come to the fore. Theory is language's belated mourning of “class,” the name for an unjust and unhealed disparity — a discontent — at the heart of the social tie.

June 17

Sputiamo su Hegel (The ordinary)

Man has searched for the meaning of life beyond and against life itself. For a woman, life and the meaning of life never cease to overlap.

—Carla Lonzi, *Sputiamo su Hegel*

The woman is at the School of Theory. She is expecting her birth. She wanders in the morning along the outskirts of the beautiful campus, where the front gardens are in bloom with the giant poppies she had not seen before, with peonies and irises; where the silent houses and the sloping lawns are supposed to consign to her something of the spirit of the place. “You are new,” some

voice out of the landscape will say in a moment. But no wrinkle, no dehiscence; only the muteness of an adherence, taking root inside, pulling outward — like destiny.

Back in her room, she gives in. “I realize,” the hand writes. This is what stoops down to kiss her eerily at The School of Theory: not Kant, not Hegel, not Foucault. Like Kafka’s man before the law she is missing the last good chance to enter with support. “I realize,” the hand pulls on without mercy, “the human tie.” The stark truth she could know really anywhere else, not here, not now but anywhere far and outside of the beautiful campus, had found her again. The woman now regresses back and back to a place she confusedly calls her “origins.” Her mind tumbles down — zero degree of thought. Now, once again, she will fall flat in that region where any School would leave, where no one is and language does not improve. No matter what it did before, the mind tumbles down in the swamp, reduced to feeling what the woman calls the banal pain of dialectics. The hand writes: “the possibility of someone else coming close brings immediately the pain of exclusion — one excludes as one comes close.” And she has no system against it. She had dreamed of acquiring the words of a truth beyond all reasons: a shared logos, like a vineyard with fruits for all, “whose only worth lies in being exposed . . . as when a face lights up, opening” (Jean-Luc Nancy xxxviii). The Face-Logos. But how to think the shareable logos, which is neither project nor appropriation, without setting everyone on the axis of the ethical, always ceding to another, living for another and in another? Finally oblivious to self-consciousness through this ceding, all trembling on the same bough? “Are you a Concept human tie?” the woman screams.

Now the woman is unlocking the door of the building. She hears someone’s quick footsteps. As she is opening the door, she turns and sees a young woman behind her. As the woman is opening the door, the young woman sweeps by into the building. She has a purpose and is holding onto it avidly, trying to be on her best behavior with others.

The woman goes up to her room and knows that time has changed her, changed her mind. Thought no longer comes in surging motions. One wave after another after another. Now it comes in fits. She does not know whether there is any desire attached to it now. It is more like a necessity: time and thought had come to coincide.

After the episode of the young woman, she looks at herself in the mirror. She sees the change in her face. She sees her past. She sees her young lover turn and go. She is wearing her gifts as she turns — a leather jacket, the ruby stones. From the back she looks burdened, yet expectant. She is the younger. Was that when the intellect and the body had collapsed into each other never to split again? The woman and the lover had come together originally to assuage the violence of history, one in the name of the ethical, the other in the name of private love. For one of them the body had to step aside. Believing she was fighting the violence of history, all the while she had prolonged it by choosing a body that from birth had had to step aside. She had only been telling a family story. Fearing for her mind, wanting a mind, she had chosen a woman. But in doing so, she had only prolonged a family story.

On her way to the theater she looked down at the gorge. “I realize,” the hand writes. She was falling — back and back. She heard the monotonous noise of the water, and the two o’clock chimes. She remembered Quentin in *The Sound and the Fury*, shaving. She thought of the smell of death in the midst of life and of laughing at the days to come.

June 25

Language could carry

At one point language could carry. At the table of the café, the five people jumped into verbal confrontation. It’s not that language carries immediately, even the most dexterous; we can carry our points more or less skillfully when we hear a comprehensible idiom. It follows that one can speak only after training, and less from accord. Does training at this café table disguise as accord?

It might feel like a problem of boundaries: how do I step into this circle? Will I? Can I? The questions, which essentially reduce speech to a case of mustering power among others, however, appear as a misguided plea for the fulfillment of a want one cannot decently thrust on strangers too soon. Will I? Can I? The personal labor required to attain a proposition and, thus, the terror of differential speech, are not discredited by the want behind them — a want for the event of thinking.

At this table, our voices taking turns, we allow one another to hear truths we had already come to, though scattered in different places, perhaps mixed to what Gramsci would take as signs of non-thought — “brilliant paradoxes, witty word games, verbal acrobatics” (25) — because, after all, the voice needs to find its *point d’appui*, and so spectacularly, before it can step in and warm up for the dialogue. But the coldness with which the others in the circle meet our internal agitation, almost thrusting the voice back below the throat, should not be taken at its face value. The novelty of our group is that the voice meets the obligation to rise and move outward not for our ears, in a way, not to put on this table the individual truths we have labored at so devotedly, oftentimes in such bleak isolation, but to carry on the obligation to hear the other “asking you to find the words with which he’ll make you hear him” (Nancy and Smock 311). Just for tonight, the Face-Logos with no project. We are in the vineyard, on the same bough.

June 27-28

Really

At the threshold of the theater, since their planets were revolving around each other, they took themselves in opposite directions, in haste, without looking. He did not follow, their eyeballs fixed solely on the lights on the wooden stage and the podium, on the rows of red seats. She thought he was another who wanted her to watch Anne-Marie Stretter again, so she took her place among the others. She would clear the path and go into the soul. Even as she

watched, her mind would be made strong by the speaker's propositions. She would know his ambition to make transparent the process of thinking as a squandering of his gift outward to many, many, and his self-destructive . . . social passion when thinking is on the verge of wanting to draw in things that cannot really be talked about, because how could we carry them in speech without also wailing about coffee, about having a coffee or a coke alone or with someone, about a pang, a betrayal, a carnal fear, a falling for . . . tenderness, for the language of tenderness?

The man was drinking coffee in the square, sitting on the steps. He was writing. The woman saw that he was watching women. She went to where he was. He said "No," and walked back with her over the bridge.

At 11 at night, he knocks on the door. He watches. Then he says, "So, can I kiss you?" The woman thinks, "let me give you a story." "Do you want me to watch Anne-Marie Stretter?" it is saying. "Go to the many others and I'll go to the soul," it is saying. At the end of cruelty they kiss and kiss. It is as if the man let the woman kiss him.

June 29

Meditation on need

In *Group Psychology*, searching for an explanation of contagion, of "the mental change which is experienced by an individual in a group" (88) and that makes him/her consent to things that, when alone he/she would not do, Freud comes up with the word "libido." Much later, in Foucault this word would become "power" and by this name will expose itself as both the reason and limit of groups. But, originally, for Freud libido is the energy of love, cosmically understood, and therefore not yet, as in Foucault, the mechanism of a public State that has perfectly infiltrated private souls. Freud writes:

Libido is an expression taken from the theory of the emotions. We call by that name the energy, regarded as a quantitative magnitude (though not at present actually measurable), of those instincts which have to do with all that may be comprised under the word "love." The nucleus of what we mean by love naturally consists (and this is what is commonly called love, and what the poets sing of) in sexual love with sexual union as its aim. *But we do not separate from this* — what in any case has a share in the name "love" — on the one hand, self-love, and on the other, love for parents and children, friendship and love for humanity in general, and also devotion to concrete objects and to abstract ideas.

(90; emphasis added)

Extricated from the context of the couple, sexual love confuses itself with humanitarian love; the sexual union prolongs the social love for family, friends, and humanity in general. Having lost its boundaries, "love" dissolves into the muddle of love. Freud's indistinction between the social and the private spheres is here less reminiscent of a Foucauldian ideological continuum of individual

and State apparatus and more of feminism. In this passage psychoanalysis and feminism, especially that form of historical feminism that in the 1970s and early 1980s was called woman-identified feminism, seem to meet on common ground, arising both from a similar passion to experience in the choice of another social justice in action. (The feminist partners find their equal in the couple analyst/analysand). To a certain extent, feminism repropounded Freud's muddle of love. Thriving on the juxtaposition of social and private love, woman-to-woman love (the politicized version of the lesbian relationship) permits to assimilate to the sphere of intimacy the logic of reparation for the unfairness daily met by all the needs of others, an unfairness that the social is unable to repair.

Feminist love of the same celebrated synchronicity between the partners: "Sleeping, turning in turn like planets / rotating in their midnight meadow" (Rich 82). The private couple, in turn, became a fit metaphor for a better social tie admitting the possibility of equality. From this perspective, the feminist couple represents a position similar to what John Rawls calls "the veil of ignorance." The essential premise of social justice, the veil of ignorance, demands that we cede to the other's right as if it were our right. We start as same and we see the need of others. Out of restriction and in recognition of this need, one yields to the other's part-taking. The problem with this position is that it conflates social justice and private love. From Freud to feminism to Rawls, it seems that a healed, just social tie would depend on this confusion.

* * *

Now that you are, the needs of others have become my numbness from you. When you turn against me you save me from the crudeness of this split; you give me back to the social. Clad in a veil of ignorance, mindful of others' fairness to part-take of you, I have to give you.

Perhaps I was your social from the start. Did you kiss in me all the others' need for justice? Did you repair with your kiss? Did you want to opt for the manageable and stop at night with the language of tenderness at least one of the million simultaneous cries, "Unfair to me"?

"There is no doubt," Martin Stanton writes, "that Freud sternly admonished Ferenczi for what he termed 'the kissing technique' (*Kusstechnik*), that is, the purported permission for patients to express physical affection to their analyst — as long, of course, as it did not drift into full-scale sexual intercourse" (2). Freud thunders with disapproval of his pupil, who was taking the teacher's psychoanalysis in an anarchic direction: "I see that the differences between us come to a head in a technical detail which is well worth discussing. You have not made a secret of the fact that you kiss your patients and let them kiss you; I had also heard that from a patient of my own" (quoted in Jones 174-5). Enraged, the master lashes out at the pupil, explaining the "new" kissing technique less with Ferenczi's healing zeal and more with his self-serving desire to dethrone Freud himself in the eyes of future psychoanalytic adepts: "A number of independent thinkers in matters of technique will say to themselves: why stop at a kiss? Certainly one gets further when one adopts 'pawing' as well,

which after all doesn't make a baby. And then bolder ones will come along who will go further to peeping and showing — and soon we shall have accepted in the technique of analysis the whole repertoire of demiviergerie and petting-parties . . . and God the Father Ferenczi gazing at the lively scene he has created will perhaps say to himself: maybe after all I should have halted in my technique . . . before the kiss."

Yet, despite Freud's rage, Ferenczi may be viewed as Freud's true disciple. He was acting out the muddle of love that the teacher himself — only an agent of history, as we all are — registered in his thinking. "Psychoanalytic 'cure' is in direct proportion to the cherishing love given by the psychoanalyst to the patient" (Ferenczi quoted in Stanton 139). To assuage the unfairness of their pain, to nurture and maybe heal his patients, it was said that Ferenczi, the practitioner of Freud's muddle of love, kissed them by letting them kiss him.

July 5

Literature is fire⁴

Literature is fire: being sought, being written to — a kind of panic — coming into debt, indebted — "please forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" — debtor coming back to make you debtor with exhausted eyes.

July 9

Antigone (At the Thai restaurant)

As if you were my brother — before you, this coarse uniform, as if you were my brother — no candle at our table because you are my brother. When you are my brother I outspoke the tyrant — gloriously — outside of the polis, anonymous, unfeminine in my coarse tunic, yet unique in my rebellion. Because you are my brother, the Law does not exist, this fragile thing invented by the whims of hysterical men. Everybody can see that. Then why do so few speak? If women had brothers, they would speak more often. When you are my brother I am on my quest to find the law; there is no reason for its fixity, I have nothing to lose in knocking down tyrants, my uniform makes me strong. The tie snaps. I share nothing with the polis. My comrades and I laugh at the awe with which you hold yourselves subjected to the Symbolic. There is nothing sure about it; you invent your own chains and call them male eyes that see you in, inside your societies, giving you rights — be insiders inside. Power does not come through them. Unchain yourselves. If you were my brother I would not be endangered near the tyrant. Strong in my anonymous uniform, I would not be prevailed upon by such an anonymous force to dream of having my hair untied and perfume oil between my fingers since you'd be my brother.

[. . .]

July 11
May I laugh

Now we are in the ringed wood with the wall round it. This is Elvedon. I have seen signposts at the cross roads with one arm pointing "To Elvedon." No one has been here. The ferns smell very strong, and there are red funguses growing beneath them. Now we wake the sleeping daws who have never seen a human form; now we tread on rotten oak apples, red with age and slippery. There is a ring of wall round this wood; nobody comes here. . . . That is Elvedon. The lady sits between the two long windows, writing.

—Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*

Every reader of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* has fantasized about the mysterious woman in Elvedon. Every reader has probably wanted to carry on with Bernard's story about her. The woman sat writing in the empty house, tied to her desk, charmed in Elvedon. The spruce tree boughs fluttered through the window pane, over the grey slates of the roof of the white garage. Through the night the windows were kept lit, and the woman wrote at her desk in Elvedon. Every reader of *The Waves* has wished Bernard had finally shown a text by this woman in Elvedon. What was she writing all the time?

If we read again, however, another, perhaps more pressing, question forms in the mind: How might it feel to be in an enchanted place that has "never seen a human form," where "[n]o one has been," and where the ripples of this unique absence have irradiated from the center outward, to the things in the landscape deep in sleep, to the oak apples "red with age." The woman is in a heroic place, romantic to the outsider's eye. Her unity with her writing is indeed unvanquished: she is always the woman writing, the one designated by her exclusive activity. Thus she has passed into subjectivity to the eyes of those who stare at the scene: less a woman and more a writer, herself now a figure of speech in the race of her writing. This is why Bernard cannot show us any text of hers; so wide has the distance had to be between the palpitations inflecting the woman's orthography and the expectations raised by the scene of her tenacity, by the unchanging intensity with which she gives her existence between the two long windows lit through the night. One, like Bernard, wouldn't look for anything less than an interminable text of the future. Yet, considering the place of the woman, it is sensible to imagine her in a moment of weakness. On her desk her notebook worn with use, she succumbs to a roughness of expression, lets the hand go after the ink, annotating. Those who have discovered Elvedon would not think of reading in the text they are awaiting from her perhaps a curse against the interminable human distance that — unaware to them — she continues to occupy.

July 15
Just for an hour

The woman crossed the lawn, reached the mansion, and lingered in the dining room. As calm descended on her, she walked out into the garden, slowly. It

was late afternoon in the summer. People were humming to each other in couples and in groups, and her dress was billowing as if in a novel. She saw a circle with an empty spot. She took her place there. She saw the friendly faces who took her in the circle. The air became very still. People were chatting around her, yet their talk was held still at a remove from her; she could not distinguish a syllable. She was at the far end of the pier looking on the stilled mainland.

After a while the man got up as she was trying to. He went to get her a glass of wine; he got them both a glass of white wine. He came back and sat by her side. People's eyes in the circle were on them; the woman and the man were being together. She did not know what she was saying. She was talking about Foucault and how American he was, and going for the philosophical experience of the subject without ground, then about Foucault in the summer, lying in the scorching sun of the long strip of beach in Civitavecchia, discovering Nietzsche for the first time. They saw an ant carrying her food in the grass. The man looked at the ant carrying the food approvingly, then he looked at the woman and asked her to go swimming. The woman was scared of crowds.

Everything stood extremely still. People held their plates. The man and the woman finished the wine. He said to go. The woman stood up; a bell jar had fallen on the entire party; noises were numb. The moment had come; people receded in the background. But before she took the first step her soul stumbled; she saw the scene again. Her lover had cut her tongue before all times, for all times. Her voice said, "I am positioned; you are positioning me now in the place left empty not long ago, and only for a while, by chance. I am arbitrarily in place of . . ." "Your choice," she said to the man, "moving of objects as if, as if," she stumbled. "Even in our most private motions when we soar with Plato's charioteer it is the violence of history that chooses, when we flutter, twitching and abandoned, under its blows and mistake that trembling for love." She wanted to go mad and caress the horses and the animals in all cities. Her rage would have destroyed the world. Through the long window of the mansion's dining room, S.'s eyes caught hers for the classic fraction of a second. He waited to see what she would do. Following the man, the woman stopped to throw her paper plate in the trash can. The man stopped to wait. Although someone else followed them, everyone knew the woman and the man were walking out together.

The man dived; the water kept them apart, a wide space in between. The woman thought, "Will our minds meet? Are they meeting?" Keeping at bay the loss of a plot just when one could be begun, she enjoyed letting him be a stranger with the privilege of scrutiny — pondering decisions, weighing, balancing accounts in his mind while the watery space in between kept them still untied. She dreamed of questions which he bore as a beacon. He had reached the rocky ledge beside the falls, on the other shore of the gorge. He sat in the evening sun; she saw his shape in focus but removed at the other end. Perhaps their gazes met, but who knows for sure from afar, with the pool of water in between. She waved; he waved back, lit by sunset. She went down with her mouth into the water. "He is my brother," she said to the water. She was in Virgil. She held to the rock on her side of the gorge.

The stillness she had brought over from the party cracked; she woke up to the presence of people around the circle of the gorge — the children, the mothers and the fathers, men, women — they stirred, played, made noises. She thought of coming from overseas, from beyond her ultramarine sea and being in the book of paradise if only for an hour. She cut herself lose, untied from narrative. She thought, “I am positioned and he is not positioning me: I am the fullness of sunset on my brother to send him forth.” Only her eyes above the water, her body in this water tinged with earth and tree reflections as if now it were in her ultramarine sea from beyond — no difference. On the surface of the well of the gorge — “just for an hour” he had said “to cool down” — contingency, brotherhood, nature.

July 16

Ontology and the Symbolic

For politics does not happen when you act on behalf of your own damaged good, but when you act, without guarantees, for the good of all—this is to take the risk of the universal interest. Politics in this sense requires representation, the critique of representation, and the critique of the critique of representation.

—Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*

The Symbolic is the circle of the gorge. If the woman were to follow the man she would be lost to ontology. If she swam to him, the love-object would be made to consent to being the object of choice. Then, from him an infinite gain would come, resembling the touch of universality. In the convergence of the erotic and the intellectual, desire for the Concept consents to the ontologizing confusion of individual self-interest and the interest of the other. One’s gain is made to become the other’s.

Martin Heidegger met Hannah Arendt and gained *Being and Time* from her. In turn, she received intellectual empowerment. In his presence she received the indelible birthmark of the kin of philosophy and of philosophers. Love was installed, a love that meant being chosen by thinking, by the Concept itself — lastingly:

so bright, so different, so young, so sexual, so Jewishmerry and melancholy at the same time — this woman, half his age and so knowledgeable . . . he wasn’t used to that, was entranced, as was she. What female student, 18 and willing to listen, open to the spirit and tone of the lecture room and male character and male tongues, would want to resist? Nor did she want to resist, she wanted to love what she heard, and did so.

(Theweleit 28)

Entranced by the unresisting consent of another that needs our need, our sense of locality and of limits dissipates. For Heidegger, Arendt was “the inspiration for his work in those years, the impetus to his passionate thinking” (Theweleit 28). In a European hut, removed in a nature away from the city and the hub of

modernity, and not despite the body, but precisely because his ontic body was sustained by an unresisting love-object, Heidegger could theorize the world. The Heidegger/Arendt relationship is exemplary because in this case theorizing the world, that is, the authority of the Concept, presumes the male body's kinship with a giving maternal breast. Heidegger gave to the young, to an Arendt "willing" and "open . . . to male character and male tongues" what the young will not be easily weaned from — the milk of thought . . . *la filosofía*. From her erotic tie to Heidegger she gained a universal tongue, a tongue that one speaks as easily as one can draw milk from a generous breast. At the conjunction of the erotic and the intellectual, Arendt thus received the pass to philosophy. The erotic alone could not give her the pass; it could come to her if Heidegger functioned simultaneously as male love-object and yielding breast, nourishing the young with the milk of thought.⁵ Thus her pass came to Arendt from a "mother" beyond the Father, both beyond the father figure that the older Heidegger was to his young pupil, and beyond the Freudian sense of the male child's identification with the father as a necessary event in the child's development, which ultimately means beyond homosexuality as the privileged figure of the social tie.

This "mother" might have nothing to do with gender. In fact, the presumed necessity to think through the gender binary (sexed thought) might be a negation of that primary attestation of her kinship to philosophy that a woman intellectual gains from the convergence of the erotic and the intellectual situations. Though entitling, this convergence begs a question: if for women intellectuals identification with the father means gaining the milk of thought and becoming fluent in the Concept, can one think without a Master?

If from her identification with the Father — which is more complex than it appears because it also sends us to a maternal source — Arendt gained intellectual entitlement, Heidegger, in his turn, did not learn anything from Arendt's difference — as a Jew, as young, as woman, as listener. What was at stake was Heidegger's milk-philosophia, its absolute essentiality as it made the listener willing, yielding from the very youth, giving up the possession of her difference (the Symbolic) in exchange for that which the thing she heard would bring. She was in a love-debt: "open to the spirit and tone of male character and male tongues, who would want to resist?" (Theweleit 28).

Through his willing Jewish pupil, Heidegger had renewed proof that this milk could feed the aggressor and the betrayed equally. And as he gave and betrayed, Heidegger became hypnotized into the fundamental disengagement of thought and the State. This disengagement is another name for ontology. Like politics, ontology "take[s] the risk of the universal interest" (G. Rose 62): in the name of, on behalf of, for, with, on the side. Like politics, ontology takes the risk that if I speak for you, you will submit, breast-feeding as it betrays others but lending them the milk. "It requires representation," a primary castration: no withdrawal is possible from the potlatch of love-debt. Gender must be left out for the milk-philosophia to run from the breast of the modern world (Theweleit 59).

Exchanged for the pass to universality that comes with the milk, gender, an initial and long-lasting sacrifice, must ultimately remain before thought, an

abyss in which thought risks to fall. The problem is who can and would want to resist this pass? If the pass is so difficult to resist, gender will never interrupt the intimate, seductive, and exclusive whispering flowing directly from thought to State. (With a “Heidegger-lord” [Theweleit 59] catatonic to the good or evil of the universal interest that his children loved to hear when they loved his milk, we have the Nazi Heidegger.)

July 16

Euryalus and Nisus, the poem of force

The woman and the man returned to the gorge, in full daylight. The bustle was carrying on: the young men, the children at play, and the women. The man watched. There were two people between them, but the stillness from the previous day had caught up with them. The man and the woman’s gazes never met. They were called, would be called even before death, elsewhere, each responding to that magnetic instance just passing by the presence of the other. They destroyed each other’s presence. The woman thought she and the man were making love in the stillness, across from the presence of the two people between.

The man came out from the water for the second time to lie in the afternoon sun. His hair was dripping; his eyes elsewhere, after the magnet. They were in Virgil, where a difference so discouraging to the Concept must be forced through the brotherly tie. The woman lived, wrote, had time — and the letter, and what was the point of the letter? “Your body is so fragile, my Love!”

[. . .]

July 17-18

“So, can I kiss you?”

[A]ny society — is essentially political, since it is wholly dependent on the figure of the Chief. . . . But we must go on to say that society, any society, is fundamentally *totalitarian* — not, I hasten to add, because state coercion or tyrannical violence are somehow essential to this conception; these traits are in no way exclusive to totalitarian societies, and Freud clearly said that the reign of the *Führer* rests above all on the fiction of his love. Rather, if society for Freud is totalitarian in the strictest sense, it is because it presents itself as an integrally political totality, a *totale Staat*, knowing no divisions except the one — minimal, and solely intended to relate the social body to itself — between the beloved Chief and his loving subjects.

—Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *The Emotional Tie*

Can one-to-one love be other than fascistic? What do we do with this passion in a private human relation, with this glitch that nevertheless requires reckoning in our rightful search for an alternative sociality? You turn. As both moth-

er tongue and language slip, you turn away; you turn your back and this is good. As you turn, you interrupt the totality. I can then hesitate: should I swim into you, should I not. If I know you will turn just as my mind slips toward you, if I know you will follow someone else's back, I will also know in you a crack in the totality. I will be "beyond," more toward the ethical, less stuck in the political. "In the name of what do we need to imagine an alternative sociality?"⁶ My rope is cut loose; I float; I regress to the integral totality — your loving subject, my beloved chief. There is nothing ethical about private love; only religion could restrain its extremist political vocation, or you — when you turn away. The greatest welling up of absence of private love gives rise to fascism. Now you, as you turn against me as I slip, teach me and cure me.

[. . .]

July 22-23

Trauma and parataxis

No man is an Iland, intire of itselfe; every man a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine; if a Clod bee washed away by the Sea, Europe is the lesse, as well as if a Promontorie were, as well as if a Mannor of thy friends, or of thine owne were; Any Mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde . . .

—John Donne, Meditation XVII

Parataxis is a figure of accretion, it heaps words on, using them more than choosing them. It departs from calculation for lack of time, and from exegesis for the same reason, because the writer is in a hurry, "so inspired by his theme, it fills him so completely, and the desire to communicate himself and to be understood is so overwhelming" (Auerbach 166).

If lyric dreams of an "absolute inseparation" (Derrida 229) of body and letter, parataxis lives this desire in the light of day — acting out one's being, making a scene, graphic and therefore comprehensible to all, striking at "the crucial spot" in the heart, dissolving its memorized lines into haziness — "it arouses emotion, it staggers" (Auerbach 168).

An affront to the sovereignty of language, paratactic expression — "hurried, awkward, uncalculated" (166), constantly driving itself into public display — lives on language's raw material. The hurried writer loses one figure of speech after the other to the urgency of the acting-out of being — "to communicate himself."

Parataxis gains conviction when details can no longer mislead, when, no longer a question of symbolic investiture, language becomes rudiment, occasion at the unilateral service of expression. An arresting exaggeration? A second-hand possession, that is not given, not by the mother, not with the mother tongue, a secondariness that, therefore, no munificent giver could ever give. Therefore not even a law, benign — that is, inviting — or otherwise castrating. The writer so filled with the gripping theme, with the aim of such "unilateral directness of expression" (167), arrives at the scene.

July 24

Possession-love and metaphysics

Concealing shame sabotages intimacy.

—Adam Phillips, *Terrors and Experts*

In the classic philosophy of Plato the ascent toward wisdom begins in love. Philosophical and linguistic power, figured by the upward movement of the soul, coincide with erotic attraction. As Julia Kristeva discusses it, the episode of the charioteer in *Phaedrus* illustrates the interdependence of soul and eros and, by extension, the dependence of the philosopher on “the surge of empathic desire” (66) that unfolds in a violent “somasochistic psychodrama” (64):

Now when the charioteer beholds the vision of love, and has his whole soul warmed through sense, and is full of pricklings and ticklings of desire, the obedient steed, then as always under the government of shame, refrains from leaping on the beloved; but the other, heedless of the pricks and of the blows of the whip, plunges and runs away, giving all manner of trouble to his companion and the charioteer, whom he forces to approach the beloved and to remember the joys of love. They at first indignantly oppose him and will not be urged on to do terrible and unlawful deeds; but at last, when he persists in plaguing them, they yield and agree to do as he bids them.

(Plato, *Phaedrus*, quoted in Kristeva 65)

The *bildung* of the philosopher relies on the struggle with possession-love to the extent that, as Kristeva comments, “phallic domination is elevated and metamorphosed into apprenticeship of the Good and the True” (67). Quite a different version of love can be found in Plato’s *Symposium*. There, Diotima bears the tale of an ideal love that constructs in view of the supreme good and of immortality. The knot of desire and intellectual empowerment seems less significant than the choice of the Good, a choice that unites the lover and the philosopher. In Diotima’s tale the philosopher/lover is the one who can stand midway between ignorance and wisdom, the position of tempered desire. As far as the reader can tell, in the case of a woman — Diotima’s — occupying this position of wisdom does not make her an entitled philosopher: though erudite, Diotima is not present at the banquet of the dialecticians. In Plato’s text she is a removed presence, and her theorizing is reported secondhand by Socrates.

* * *

Now imagine the woman again, and a room. Imagine the night in which the lover has come within the reach of the object of Beauty that had been before forever out of sight, lost, merely a shadow crumbling to the touch in the cave of imagos. Imagine the path ahead of which the object of Beauty now leads the lover; the lover’s hand extended and the path. From a point on, the beloved follows, his hand too reaching to heal, taking the language of tenderness out of the room and in the roads and over the bridge almost imperceptibly for the lover

— his hand falling lightly over the hip of the lover, healing, already a healer's hand in place of the beloved's, then already again quickly out of sight as it was before, ahead of the path. Imagine the path leading up to the room and the lover once more having covered the distance up to the point of beholding the object of Beauty.

Imagine the room, the lover and the beloved locked into the embrace in which the lover can no longer let go of the beloved. If in the classic philosophy of Plato the dialectician and the philosopher begin in love, if knowledge plants itself primarily in a tie of love, for the woman in the room, who has come within the reach of Beauty, knowledge remains a drama of perpetual suspension. Positioned between the winged pair, with the prickling of desire that demands the narrativization of erotic aggression and domination, and Diotima's ideal concept of love, how will the woman choose the path of wisdom? What will make of her the philosopher, the dialectician — which she knows she will be — with any sense of conviction? The beloved's embrace locks her between an empowering subjection and an unreachable object of Beauty, two as yet uninitiated, unresolved paths. When will philosophy begin?

Imagine the room, the brightness of the lights, the knotted bodies suspended between the act-predicated narrative of the sadomasochistic drama of the charioteer and Diotima's path which if taken, the woman now thinks, is bound for elliptical narrative, for the loss of the Concept. What will the woman do?

For the woman locked in the embrace, bidden by the presence of the beloved, her soul born through the pricklings of sense, divided between the horror at the beloved's flight and her own undecidability, wisdom (metaphysics) lies in the trauma of an in-between. The solution of the kiss, while reestablishing an accord, a mutuality without violence, comes as the pass into a secondary form of metaphysics. The kiss returns her to the poverty of an originary suspension, a figure of reciprocity and yet of secondary thought. Does the metaphysical power passed with a kiss that stops before possession-love amount to boring theories? Does it risk itself as a subplot of the universal? A local, sexed thought, forever an image, a representation, a death-in-life?

Styles of kissing can be seen but not easily described, as though kissing resists verbal representation. It is striking that, unlike other forms of sexuality, there is little synonymy of kissing. It has generated no familiar slang, acquired virtually no language in which it can be redescribed. . . . Apparently for the sake of interest stories often ignore, in a way films do not, the fact that the kiss itself is a story in miniature, a subplot.

(Phillips, *On Kissing* 95-6)

Imagine the room. The two locked in the embrace, kissing. The woman thought of the beloved's hair as he led, ahead on the path, before approaching. She thought he got the book, read it, and went swimming because he had become the charioteer feeling. She saw him swimming in the gorge, and his slender body, as he kissed her in the room. The beloved lifts the lover and carries the lover until the end of the bright light, near the lit candle. Both are now suspended in a kissing that neither eradicates her from language nor sends

through her the birth of conceptuality. Until before the beloved's boredom. Even as the beloved is telling what he loves, almost beginning the narrative, the kiss reunites the two and returns them to human mutuality, freezing their shapes into the paradigm for the good social tie — a brotherly tie. It was as if the man let the woman kiss him: only the network of metaphors of healing could describe the kiss. This terminable, almost session-long kissing, out of need.

Arrived at on the way to a dialogue with his patient, Hungarian psychoanalyst Sandor Ferenczi's healing tenderness would seem the logical outcome of a psychoanalysis understood as a philosophy in practice, almost as a "*vita filosofica*." Ferenczi's tenderness revisits the classic scenario of the knot of knowledge and love, the dialogue of Socrates and Phaedrus by the plane tree and the spring. In the passage from philosophy to psychoanalysis, however, the philosophical dialogue is no longer complicitous with possession-love. The "maternal friendliness" (Stanton 135) of Ferenczi's kiss displaces the power of the Concept with the quest for a healing social tie. While in the charioteer story conceptual power was indivisible from the eroticized traumatic transit of the initiated, Ferenczi's tenderness — with a touch of utopian impatience, perhaps — rephrases for all of us the Concept as the question of an ethical beyond, of a better, more vigilant intersubjective tie: "Ferenczi wanted the psychoanalytic relationship to be the paradigm for social relations" (Phillips, *Terrors* 28). Taking its cue from the modern urban spectacle — so well portrayed by Marx and Engels — of strangers brutally, arbitrarily, thrown into a sudden intimacy, Ferenczi's psychoanalysis concerns itself with "the greatest need."⁷ But in trying to heal from this historical trauma, it also necessarily awakens the originary parallel trauma of philosophy's love.

Notes

1. The third position is a familiar theme in Duras's writing. The story of Anne-Marie Stretter and her lover appears again in *The Vice-consul*, and one of Duras's last works, *Yann Andrea Steiner*, returns to this theme through the considerable age difference separating the woman protagonist (Duras) and her young lover. In the love-making scene the old woman must put herself in the position of a child to bridge in her mind the scandalous gap between herself and her lover, half her age.

2. This is the question Jacqueline Rose asks in her page for the SCT Symposium, in *Postcards from the Edge*.

3. In her essay on Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw," Shoshana Felman asks: "Is it at all possible to read and to interpret ambiguity without reducing it in the very process of interpretation? Are reading and ambiguity in any way compatible?" (*Writing and Madness* 165).

4. Title of a 1967 essay by Vargas Llosa and included in *Making Waves*.

5. For the exigencies of this fiction, the relationship between Heidegger and her pupil has been simplified. For a more articulate discussion on the light that this relationship might shed on the question of love and the transmission of ideas, see my more academic, unpublished version of "Theoretical Effects."

6. Benjamin Meyer, study group session, 18 July 1997, School of Criticism and Theory, Cornell University.

7. "If we keep our cool, educational attitude, even vis-à-vis an opisthotonic patient [that is, one whose body is tensed up with anxiety], we tear to shreds the last thread that connects him to us. The patient gone off into his trance is a child indeed who no longer reacts to intellectual explanations, only perhaps to maternal friendliness; without it, he feels lonely and abandoned in his greatest need" (Ferenczi quoted in Stanton 135).

Works Cited

- Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis*. 1953. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1968.
- Borch-Jacobsen, Mikkel. *The Emotional Tie: Psychoanalysis Mimesis, and Affect*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1992.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Che cos'è la poesia?" *The Derrida Reader*. Ed. Peggy Kamuf. New York: Columbia UP, 1991. 221-37.
- Duras, Marguerite. *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*. New York: Grove P, 1966.
- Felman, Shoshana. *Writing and Madness: Literature/Philosophy/Psychoanalysis*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. 1921. SE 18: 69-143.
- Gramsci, Antonio. *Le Opere*. Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1997.
- Jones, Ernest. *Sigmund Freud: Life and Work*. London: Hogarth, 1953.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Tales of Love*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1987.
- Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe, and Jean-Luc Nancy. "The Unconscious Is Destructured like an Affect." *Stanford Literature Review* 6.2 (1989): 191-209.
- Llosa, Mario Vargas. *Making Waves*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1997.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Birth to Presence*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc, and Ann Smock. "Speaking Without Being Able To." Jean-Luc Nancy. *The Birth to Presence*. 310-18.
- Phillips, Adam. *On Kissing, Tickling, and Being Bored: Psychoanalytic Essays on the Unexamined Life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993.
- . *Terrors and Experts*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1996.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Twenty-one Love Poems." *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose*. Ed. Albert Gelpi and Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi. New York: Norton, 1993.
- Rose, Gillian. *Mourning Becomes the Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.
- Rose, Jacqueline. "SCT Symposium — Cornell, Summer 1997." *Postcards from the Edge*. School of Criticism and Theory, Cornell University. Summer 1997.
- Searles, Harold F. "The Effort to Drive the Other Person Crazy — An Element in the Aetiology and Psychotherapy of Schizophrenia." *Collected Papers on Schizophrenia and Related Subjects*. New York: International Universities P, 1965. 254-83.

- Stanton, Martin. *Sandor Ferenczi: Reconsidering Active Intervention*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1991.
- Theweleit, Klaus. *Object-Choice*. Trans. Malcom Green. London: Verso, 1994.
- Woolf, Virginia. *The Waves*. 1931. London: Penguin, 1975.