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**PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE NON-CONCEPTUAL:  
THE APORIA OF THE PRE-SYMBOLIC**

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**Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to extend the scope of consideration of the pre-oedipal or pre-symbolic mother-infant relationship by focusing on a ‘third’ space that exists between them, and the remains of this space in the infant’s unconscious. Through the theoretical explication of two non-concepts, the “third aesthetic” and the “O-Function”, the thesis endeavours to develop a framework, from a psychoanalytic perspective, which considers how the inauguration of a trace is established so that the infant may seek out or create meaning at a later stage of life following maturation or individuation. The thesis has not however insisted on defining the construct of meaning per se, which is invariably a subjective and existential endeavour or idiom, but is rather concerned with what may provide a possibility for subsequent meaning-making endeavours. The notion of a third space, which alludes to a meeting point of two subjectivities which in turn proliferates a third arena of negotiation, considers *other* (liminal) spatial and temporal possibilities that exist (or rather ex-sist) between the mother and the infant. This third time-space (the “third aesthetic”), which takes its cue from “*chora/khōra*” (as explored by Plato, Julia Kristeva and Jacques Derrida) and the “potential space” (as identified by the psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott), is developed through a consideration of thirdness (or more specifically thirdness under erasure, and the refusal to enclose it within a triad), the aesthetic, metaphor and metonymy, and rhythm. What remains of this third energetic body in the infant’s unconscious (the “O-Function”) is considered through the tropes of the trace, the gift and cinders, as well as through the ineluctably uncanny rhythms of *desistance* (of the future-to-come). The thesis focuses critically on what tropological or metaphoric forums may be provided in service of explicating these two ‘non-concept’ concepts given the problematics of representation.

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## 1. THE FUTURE ANTERIOR OF THE PAST IMPOSSIBILITY: THE FRAME OF NON-SIMPLE PRESENCE

Instead of being light opposed to darkness, or knowledge opposed to ignorance, truth is light which does not give up mystery, light which illuminates without revealing; never total, never authoritarian or dogmatic.

Luce Irigaray (2000:110)

This work, in its discontinuity, proceeds by means of two movements: the *straight line* (advance, increase, insistence of an idea, a position, a preference, an image) and the *zigzag* (reversal, contradiction, reactive energy, denial, contrariety, the movement of a Z, the letter of deviance).

Roland Barthes (1977: 90-91)

In order that something like cohesion, something like causality, that some kind of meaning might be revealed and that it can in some way be told, the historian must invent units, a hero, a nation, an idea, and he must allow to happen to this invented unit what has in reality happened to the nameless.

Hermann Hesse (1972: 62)

The realist unmakes the coherent multiple world into a collection of random objects. He thinks of reality as that which has an objective existence, but understands no more about objective existence than that which he can touch and feel, sell and buy. A lover of objects and objectivity, he is in fact caught in a world of symbols and symbolism, where he is unable to see the thing in itself, as it really is, he sees it only in relation to his own story of the world...Reality is continuous, multiple, simultaneous, complex, abundant and partly invisible.

Jeanette Winterson (1996: 143; 151)

Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honour of the name.

Jean-François Lyotard (1984: 82)

For that future world and for that within it which will have put into question the values of sign, word, and writing, for that which guides our future anterior, there is as yet no exergue.

Jacques Derrida (1976: 5)

### **Disseminating Prefacing: The Foreplay of the Outwork (*Hors-Texte.....Hors D'oeuvre*)**

In her rather monumental preface to the translation of Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Spivak (1976: ix) writes: "If you have been reading Derrida, you will know that a plausible gesture would be to begin with a consideration of 'the question of the preface'". So let me at least attempt to begin with this quasi-injunction, as if it were/is/will be at all possible to begin from the beginning. I would like to stress in this section the problems of introducing, of constructing a pre-face, particularly in the case of this thesis where the introduction was conceived after the body of the thesis had been written up. Derrida's questioning of all that pre-faces highlights the fundamental impasse of attempting to gather up material into a coherent, reduced body and introduce or present it.



This (therefore) will not have been a thesis<sup>1</sup>.....a thesis whose itinerary could be recognised, whose continuity and underlying laws could be pointed out, whose overall concept or meaning could be squarely set forth. The textuality of this thesis is assembled otherwise; it proceeds otherwise and subverts the intention of *presentation* in that it can no longer settle the case of those residual writing processes which call the very form of a thesis into question and threaten to dismantle it. To tamper with the precedence of a received thetic form is, according to Derrida (1981: 3-4), to “disturb everything else”, and therefore by necessity one needs to redouble one’s endeavour in working out at every turn the question of the retention and preservation of names: of *paleonymy*. Must the effects of a new meaning, concept or object necessarily be eclipsed by a tradition, weighed down by the burden of memory? Should “literature”, as an example, still designate that which “already breaks away from literature – away from what has always been conceived and signified under that name – or that which, not merely escaping literature, implacably destroys it?”. This question pertains to appellation, to designation, and whether what has always been conceived or signified in/as the name of ‘literature’ can coagulate into something “fundamentally homogenous, univocal or non-conflictual”. This latter configuration is predicated on the assumption of the unity of a concept affirmed by the autonomy of meaning and the ideal purity of abstraction, which in turn not only belies that which traverses closure, but also disavows the signifier’s simple exteriority to ‘its’ concept<sup>2</sup>. One cannot necessarily assume any “reassuring form”, whether it be a referent (what is anterior or exterior to a general system of textuality - its origin or cause), any mode of presence (meaning, essence, existence, substance), a fundamental or totalising principle, or even some kind of ‘outside’ of a system, its extra or meta-textuality, which may be able to “arrest the concatenation of writing”. In this way, one cannot

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<sup>1</sup> This introductory line takes its example from Derrida’s (1981: 3) opening sentence in his redoubtable text *Dissemination*: “This (therefore) will not have been a book”. Johnson (1981: xxxii) points out how the opening sentence of Derrida’s text indicates both a denial of the book and of the beginning. It is written in the future perfect tense, marking itself as a presentation (‘this’), anticipation (‘will’), negation (‘not’), recapitulation (‘have been’) and conclusion (‘therefore’). The opening sentence is “designed to map out the play of anticipatory retrospection and internalised exteriority involved in that metalinguistic moment of self-reflection traditionally known as the *Preface*”. As will be discussed, the preface inscribes itself in a “strange warp of both time and space” in that it disseminates within a preface on prefaces that simultaneously prefaces and subverts the very possibility of the preface.

<sup>2</sup> In *Positions*, Derrida (1981b: 71) reiterates this theme by suggesting that “a name does not name the punctual simplicity of a concept” but rather a “conceptual structure *centred* on a given predicate”. Ultimately, the possibility of the name does not yet exist, it has yet to exist, because “the name is always in the future; you receive an old name from the past, but a name *as such*, as received from the past, remains a name-to-come” (Derrida, 1996b: 220).

assume that what is named the 'unconscious', as an example, is a symmetrical negative or potential reservoir of consciousness because consciousness and the unconscious as opposite or auxiliary elements in a system never constitute a total or *given* system, but rather form part of a "dissymmetric, hierarchically ordered space whose closure is constantly being traversed". Consciousness and the unconscious always already indicate a heterogeneity that proliferates the impossibility of "summing up" in the name of an absolutist, full, self-contained system. They cannot be reduced to the homogeneity of a single unifying system. Moreover, they designate a problematic field, a kind of "war economy" which imports a radical sense of otherness and a margin of impossibility that refutes the operation of mastery (Derrida, 1981: 5). Any system of purported binarity can no longer remain hermetically sealed or preceded by some identity, unity or an original simplicity which relieves (*releve*), resolves or appeases.

In (retrospective) anticipation of a preface (supposedly anterior though more likely posterior, *après coup*) that outlines/presages (in general) the traces of this thesis in its textual permutations, the question immediately arises as to how to introduce, pre-face, something that "would announce in the future tense ('this is what you are going to read') the conceptual content or significance..... of what will *already* have been written. And thus sufficiently *read* to be gathered up in its semantic tenor and proposed in advance". For Derrida (1981: 7), the medium of the fore-word, "which recreates an intention-to-say after the fact", functions as a written text that dissembles under the guise of a present whereby a hidden omnipotent author (in full mastery of his/her product) presents a disquisition to the reader as his/her future – "Here is what I wrote, then read, and what I am writing that you are going to read". The *pre* or *fore* makes the future present by representing it and drawing it closer, and thus reduces the future to the form of a manifest presence. Writing however does not consist of the present, past or future insofar as they are all modified presents because the possibility of indicating some single thematic nucleus or single guiding thesis would cancel out the textual displacement or dissemination in process by confining it to "the discursive effects of an intention-to-mean". Inscribed within the movement of displacement is

precisely the impossibility or resistance (*restance*<sup>3</sup>) of reducing a text to its “effects of meaning, content, thesis or theme” which “can neither adapt nor adopt such a reduction”. Therefore, in the spirit of Derrida, if I am to make use of the word ‘preface’, or attempt to introduce this project, then it cannot come to signify a table or code, an annotated summary of prominent signifieds or an index of key words and proper names. The preface is otherwise and in itself divided whereby it refutes the declarative or predicative mode, and fosters, *along the way*, a certain *protocol* which subverts the future perfect<sup>4</sup> and inscribes the structure of a *magic slate*<sup>5</sup> (Derrida, 1981: 7-8). The preface cannot expose a frontal, preambleary façade of a certain space in that it does not exhibit the proto-face or sur-face of a development that can be fore-seen and presented. It “divides and undoes the inaugural pretention of the first page” [Johnson, 1981(TN): 8].

The preface is comprised of residues of writing which remain anterior and exterior to the development of the content it heralds. It can only be exterior to the thing it appears to be talking about because it cannot absolutely reduce *the thing itself* to a form of a particular and finite object-product that determines modes of knowledge-production. Within the writing up of the preface, there is always already something which *falls away* (*la tombée*), a textual surplus, a certain spacing between the concept and *the thing itself*, which in turn obfuscates the preface’s intentionality to offer up “an introduction to the (true) beginning (of the truth)” (Derrida, 1981: 13). Whatever attempts I, as the purported author of this textual thesis, make in offering up a preface, it will never be able to keep abreast of the concept (which in turn endeavours to represent the phenomenon-in-itself) it introduces. There is something of the impossible about a preface since the ultimate acquisition, the finality of conclusiveness, the final revelation of meaning, must already be its premise. It must

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<sup>3</sup> The French word ‘*restance*’, derived from the verb *rester* (to remain), signifies the act of remaining or of being left over.

<sup>4</sup> Johnson (1981) indicates that the French designation of the future perfect tense, *le futur antérieur*, literally means the ‘prior future’ and is often used in French to express hypothesis or opinion.

<sup>5</sup> *Un bloc magique* is a reference to Freud’s (1991d) comparison of the psychic apparatus to that of a “mystic writing-pad”. Johnson [1981(TN): 8-9] usefully sums up its description: The ‘mystic writing-pad’ or ‘magic slate’ is a “child’s writing toy composed of a stiff dark waxed surface covered by a thin opaque sheet protected by a transparent piece of cellophane. Marks are made when pressure is exerted through all three layers, making the opaque layer take on the dark colour of the waxed surface. When the top two layers are detached from the wax, the mark disappears, but the wax surface retains a furrow. The ‘magic slate’, like the psychic apparatus, thus exhibits the capacity both to retain an imprint (memory) and to clear itself for the receipt of new marks (perception)”.

announce from the beginning what it can know only at the end. There is however something, a “third term”, that cannot *simply* exist in the markings, marchings and margins of the thesis as text. It leaves a remainder that cannot be captured by pure form, content or a moment of meaning, and it marks a space that diverges and demarcates in a “remarkable threshold (*limen*) of the text” (Derrida, 1981: 14-16). This threshold of the liminal is “opened up by an inadequation between the form and the content of discourse or by an incommensurability between the signifier and the signified” (Derrida, 1981: 18). It alludes to something between the form and the content of meaning that is “structurally irremediable”, the insistence of a certain gap or discrepancy, an abyssal movement. For Derrida, the attempt to write a preface that is really a preface is ludicrous because semantic saturation is impossible, a certain excess cannot be mastered, and “the semantic after-effect cannot be turned back into a teleological anticipation and into the soothing order of the future perfect”. Moreover, the preface alludes to a “dehiscence between writing and wanting-to-say”. If it appears inadmissible, then it is because it can no longer “enable anticipation and recapitulation to meet and to merge with one another” (Derrida, 1981: 20-21). The preface, as an after-effect of meaning, cannot transform itself into an origin or envelop itself within a circularity that could determine without going outside itself, or return to itself in the movement of circular recomprehension. It is a recital of infinity that can neither be reduced to unity nor derived from a primary simplicity. It can never be enclosed or inscribed within a finite taxonomy or lexicon because it is subverted *textually* by infinite excess and the “restless exteriority” of writing that thwarts the possibility of meaning announcing itself (Derrida, 1981: 27).

The preface is “a completely other structure” that is necessarily and structurally interminable whereby its textuality is “freed from the authority of meaning or of the concept” and it instead is able to account for effects (as opposed to causes) of meaning, experience and conceptuality. For Derrida (1981: 35), the preface that attempts to establish “the text within the element of its meaning from the outset” functions as “contrary to the necessity of the text” in that it cannot reduce the “chain of writing to its thematic effects or to the formality of its articulations”. The preface can no longer designate a simple inclusion within some ideal interiority of the corpus of the thesis. It is indefinitely dispersed and fractured and therefore it cannot circumscribe the textual economy of the corpus by offering a “naïve opening” that

links the thetic text to its thing or referent or even some final conceptual or semantic instance. The “left-overness (*restance*)” of the preface as outwork, in its textual exteriority, introduces the question of the preface as *seed* that is “just as likely to be left out, to well up and get lost as a seminal difference, as it is to be reappropriated into the sublimity of the father”. Derrida suggests that there is something of the preface that induces a narcissistic preening (“narcissism is the law, is on a par with the law”) whereby “it is the word of a father assisting and admiring his work, answering for his son, losing his breath in sustaining, retaining, idealising, reinternalising and mastering his seed”<sup>6</sup>. All effacement of seminal difference leads to the reassimilation and domestication of the left-overness of the outwork which is internalised into the ontotheology of a grand discourse of absolutism that digests, recites and orders the cycle of knowledge (Derrida, 1981: 43-45). When seminal difference is repressed, then the truth that speaks (to) itself within an enclosed circularity is “the discourse of what *goes back to the father*”. It fails to “go beyond the always-already-constitutedness of meaning and of truth within the theo-logico-encyclopedic space, of self-fertilisation with no *limen*”. When seminal difference is effaced, the ‘truth’ of the preface closes in on itself and internalises its own negativity and difference to itself so that its teleological programme is internalised and reassimilated by the circle of its unfolding (Derrida, 1981: 48; 53).

### **Deconstruction: The Affirmation of Exorbitant Impossibility**

So where to begin?.....One possibility would be to foreground a seminal philosophical or meta-reflexive issue that ineluctably encompasses the scope of the investigation of this thesis. This thesis will be concerned with the problematics of representation or what Rosenau (1992) has identified as “the crises of representation” whereby epistemological assumptions, methodological conventions and knowledge claims are called into question. There is the acknowledgement that any representation may distort, signify an illusory mastery, concretise, finalise, and reduce or exclude

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<sup>6</sup> This quote recalls the Hegelian notion of *Aufhebung* (translated into English as ‘sublation’ and French as ‘relève’) which describes a hierarchically ordered relationship where one term annuls the other and lifts it up into a higher sphere of existence. As Spivak (1976: xi) writes: “A successful preface is *aufgehoben* into the text it precedes, just as a word is *aufgehoben* into its meaning. It is as if, to use one of Derrida’s structural metaphors, the son or seed (preface or word), caused or engendered by the father (text or meaning) is recovered by the father and thus justified”. Derrida makes room for a prefatory gesture that neither inseminates nor is recovered by the father, but rather scatters and disseminates.

complexity and variability. Any all-encompassing explanation of reality or what Lyotard (1984: 81) considers as a “grand metanarrative” is questioned as a limited and self-contained framework of observation, rather than a revelation of an absolute, objective reality. In this way, as Lyotard suggests, “it is our business not to supply reality but to invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented”. This statement affirms the task of attempting to negotiate that which may ultimately be rendered as unrepresentable. It is concerned with what frameworks one can create in light of a complex, fluid and multi-faceted reality – an ever-changing reality in flux and motion. It does not seek to reduce, homogenise or objectify any possible interpretation, but rather “focus on the margins, highlight uniqueness, concentrate on the enigmatic, appreciate the unrepeatable” Rosenau (1992:117). The intention is to elaborate repertoires of interpretation that stimulate several possibilities.

The above considerations allude to a deconstructive tendency or turn which unpacks or interrogates the process by which knowledge claims are constructed and represented. Deconstruction, a word-term inextricably associated with the work of the philosopher Jacques Derrida even though Derrida himself has not been particularly receptive to the term<sup>7</sup>, should not be seen as a school or taken to be an *ism* since “any attempt to define it will fail, or at least come undone, because all the defining concepts and means of articulation and signification are themselves open to the effects of this thing” (McQuillan, 2000: 2)<sup>8</sup>. Royle (2003b) suggests that it would be perfectly possible to make use of Derrida’s oeuvre without resorting to the word ‘deconstruction’<sup>9</sup>. However, I would like raise the notion of the impossible connection of ‘deconstruction’ which has been referred to by Derrida (1995: 43) as “the very experience of the (impossible) possibility of the impossible”, and which I

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<sup>7</sup> In the past, Derrida (1983: 44) has suggested that deconstruction is “a word I have never liked and one whose fortune has disagreeably surprised me”.

<sup>8</sup> Elsewhere, Derrida (1988c: 3) has written that deconstruction is neither an analysis nor a critique. Analysis, for example, implies the dismantling of a structure which indicates a regression towards some simple element or indissoluble origin. The values of both analysis and critique are “themselves philosophemes subject to deconstruction”.

<sup>9</sup> One would have to appreciate the qualification (apology) offered by Royle (2003b: 25; 109) when he suggests that making claims about ‘Derrida’s work’ or ‘Derrida in general’ is in a sense a “very undeconstructive gesture”, though of course there is always the question of strategic usefulness and convenience. Further on in the text Royle reiterates this impasse by suggesting that “one of the problems, perhaps the greatest problem of all, in trying to provide an introductory account of Derrida’s work lies in how to deal with the inevitable but quite misleading impression that his thinking, his texts and ‘ideas’ can be boxed up, systematised or simply, in a word, described..... Derrida’s work is about the ceaseless destabilisation of any context, the necessary possibility of the unanticipatable that is the condition of any writing or reading”.

think possesses relevance for this project. Derrida (1998: 54-55) writes: “Deconstruction, if there is any, is not a critique, still less a theoretical or speculative operation methodically carried out by someone; rather, if there is any deconstruction, it takes place.....as experience of the impossible”<sup>10</sup>. Royle (2000: 11) proposes that this experience of the impossible implies “what remains to be thought: a logic of destabilisation always already on the move in ‘things themselves’.....a logic of spectrality”. Deconstruction resists any univocal definition or adequate description because it is, as Derrida (2001: 64) intimates, “*what happens (ce qui arrive)*”. It is an invention of another signature that is not an entity or thing that lends itself to predicative forms or ontological categories which in turn produce sites that can be assimilated to something like a definable subject or act. It takes place as a writing that opens up to the coming (*venue*), the advent or incoming of the other (*l’invention de l’autre*) (Kronick, 1999)<sup>11</sup>. For Leavey (1980), deconstruction is *nothing but* writing – writing (and reading) and rewriting (and rereading) in a certain way whereby words, terms, concepts, predicates and logics are displaced, reread and rewritten. Deconstruction pertains to the invention of “something new in the form of acts of writing”; it entails giving oneself to “a poetico-literary performativity at least analogous to that of promises” (Derrida, 1992c: 55). Deconstruction is a desire to describe and transform, undecidably, where description and transformation “has to do with language *and* with ‘more than language’” (Royle, 2003b: 27). If deconstruction is possible, then its possibility is predicated on a structurally necessary possibility of a non-fulfillable promise, the possibility that a promise could not be kept or realized. Deconstruction is haunted by the unthinkable, by uncanniness and irremediable disturbance that is marked by what precedes or exceeds language as a descriptive tool, and by what indicates the limits of the linguistic turn. It has an interest in ‘the other of language’, a “point at which the authority of final jurisdiction is neither rhetorical nor linguistic, nor even discursive” (Derrida, 2001: 76). Derrida

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<sup>10</sup> In the first instance, deconstruction puts ‘out of joint’ the very authority of the ‘is’ so that this movement of disjunction ensures that any statement about or description of deconstruction “is itself not itself, but disarticulated in the very attempt to articulate the definition, and so control the meaning of deconstruction” (Wolfe, 1998: 57). As a disclaimer, definitive meanings or concepts that are offered in service of deconstruction are themselves open to deconstructive operations.

<sup>11</sup> One should however bear in mind, as Derrida (1992b: 341-342) suggests, that “deconstructive inventiveness can consist only in opening, uncloseting, destabilising foreclosure structures so as to allow for the passage toward the other. But one does not make the other come, one lets it come by preparing for its coming”. As such, one cannot invent or bring the other about, but rather prepare for its coming by breaking open enclosures of the same (of circularity) and interrogating methods that reappropriate difference (Caputo, 1997).

has referred to this prelinguistic, inscriptive mark as 'writing', 'trace', 'text', 'force', '*différance*' and so on, and this will be discussed extensively during the course of this project.

"Deconstruction", as Derrida (2001: 4; 82) writes, is "not only a search for, but itself a consequence of, the fact that the system is impossible". Here, the notion of system indicates a certain *syn* which alludes to totalisation in a configuration, a continuity of all statements, a *form* of coherence that entails the "syllogicity of logic", and the assemblage of ontological propositions. What deconstruction unravels is "a force of dislocation, a limit in the totalisation, a limit in the movement of syllogistic synthesis.....a certain dysfunction or 'disadjustment', a certain incapacity to close the system". Deconstruction is an "anachronism in synchronism" which highlights the effects of otherness whereby writing comes to disturb the very form of the question 'what is?' or 'what does it mean?' (Derrida, 1983). Royle (2003: 24) considers deconstruction as an "uncanny overflow" that renders apparently familiar texts as strange, and apparently unequivocal and self-assured statements as uncertain. It is haunted by a logic of spectrality that inscribes difference at the heart of representation, shattering the ideality of pure self-presence and proliferating elements of undecidability which displace a sense of mastery through stable, settled and definitive meaning. Deconstruction is always what exceeds any method where method is taken as an inroad toward knowledge, an instrument of representation that is reductively applied to a given field from the outside. It remains "exorbitant to the totality of philosophical knowledge" in that it "proceeds from a certain point of exteriority to the whole of the region of all regions of philosophy so as to reinscribe or reground that totality in or with regard to what is exorbitant to it" (Gasché, 1986: 122). The steps of deconstruction, as Derrida (1981: 271) writes, "allow for (no) *method*: no path leads around in a circle toward a first step, nor proceeds from the simple to the complex, nor leads from a beginning to an end.....We here note a point/lack of method (*point de méthode*): this does not rule out a certain marching order". Deconstruction is not formalisable and it cannot be transformed into a set programme or axiomatic model that would espouse theorems, tools, techniques or rules (Wolfreys, 1998). It instead affirms the opening up to the other, a certain responsibility to the other; it "marches ahead and marks a trail", it comes to pass, though it never installs a theoretical assurance of absolutism or omnipotence (Derrida,



1992b: 337). Deconstruction works against the possibility of completion in that it subverts any philosophy or theory that endeavours to anticipate all forms of otherness and transcendence by including within itself all the resources of its exterior (Derrida, 1978). It attempts to “shake totality, to make it tremble in its entirety”. Moreover, it exposes a certain naïveté of a theoretical body which fails to question (or annuls or neutralises) the discrepancies, fissures, inconsistencies and contradictions of its *mise en scène* (Gasché, 1986: 179). The question of deconstruction is a question of questioning the structuring of parameters within which critical thought, analysis and interpretation unfolds (Wolfreys, 1998).

In attempting to offer some “schematic and preliminary reflections” on the impossible possibility of deconstruction, it should be stressed that intentionality does not bring about a ‘deconstructive reading’, but rather deconstruction involves the reader in following the resources, contours, patterns and rhythms of the text – playing with possibilities within the text through reading (and writing). For Derrida (1988c: 1-3), deconstruction is not an act or an operation and it cannot be reduced to “some methodological instrumentality or to a set of rules and transposable procedures”. It does not await the deliberation of a subject who would take the initiative and apply it to a text, object or theme. All predicates, defining concepts, lexical significations and syntactic articulations that lend themselves to defining deconstruction are themselves “deconstructible, directly or otherwise”. While it may seem that deconstruction proliferates a type of nihilism, it should be remembered that deconstruction “certainly entails a moment of affirmation”. It “always presupposes affirmation” in that it is a “positive response to an alterity which necessarily calls, summons or motivates it”. In this sense, deconstruction is a “vocation – a response to a call” of otherness that cannot be contained or disclosed within a circular enclosure, and “it is in this rapport with the other that affirmation expresses itself”. Deconstruction attempts “to discover the non-place or *non-lieu* which would be the ‘other’ of philosophy”. It attempts to address the problematics of representation in a more radical light, from “another topos or space”, an *other* site, a non-site. It is “not an enclosure in nothingness, but an openness towards the other” where it is “above all else the search for the ‘other’ and the ‘other of language’”, an other which is beyond language but which also summons it (Derrida, 1984: 118; 112; 123-24).

In my reading of deconstruction, the dangers of conceptual nihilism, where knowledge claims are rendered as infinitely relative and where any possibility for at least a transient, stabilised position remains unattainable, gives way to what Winterson (1996: 50) suggests as a resistance against the “fixity of form, not to invite any easy chaos but to rebuild new possibilities”. These new possibilities are of course open further to the infinite rhythms of deconstruction. Deconstruction is what affirms the (impossible) possibility of the non-concept – something (as no-thing) which cannot be defined in terms of oppositional predicates since it is neither *this* nor *that*, and it is not reducible to a dialectical logic. However, whilst the realm of the non-conceptual does not espouse a predicative or logical generality, it still cannot escape a certain linguistic determination from which it is inextricably bound. Indeed, there is “no conceptual realm beyond language” which would authorize the non-concept to possess “a univocal semantic content over and above its inscription in language”. The non-concept (as it is described through language) still remains *inside* the ‘closure’ (*clôture*) of language, though one should not view this notion of *inside* as if one were inside a box or milieu, and the idea of closure does not indicate a circularity with a limit or simple boundary. For Derrida (1984: 111), the limit-boundary is not linear or circular in any indivisible sense. Instead it is divisible so that “the logical rapport between inside and outside is no longer simple” – the non-concept is neither inside nor outside. The instant/instance of non-conceptuality will be explored extensively throughout the thesis, however in keeping with this theme (of the impossible possibility), I would like to offer up two textual examples of deconstruction in practice since deconstruction cannot be dissociated from its textual unfolding and remains intrinsic to the text without implying thematic or formal closure. Deconstruction is always already at work in the text. It is, as mentioned, “what happens if it happens (*ce qui arrive si ça arrive*)” (Derrida, 2000b: 288). This seems to imply, as Norris (1991: 31) suggests, that deconstruction is “an activity of reading which remains closely tied to the texts it interrogates, and which can never set up independently as a self-enclosed system of operative concepts”.

## **The Agency of the Letter: The Possibility of ‘Without-Return’**

As a first example of the turn of deconstruction, I would like to explicate Derrida’s reading of Lacan’s reading of Poe’s “The Purloined Letter”. It should be stressed that this exploration is not a detailed literary explication of Poe’s text and by consequence a detailed discussion of the psychoanalytic-literary nexus (which warrants a separate and extensive thesis in and of itself). Nor is the exploration an attempt to engage with the plethora of secondary criticism (yet another thesis) that emerged after the analyses of Lacan and Derrida<sup>12</sup>. Instead it will focus on the tendency of psychoanalysis (as an interpretative framework and strategy, and as a body of knowledge relevant for this thesis) to prioritise its obsession with (metaphysical) content-based narratives or, to paraphrase Ellmann (2000), the endeavour of psychoanalysis to seek out and expose grand psychoanalytic narratives (Oedipus, castration, fixation, sublimation and so forth) supposedly encrypted in the depths of a text, the eagerness of psychoanalysis to loot the text’s purported psychoanalytic ‘truth’. This latter point seems to hold true even in the case of a psychoanalytic theoretician like Lacan who ostensibly is not interested in uncovering content-based solutions and actively disavows the confluence or fusion of signifier and signified. Derrida (1998: 54) suggests that it is possible to witness in the theoretical binding of Lacanian discourse, as one version or example of psychoanalysis, various motifs that in his view are deconstructible (phonocentrism, logocentrism, phallogocentrism, full speech as truth and so on - see also Derrida, 1981b: 107-113). My focus will be on one such motif - what Derrida has classified as “the transcendentalism of the signifier (and) the circular return of reappropriation toward what is most proper about the proper place, whose borders are circumscribed by lack”. It may indeed be the case that Lacan’s ‘full speech’ is full of Derrida’s writing, where writing refuses the recourse of speech and resists being ‘lifted up’ by speech (Derrida, 1987: 150).

“The Purloined Letter” narrates the tale of a scheming minister who steals a compromising letter from a queen, and it is finally recovered or retrieved by a detective, Dupin, who finds it ‘hidden’ in full view on the minister’s mantelpiece.

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<sup>12</sup> Many of the commentaries have been assembled in Muller and Richardson’s (1988) collection entitled *The Purloined Poe*, a seemingly exhaustive anthology where the reader feels overwhelmed to the point of saturation, something akin to being seized by what Rabaté (2001: 42) has identified as “metatextual vertigo”.

Lacan (1988: 29; 39) proposes that Poe's fable of the purloined letter demonstrates a "truth", something "propitious to pursuing a course of inquiry", which not only makes the existence of fiction possible, but also dramatises "the decisive orientation which the subject receives from the itinerary of the signifier". The (purloined) letter functions as a "pure signifier" whose materiality does not "admit partition", and it remains indivisible in its uniqueness<sup>13</sup>. It is precisely this singularity which Lacan (1988: 43-44) regards as "the *true subject* of the tale". Moreover, the narrative confirms that this purloined letter "has been diverted from its path" in that its course has been prolonged and so, in accordance with an extended metaphor of the post-office (*poste restante*), it functions as "a *letter in sufferance*", a letter that has been displaced. Lacan reasons that if the letter can be diverted, then it "must have a course *which is proper to it*" since this is the "trait by which its incidence as signifier is confirmed". The signifier sustains itself only through displacement whereby it necessarily is required to "leave its place, even though it returns to it by a circular path". This very displacement traverses subjects and thus determines them in "their acts, in their destiny, in their refusals, in their blindness, in their end and in their fate.....everything that might be considered the stuff of psychology, kit and caboodle, will follow the path of the signifier". Indeed, the unconscious signifies that the subject is inhabited by the signifier which gains pre-eminence over it. The fable is constructed to reveal that the letter and its diversion structures the protagonists in "their entries and roles", whether it be an endurance of the pain of a letter "in sufferance", or in the possession of the letter which in turn possesses them, or falling beneath the shadow of the letter which renders that protagonist as its reflection. Ultimately however the "purloined letter", or more precisely the "letter in sufferance", always arrives at its (real) destination for "what is hidden is never but what is *missing from its place*". This "something" which is "missing from its place" is as a result of symbolic mediation and transformation<sup>14</sup> because what Lacan regards

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<sup>13</sup> Muller and Richardson (1988: 58) understand this designation of 'pure signifier' as a signifier functioning completely independently of its signified (i.e., its content), and through its displacement, the signifier serves as a "movable pivot around which revolves a shifting set of human relations". As will be discussed shortly, Derrida will not concur entirely with this reading, and his reading will detect an underlying narrative of lack driving the putative independence of the signifier.

<sup>14</sup>The symbolic order is a supra-personal structural order, governed by inexorable legalities, absences and exclusions, and it manifests as the cultural, social and linguistic realm of unity, binary oppositional structures and hierarchical forms of organisation. The symbolic order imposes and enforces prohibition and subjugation, and is regulated by the paternal metaphor or *Nom-du-Père/Non-du-Père* (which translates as the Name/No of the Father) (Lacan, 1977). This metaphysical construct is reminiscent of

as the pre-symbolic order of the “real”<sup>15</sup> always remains in its place in spite of the upheavals it is subjected to.

In a trenchant reading of Lacan’s seminar on the letter, Derrida (1988: 173) offers up his response in the form of an essay entitled, “The Purveyor of Truth”, where he rather ironically subtitles [or (counter-)signs if you like] the first section of the essay, “Divested Pretexts”. He playfully begins by suggesting that the endpoint of the quest of psychoanalysis seems to be an extraction and confirmation of its own ‘truth’ or, as Johnson (1988: 245) puts it, “psychoanalysis as being always already *mise en abyme* in the text it studies” (a pertinent criticism for any body of knowledge or discursive system):

Psychoanalysis, supposedly, is found.

When one believes one finds it, it is psychoanalysis itself, supposedly, that finds itself.

When it finds, supposedly, it finds itself/is found – something.....

Where then? Where does psychoanalysis, always, already refind itself, where is it to be refound?

That which psychoanalysis finds/founds (in finding itself) is what Derrida (1988: 174-175) refers to as “text”, which invariably is accompanied by discursive inscriptions that pertain to language, writing, culture, history, mythology and so on<sup>16</sup>.

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the violent primal father that Freud (1946: 204) evokes in his paper *Totem and Taboo* (a psychoanalytic contribution to anthropology which details the genesis of the myth of patriarchy), as the “dead father”, the “violent primal father” or the “father of the individual prehistory” whose death leads to prohibition, and whose paternal authority is never so strong as in his absence or death.

<sup>15</sup> The real is the order preceding the ego and the organisation of the drives, and is characterised by anarchic pre-oedipal component drives and polymorphous erotogenic zones, heterogeneous to meaning, truth, logic and representation. It is an order characterised by pure plenitude, an impossible place of fullness remaining exterior to language (Smith, 1996) where it could only be “inscribed on the basis of an impasse of formalisation” (Lacan, 1998b: 93). It is important to note that the real is not the same as reality delineated through symbolic representations. It can never be accessed as such, and it alludes to “the mystery of the speaking body, the mystery of the unconscious” – the enunciating subject of *jouissance* with the inevitable possibility for corporeal rupture, slippage and *mèconnaissance* (Lacan, 1998b: 131).

<sup>16</sup> Elsewhere, Derrida (1979: 81-84) offers a useful description of how he comes to understand the notion of ‘text’. He suggests that one assumes that if one is to approach (*aborder*) a text, then it must have an edge, a shoreline, a necessary boundary comprised of the supposed beginning and end of a work, the unity of a corpus, the title, the margins, the signatures, the referential realm outside the frame, and so on. For Derrida, however, this has been transformed through a sort of overrun (*débordement*) which “spoils all these boundaries and divisions and forces us to extend the accredited

Yet what happens if the very text that psychoanalysis seeks to decipher (diminish), always already explicates itself or inscribes within itself “the scene of the deciphering”, or says more about itself than the psychoanalytic deciphering? What happens when the supposed deciphered text “deploys more force in placing onstage and setting adrift the analytic process itself.....of situating analytic activity grappling with the truth?”. What happens if the deciphered text delimits the analytic reading, assigns the analyst to a position, exposes his quest for the truth and then proffers “the discourse on truth, the truth on truth?”. While these provocative questions are not necessarily accompanied by cogent or satisfying answers, they allude to the potential hegemony and mastery of psychoanalytic deciphering which purports to reveal the ‘primary’ content beneath the secondary revision – “denuding the meaning behind the formal disguises”. The “familiar acrobatics of the metaphor of truth” (or truth of metaphor/metaphor of metaphor/ truth of truth) endeavours to exhibit, denude, undress and unveil all in anticipation of the naked truth of the text or truth as nakedness. While Derrida (1988: 177) acknowledges that Lacan’s “style” keeps in check any access to isolatable content or unequivocal and determinable meaning beyond writing, he takes Lacan to task on his proposition that “the lack has its place (*manque a sa place*) in this atomistic topology of the signifier” whereby if what is missing occupies a determined place within defined contours, then the letter will “always refind its proper place.....the letter will be where it always will have been, always should have been, intangible and indestructible via the detour of a *proper*, and properly *circular*, itinerary”. Derrida detects in Lacan’s seminar “the classical landscape of applied psychoanalysis” whereby Lacan makes use of Poe’s text as an example destined to illustrate “a law and a truth” [the (circular) itinerary of the signifier], as a text “brought into an illustrative position” where the text functions in service of a particular and taught truth, as an illustration, example, testimony or confirmation in terms of knowledge, truth and law.

Derrida (1988: 179-181) suggests that the psychoanalytic attempt to decompose Poe’s text into its elements, origin and destination as well as uncover its ‘truth’, leads to the

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concept, the dominant notion of a ‘text’.....a ‘text’ that is henceforth no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces”. The text, in this sense, overruns all imposed limits assigned to it. These limits are not submerged into a “undifferentiated homogeneity”, but rather are rendered as infinitely more complex, multiple and divisive.

reification of a *story (histoire)* of a letter (signifier) and its displacement, which in turn promotes the exemplary content and meaning of the text whilst excluding “the complex structure of the scene of writing played out within it” (writing remains in excess of content and meaning and it leaves irreducible residues). The agency and scene of the signifier in its letter and its subsequent displacement is effectively reconstituted as, or reconstructed into, a signified, a recounted object of the story which in turn misses the invisible and structurally irreducible ‘frame’ around the text. For Johnson (1988: 229-231), this frame pertains to “the stratum of narration through which the stories are told, and, ‘beyond’ it, of the text’s entire functioning as *écriture*”. The frame signals something of textuality’s “unframability” and indetermination, a borderline which not only highlights the “limits of spatial logic as it relates to intelligibility” but also prevents the signifier from being totally transformed into a signified. Psychoanalysis has the tendency to focus on “the content of a representation, the internal meaning of a story, the all enframed, which demands all the attention, mobilises all psychoanalytic schemas (Oedipal ones here), and pulls toward its centre the entire deciphering enterprise”. As a result, psychoanalysis fails to elaborate on the problematics of the frame which consequently renders writing into the written and production into product. The text is greatly diminished when its ‘truth’, its exemplary message, is allegedly deciphered. It is reduced at the very moment when it is related to a condition of truth which invariably entails the extraction of semantic content. For Derrida (1988: 182-185), the signifier-letter “in the topology and psychoanalytico-transcendental semantics.....has a proper place and meaning which form the condition, origin, and destination of the entire circulation, as the entire logic of the signifier”. The letter refinds its proper meaning in its proper place via a proper itinerary (destiny as destination) so that the meaning of the signifier-letter and the agency of its itinerary are determinable in truth, as truth. The truth of the letter has a proper place of destination (its place has an essential relation to its meaning) that is not a subject, but rather, according to Derrida’s reading of Lacan’s reading of psychoanalysis, a hole or lack on the basis of which the subject is constituted. The proper place of the letter is the place of the *grand récit* of castration, the truth of the phallus, which is to say the truth of castration, of castration as truth. The discourse on castration functions as the terminus of the signifier-letter’s circular itinerary and in this way truth is not only dissociated from any “essential dislocation and irreducible fragmentation”, but it is also encompassed within a

“bizarre kind of hermeneutic circle which is literally phallogocentric” (Howells, 1999: 105). For Derrida, castration-truth brings the signifier-letter into its *oikos*<sup>17</sup>, its familiar dwelling and proper place of circular return, into the circle of a restricted economy which comes to function as the very antithesis of or antidote for fragmentation: “that which is missing from its place has in castration a fixed, central place, freed from all substitution. Something is missing from its place, but the lack is never missing from it”. The place of lack, captured in the topos of castration as truth, does not have any place in dissemination, but instead in the determination of the circulation of the proper which in turn renders the “truth of the purloined letter as the truth of ‘The Purloined Letter’”.

The purloined letter is ‘contained’ within the text not only as an object whose proper itinerary is delineated, or as a signifier that functions as the theme or signified of the text, but also “as the text producing the effects of the frame”. Derrida (1988: 186-188) proposes that one needs to concede that perhaps “if there is something like a purloined letter”, it has a supplementary trap with no fixed location or definable hole or assignable lack. The letter could always possibly not be found, or found less in the content of the story that psychoanalysis seeks to unpack (the framed content of the “real drama”, a hidden or sealed interior) and more ‘in’ the text which escapes psychoanalytic appropriation. This remainder that escapes “divests the letter of the text from whoever deciphers it, from the *facteur* of truth who puts the letter back into the circle of its own, proper itinerary”. The endeavour to determine the letter’s proper location and itinerary as if one could locate it “here or there as on a map” fails to consider the map itself; not the map that the text describes at one moment or another, but the map that the text “is...itself” – a dissemination without promise of topos or truth. For Derrida, the letter’s divisibility (in contrast to Lacan’s conception of the letter as indivisible), its “always possible partition”, ensures that the “letter can always not arrive at its destination” and that it remains fragmented without return [Major (2001: 303) speaks of the “wandering destination” of the signifier and of the letter, or their “destinerrance”]. The system of castration-truth effectively attempts to protect the letter from this fragmentation. This however is not to say that the letter never arrives at its destination, but rather that “it belongs to the structure of the letter

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<sup>17</sup> The Greek word ‘*oikos*’ signifies house or dwelling, and is also the root from which the word ‘economy’ is derived.



to be capable, always, of not arriving". Truth cannot mean a "readequation or reappropriation as the desire to stop up the hole". It cannot be equated with a circular return from the signifier's detachment to its place of reattachment. It would be necessary for the letter not to admit 'partition' if it is to be kept and make its return because if it were divisible then it may be lost (disseminated) en route. It is always against this possible loss that the signifier's indivisible singularity is constructed. Derrida regards this notion of indivisibility as an ideality (of the signifier) that resists destructive division and permits the singularity of the letter to be maintained. The indivisibility of the letter is concerned with its elevation towards an ideality of meaning, even if one knows very little of its content. This is as a result of the fact that the "content must be in relation to the original contract that it simultaneously signifies and subverts. And it is this knowledge, this memory, this (conscious or unconscious) retention which form its properness (*propriété*) and ensure its proper course toward the proper place". When castration as truth is unveiled, the guiding value is that of propriation which effectively excludes the failure-without-return or divisibility which "definitively rebels against the destination of lack (*la destination du manqué*)" (Derrida, 1988: 195-197).

To summarise, the other scene of the letter's remaining is the possibility of the "without-possible-return" of its "disseminal structure". It may function as an "interminable drift", an elliptical adrift with "no possible approach or bordering", cutting across the space of a restricted economy. The letter as divisible is "what chances and sets off course, without guarantee of return, the remaining (*restance*) of anything whatsoever: a letter does *not always* arrive at its destination, and from the moment that this possibility belongs to its structure one can say that it never truly arrives, that when it does arrive its capacity not to arrive torments it with an internal drifting". For Derrida, the letter may evade an assignable destination, and it is this very unassignableness that rejects the possibility of "bringing a meaning to its destination" (Derrida, 1988: 197-206). In this way, the signifier or the letter resists against "a certain capacity, a certain determined pertinence of psychoanalytic concepts" that endeavour to calibrate and master through detection and elaboration. The text 'itself' may possess a "deconstructive capacity greater than certain psychoanalytic discourses which *apply* their theoretical apparatus to these texts, or 'apply' a given state of their theoretical apparatus, with its openings, but also with its

presuppositions, at a given moment of its elaboration” (Derrida, 1981b: 112). This latter quote seems to allude to an act of violence (through reduction) that psychoanalysis (as a discursive body of knowledge) may commit in the process of determining/presupposing some template for the text, and it also refers to the dissemination of the text that always already escapes the framing of interpretation through its textual residues. Howells (1999) suggests that while there is something of a poetic appeal about Lacans’ conceptualisation of a ‘migratory signifier’, his ‘happy ending’ in which origin and end are reunited in teleological bliss remains entrapped within a metaphysical enclosure of circularity and determination. The signifier may never come back to some (original) referential point or centre, an inevitable point of return. Ultimately the writer-reader is forced into an impasse that emerges as a consequence of his/her dogged persistence (a detected disclaimer if you like): “Like the purloined letter itself, Poe’s story continues to change hands, placing everyone who seizes it at risk of being duped and dispossessed” (Ellmann, 2000 : 219).

### ***The Unexperienced Experience: Dying Without Death***

I have selected this second instance of ‘deconstruction-in-action’ as I feel it to be useful in highlighting the possible variations of an experience or event/advent of the impossible, something with which deconstruction is intimately connected. It involves an exploration of Derrida’s discussion of an extraordinary text by the writer Maurice Blanchot entitled, *The Instant of my Death*. The text narrates the tale of a young man “prevented from dying by death itself”. This young man is captured by the Nazis during World War II and lined up to be executed. As the Nazis await their final order, “already aiming” at the young man, as this young man awaits his death, “as if everything had already been done”, he experiences something unanalysable and indescribable. The text flounders in attempting to pinpoint this ‘experience’, this “encounter of death with death?” which invokes/provokes a feeling of “extraordinary lightness, a sort of beatitude.....sovereign elation?”. Possibly a sudden invincibility or perhaps ecstasy. From that moment on, the young man, who was supposed to come to death, remains “bound to death by a surreptitious friendship”. The young man was supposed to come to death, death was inevitable, it had arrived, however at that very instant of the inevitable arrival of his death, there is an “abrupt return to the world”, and the young man manages to escape owing to considerable noise from a nearby

battle which distracts the Germans. After this episode, “at the moment when the shooting was no longer but to come”, there remains for this young man a feeling of lightness which cannot be translated: “freed from life? the infinite opening up? Neither happiness, nor unhappiness. Nor the absence of fear and perhaps already the step beyond”. What remains of existence may possibly be transformed by this unanalysable feeling, “as if the death outside of him could only henceforth collide with the death in him. ‘I am alive. No, you are dead’”. What remains of existence for this young man, all that remains, is the “instant of my death henceforth always in abeyance” (Blanchot, 2000: 3-11).

Derrida (2000: 28) proposes that this short text by Blanchot espouses an (auto)biographical truthfulness/tremulousness of a witness who claims to recount not only his life but also his death, a quasi-resurrection that testifies at the limits of a *without-thing*, that testifies to an indeterminable or undecidable limit where something (that is no-thing) must “*suffer everything precisely because it is not itself*”. *The Instant of my Death* is a narrative or testimony that signs itself in accordance with every possible tense:

*I am dead, or I will be dead in an instant, or an instant ago I was going to be dead. Someone intends to speak, to speak to us, not only of his death, but of his death in the sense of the Latin de, in the sense of from his death: not.....of my life from my life, but on the contrary, one might say, from my death, from the place and from the taking-place, better yet, from the having-taken-place, already, of my death (Derrida, 2000: 45).*

The instant of this young man’s death, of death in life, rests on the “very thing no ontology could essentialise” and receives its “determination from something other than itself” that does not remain at home abidingly (*à demeure*), that does not maintain itself abidingly if at least the notion of abode designates some essential stability. It belongs to quite a different space and comes from a different order. Indeed the instant of impossible death and of dying prohibited testifies, *at this very instant*, to the singularity of a secret (of the instant, of the impossible) which is “temporalised without being temporalised *permanently (à demeure)*”. The notion of a secret testimony however may be a contradiction in terms in that to testify, to bear witness,

implies or entails the movement of rendering public (“How can one testify to what, in principle, is destined to refuse itself in testimony?”). Derrida therefore puts forward the possibility of “attesting to there being some secret without revealing the heart of the secret”, the possibility of “testifying to the absence of attestation.....to an attestation’s not being possible – and that there is here a secret to keep or a secret that one cannot not keep: the avowal of a secret having remained secret”. The instant of the secret, the ungraspability of its instance, is instantaneously divided, shattering the condition of possibility for a “determinate, indivisible instant” whereby the instant is always divided at the very point of its writing, it “is always on the verge (*en instance*) of being divided”. This secret instant of death in life takes one beyond categories, which are invariably rendered as “problematic, fragile, uneasy” (Derrida, 2000: 28-33; 40-43). Ultimately, the secret can never be broached/breached and it is “non-thematisable, non-objectifiable, non-sharable”. It cannot be constructed into a formalisable, expressible relation and it “interminably disqualifies any effort one can make to determine it” (Derrida, 2001: 57-58). It is not something that can be detected, demystified or unveiled (for such a possibility would imply that the secret is linked to representation), and it remains “inviolable even when one thinks one has revealed it”. To speak of the secret, to create narratives, discourses and stories around/about it, is not enough to disrupt it because the secret will remain secret and silent, non-reductive and out of reach. It is not a reserve of potential knowing and it is heterogeneous to all manifestation (Derrida, 1995: 26).

One should not be able to testify to one’s own death, but rather only to the imminence of one’s death, to its instance as deferred imminence. One should only be able to testify to a delay preceding the “thing” that is pending (*en instance*), that cannot be long in coming, that is on the point of arriving. Interestingly, Derrida (2000: 46) draws the reader’s attention to the analogy of the letter that is held in general delivery and therefore remains “on hold (*en instance*)” awaiting delivery, and this sufferance of the letter is also the passion of the being in abeyance (*de l’être en instance*). For Derrida, “an instance in abeyance (*un instant en instance*)”, the imminence of impossible dying, form part of what elsewhere Blanchot (1995: 67) has referred to as the “*unexperienced experience*” which speaks of something that takes place without having taken place, a strange event that is “abyssal, elliptical, paradoxical, and, for that matter, undecidable”. The young man of the text was supposed to die. Death had

already arrived, it had been decreed and decided, it was imminent and inescapable, and yet the very order to die comes to prevent this man from dying - “From dying, he is prevented by death itself” (Derrida, 2000: 53-54). Being “prevented from dying by death itself” (Blanchot, 2000: 3) comes to testify to this realm of an *unexperienced experience* - “the young man, the other, the one who will die without dying”<sup>18</sup>. Moreover, this *unexperienced experience* testifies to the possibility that “what will happen will have opened another time. Absolute anachrony of a time out of joint” (Derrida, 2000: 57; 61). In the space of a few moments of the narrative of *The Instant of my Death*, “a man still young” is rendered “already less young” (Blanchot, 2000: 3-5), yet according to actual, temporal chronology barely a few seconds have elapsed. This, according to Derrida (2000: 61), comes to testify to “two times, that of objectivity and that of phantasm or fictional simulacrum, which.....remain absolutely incommensurable”. There is a disturbance in the measure of time, “neither synchrony nor diachrony” but rather “an anachrony of all instants” (Derrida, 2000: 81). This anachrony is “there where time would fall, fragile fall” in accordance with “an outside of time in time” (Blanchot, 1992: 1). In the face of the *unexperienced experience* all knowledge comes to tremble so that “instant lightness, elation, beatitude remain the only affects that can take measure of this event as ‘an unexperienced experience’”, and it is these very affects that come to testify to “an ecstatic wrenching from common temporal existence, an immense orgiastic jouissance”. The experience of the unexperienced testifies that “dying will finally become possible – as prohibition. All living beings have an impossible relation to death: at the instant death, the impossible, will become possible as impossible” (Derrida, 2000: 65; 68; 65).

The young man of the text was a witness to “death that came at him”, and it is this “inexorability of what was coming at him, of what was imminent” that unleashes a trembling where “everything only *may be*” (Derrida, 2000: 66-69). From the very stigma of the verdict that condemns this young man to death (without an ensuing death), there will be for him “a death without death and thus a life without life. Life has freed itself from life; one might just as well say that life has been relieved of life”.

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<sup>18</sup> Elsewhere, Blanchot (1995: 136) suggests how “to die forsaken by death” elicits “enigmatic proportions” in writing which is placed and tested at the limits of “un-knowledge” – not a lack of knowledge or even knowledge of the lack, but rather that which escapes or exceeds knowledge and ignorance alike.

The young man lives yet he is no longer living, and his existence comes to embody the logical and textual matrix of “X without X” (to live without living, to die without death, the instant of death without death). He is “alive and dead, living-dead”. For Derrida, the “without” in this model “X without X” signifies a “spectral necessity” which overflows the opposition between real and unreal, actual and virtual, factional and fictional, and it allows “what does not arrive to arrive.....with a virtuality that can no longer be opposed to actual factuality”<sup>19</sup>. Hence the death of which the narrative speaks has taken place even if it did not take place in what is commonly referred to as ‘reality’ (Derrida, 2000: 89; 97; 92). Blanchot (1992: 52) offers up a useful point when he suggests that death is merely a metaphor that aids one in “crudely represent(ing) the idea of limit to ourselves, while the limit excludes any representation, any ‘idea’ of the limit”. The possibility of death without death or life without life is not a matter of knowing because it is a secret that remains irreducible and inaccessible in its alterity as well as incommensurable with the economy of representation. The ‘eventness’ of the event of the instant of death consists of a certain non-knowledge (or ‘un-knowledge’ as Blanchot suggests) that, as Kronick (1999) points out, is not ignorance or indifference but rather a structural submission to the heterogeneity of not-knowing and a referral to the other. It is an event that remains anterior to all narrativity in that it ‘functions’ as a “non-arrival of what is to come”. What was coming or supposed to come – in this instance, death – never actually arrives and does not give way to the order of the present. However, the coming that never arrives testifies to “a certain structural openness, undecidability, unaccomplishment, non-occurrence, noneventuality” (Caputo, 1997: 78) that ensures the instant of death always in abeyance. The whole order of this coming belongs to an *other* time, an *other* language that cannot be absorbed within an actual-historical or linear-temporal narrative. It belongs to the enigma of a ‘lightness’ that calls the present beyond (*au-delà*) itself and that cannot be captured in the grossness of the order of the present or the actual. It is part of the unexperienced which escapes the very possibility of a comprehensible experience and functions at the limits of writing in that it “de-scribes”. The instance/instant of this young man’s dying without death “flees and pulls indefinitely, impossibly and intensively” whereby the intensity of

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<sup>19</sup> Rather usefully, Caputo (1997: 100) points out that the strange syntax of the ‘without’ (*sans*) in the matrix of “X without X” is “not a simple negation, nullification, or destruction, but a certain reinscription of X, a certain reversal of the movement of X that still communicates with X”.

dying as the push of the impossible is “always a step over the edge, it rules out every conclusion and all ends” so that “*he who masters death (finite life) unleashes the infinitude of dying*” (Blanchot, 1995: 47-48; 40).

### **The Excluded Necessary: The Veil of the Imaginary**

Before I attempt the somewhat complicated task (given the impossibility of mastering textual dissemination) of offering a synopsis of the central themes and tenets of this research thesis as well as the structure of each of the following chapters, I think it is important to attend to what perhaps warrants the apposite phrase, ‘the polemics of style’. Broadly speaking (and in the interests of convenience), this thesis is inspired by the French poststructuralist psychoanalytic and philosophical traditions (primarily the work of the philosopher Jacques Derrida and the linguist and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva), which may present itself as rather daunting and foreign to the uninitiated reader. The philosophical orientation is such that it is virtually implausible to dissociate style or form from epistemology (the process by which knowledge comes into being and proliferates) because the stylistic approach remains a critical forum in gesturing towards any potential knowledge claims. Indeed, the style in which a narrative is constructed remains a central driving-force in the exploration of the content and the textuality of that particular narrative<sup>20</sup>. Hobson (1998: 2) identifies this approach as the “relation of argument to mode of writing” whereby “the import of an argument made can be modified not just by its words, but by other factors, like the structure induced on it by the order in which it is advanced, and repetition”. The mode of writing frequently serves to highlight the problematics of language, the nuance and slippage in meaning, and the difficulty in selecting one particular adjective or phrase in service of the description of a multi-faceted phenomenon. It resists the rendering of canonised and closed interpretations so that the text is not conceived in terms of the notion of a work as a reductive or hermetic product, but rather, as Barthes (1981) suggests, the text functions as a production which renders it as a disseminative and equivocal space where a multiplicity of meanings and tensions

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<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that I am focussing on style in this section though of course the scope of this question extends to the play of language and its inherent slipperiness irrespective of the mode chosen to express some idea. The play of language calls into question any putative self-contained discursive system whereby it highlights *inter alia* the intricacies and multi-referential quality of the signifier. The permutations and complexities of language will be discussed extensively during the course of this thesis.

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intersect. Style is the “beginning of writing” which “sketches the reign of the signifier”. It “serves to praise a new value, *writing*, which is excess, overflow of style toward other regions of language” (Barthes, 1977: 76). Any discursive discipline cannot evade the question of its language since it does not operate in an ideal domain of pure truth and therefore it deludes itself if it claims to present Truth independent of the language it uses to express this truth (Howells, 1999). In this tradition, there is also an endeavour to create a critical juncture or dialogue through a dialectical interchange between the humanities and the social sciences, where distinctions are highlighted as artificial and constructed as opposed to inherently valid. There is an attempt, as Norris (1990: 74) suggests, “to resist the habit of compartmentalised thinking”. Derrida (1984: 114), for example, proposes that philosophy is prevalent in many academic disciplines and that “the only justification for transforming philosophy into a specialised discipline is the necessity to render explicit and thematic the philosophical subtext in every discourse”. The transmission of knowledge cannot retain a level of integrity without interrogating itself philosophically, that is, without acknowledging subtextual premises that may include engaging with and investigating unspoken interests, values and discourses.

Underlying the need to compartmentalise or segregate various disciplines (particularly those disciplines subject to the discourses of the scientific endeavour), one may discover an inveterate desire to expel those impure elements broadly categorised as ‘literary’ or ‘poetic’. Indeed, Le Doeuff (1989: 1-5) proposes that the characterisation of philosophical discourse “meets with reference to the rational, the concept, the argued, the logical, the abstract”. Philosophy certainly does not waver in defining what it is not<sup>21</sup>. It is “inscribed and declares its status as philosophy through a break with myth, fable, the poetic, the domain of the image”. It is a certain *logos* that defines itself through opposition to other types of discourse. However, this putative philosophy of the *logos* that excludes is never found in its pure form because it remains saturated with a “whole pictorial world” - the “philosopher’s image-

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<sup>21</sup> It should be noted, in accordance with Le Doeuff, that the terms ‘philosophy’ and ‘theory’ will be used interchangeably in this thesis. It seems as if the Anglo-American preference for the word ‘theory’ (unless specifically describing the academic discipline of Philosophy) gives way to a Continental preference for the term ‘philosophy’ for both the discipline of Philosophy and for interdisciplinary theoretical studies. In a conference organised around the subject matter of ‘life after theory’, for example, Derrida (2003: 8) proposes that he would translate this conference title into French as ‘life after philosophy’.



album". Usually, these images are viewed as nothing more than decorative, extrinsic to the theoretical work, merely anecdotal, but in fact these strands of the imaginary are essentially and intrinsically linked to the points of tension in a work, the "sensitive points of an intellectual venture"<sup>22</sup>. The imagery/imaginary of philosophy/theory remains inseparable from the difficulties that a text encounters. Yet meaning conveyed through the imaginary of myth, metaphor, the poetic and so on, works both for and against the system that deploys it because the imaginary sustains something which the system itself cannot justify and is therefore necessary for the system's functioning, but it also signals that its properties as imaginary will remain incompatible with the system's discursive possibilities in that the imaginary always remains in excess of the system's descriptive capacity and conceptual mastery. The imaginary "occupies the place of theory's impossible", and this in turn problematises philosophy's "right or task of speaking about itself, of having a discourse about its own discourse and its (legitimate or other) modes, writing a commentary on its own texts" (Le Doeuff, 1989: 6). Philosophy's attempt to establish a process of self-foundation and self-validation always already entails the establishment of an imaginary construct. There is no such thing as a self-founding discourse without recourse to the poetics of the imaginary. Philosophy, in the "administration of its own legitimacy" and the "establishment of its own value", is drawn into "defining and designing its own myths" and making use of "spatial or narrative plans and layouts" (Le Doeuff, 1989: 171). Still philosophy frequently attempts to exclude or exorcise "this inner scandal" (of the imaginary), the "non-philosophical character of thought images" by projecting this "shameful side of philosophy on to an Other" (primitive, archaic, irrational thought, folklore, old wives' tales, nursery stories, the intuitive, the uncultivated, uneducated mind, deficient culture, and so on). It attempts to master through understanding (and prevent this fixed understanding from wandering off elsewhere), assigning understanding to its proper, empirical employment.

Rigour, objectivity and precision are desired attributes of a philosophical system, whereas metaphor, allusion or style are considered as decorative embellishments that

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<sup>22</sup> While Le Doeuff never specifies a definition for the notion of the 'imaginary', Grosz (1989) suggests that the imaginary refers to the image as opposed to the 'pure' content of a theoretical concept. It is a 'thinking-in-images' within theoretical discourse, and alludes to the knots and binds of textuality, the unsayable or unnameable.

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could be easily excised without loss to the fundamental concepts they represent<sup>23</sup>. The imaginary of philosophy is considered as alien or extrinsic even though theoretical disciplines are unable to rid themselves of their dependence on images which remain constitutive and ineradicable. In order to articulate what it is unable to say in other terms, when it “flounders on its own presuppositions” (Grosz, 1989: 190), philosophy is forced to rely on discourses which may be labelled as poetic, visionary, literary, fabulous, figurative or tropic. As a result, these images come to function as philosophy’s necessary underside, its unacknowledged supports, philosophically and pedagogically necessary in the proliferation and elaboration of a theoretico-conceptual system. Yet there still remains a resistance (or in the most extreme form a disavowal) to recognise the ineluctability of the imaginary which is frequently regarded as superfluous or inessential, a “cryptopoetics, a poetic perversion of philosophy” which replaces evidences and proofs with analogies and possibilities, and thus functions as a castration (emasculatation) of reason and rigour, making “a corpse of reason”. The philosophical imaginary is considered as “perverting philosophy into poetry”, permitting “literary mystagogy” to pollute the purity and truth of philosophy so that philosophy is confused with literature (Derrida, 1993c: 136-140). However, it may possibly be that while philosophical discourse puts everything into question, it is “tripped up (*achopper*)” by the poetics of the imaginary which is the question that eludes (*échapper*) it since the imaginary is where the system does not close (Blanchot, 1995: 63). The imaginary is simultaneously “the place where the system constitutes itself, and where this constitution is threatened by the heterogeneous, and by a fiction no longer at the service of truth”. It participates in participation and non-participation whereby there is a double postulation of an imaginary as “participation that which in no case allows itself to be reappropriated by participation, and thus by a philosophical system” (Derrida, 2001: 5-6). In short, the imaginary alludes to the locus of philosophy that fails to be what it wants to be, that fails to add up to the sum of its desired totality. It signals theory at the limits, fissured and displaced, and yet it is precisely the acknowledgement of this essential limitation that permits any theoretical discourse to reflect upon the nature of its discursivity

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<sup>23</sup> For an interesting contextualisation of how Freudian psychoanalysis “devotes itself to the imaginative interpretation” and is informed by metaphoric and idiographic (hermeneutic knowing) principles rather than nomothetic (positivist knowing) approaches, the reader is referred to chapter VII (pp 37-49) of Bruno Bettelheim’s (1985) text, *Freud and Man’s Soul*.

(what constitutes its status as a body of knowledge-production) and to interrogate the frame of its textual possibilities and permutations.

### **The Seductions of an Introduction: From Blindness to the Supplement**

In attempting to honour a more traditional structure of an opening section of a thesis, I will offer up an outline of the content of each chapter, bearing in mind that I am presenting to you, in *précis* form, something that has already been written, which is thus in the past, as your future under the “under the false appearance of a present” (Derrida, 1981: 7). In place of an introduction (to circularity), one can only add more of an elliptical blow which defeats in advance the teleology of an introduction and “undecides its circle”. Derrida (1980: 108) suggests how any attempt to introduce should not intrude (*s'introduire*) or saturate the corpus of the text with reading. So possibly a disclaimer *à la* Derrida is needed/required: Beware, the introduction may attempt to read (seduce) the corpus of the text with the consequence, the ineluctable probability, that the textuality of the text may deviate (differentiate and defer) further from the ‘it’ of itself in this attempted reading. In addition, as Derrida (2003: 44) proposes in qualification for the possibility of meaning (and thus truth), “for someone to mean what he or she says, the possibility must remain always open for *not* meaning, for meaning something else”. Language is constituted as such by the structural possibility that what we say or write may signal something else, something other. “For truth to be true and for the meaning to be meaningful the possibility of a misunderstanding or lie or something else must remain, structurally, always open”. Opening up meaning to the possibility of otherness, to the (in)coming of the other, requires a certain hospitable way “of giving to be read (*donner à lire*)”. As Derrida (2001: 31) suggests:

If something is given to be read that is totally intelligible, that can be totally saturated by sense, it is not given to the other to be read. Giving to the other to be read is also a *leaving to be desired*, or a leaving the other room for an intervention by which she will be able to write her own interpretation: the other will have to be able to sign in my text.

Opening up to the writings of Derrida is, as Royle (2003b) suggests, a matter of reckoning with the incalculable, the unforeseeable, the unknowable, because his writings constitute a “strange strategy without finality” (Derrida, 1981: 7). Derrida is concerned with a supplementary logic whereby an author can always say “more, less, or something other than what he *would* mean (*voudrait dire*)” (Derrida, 1976: 158). Intentionality does not necessarily add up to mastery or control because “there (is) always one more, a supplement” (Derrida, 1996b: 218), and it is this supplement which signals the “mark of an emptiness”, a certain exorbitant exteriority that cannot “emerge out of its strange penumbra” (Derrida, 1976: 145; 149). “We speak its reserve”, as Derrida writes, so that “the presence that is thus delivered to us in the present is a chimera”. Signs, images and representations which are supposed to supplement this non-simple presence are mere “illusions that sidetrack us” (Derrida, 1976: 149; 154). Even if I desire to bring this introductory chapter to a conclusion, I have to keep in mind (to hold onto what is fundamentally ungraspable?) that my desire is circumvented and undermined by that, the haunting of a ghostly trace, the singularity of the other, which problematises the very notion of introductions and conclusions, beginnings and endings. However, in/for the interests of convenient necessity (for the thetic, for the academy), I shall circumvent this spectral elusiveness (of nonconceptuality) and push on in the illusion of my desire – after all, all is as it should be for the deluded subject of the symbolic, according to Lacan!

The next chapter attempts to provide a philosophical and psychoanalytic backdrop or context within which the thesis operates. Derrida (1984: 108) suggests how he has always systematically endeavoured to find a “non-site (*non-lieu*)” from which to question philosophical premises. This non-site or alterity remains radically irreducible to philosophy (thereby presenting the problem of its situation within philosophical language, not to mention the inevitability of the mark of philosophical language on it), and it attempts to manoeuvre philosophy into appearing “to itself as other than itself” so that it can interrogate and reflect upon itself. The chapter will offer an explication of Derrida’s development of certain ‘non-concepts’ (as philosophical aids or monitors if you like), which attempt to promote the possibility for this non-site, this “necessary free space”. It will focus specifically on Derrida’s writings on aporia (the possibility of the impossible), the mythology of metaphoricity and his seminal essay on *différance*. The exploration of psychoanalytic theory will attempt to

establish precedence for this project by focussing on certain phenomena that have challenged the very boundaries of psychoanalytic mastery. It will offer readings of some of the Lacanian ‘fundamentals of psychoanalysis’ – cause, lack and desire, Kristeva’s poetical (and revolutionary) musings on melancholia and abjection, and it will investigate the ‘navel’ or knot in/of dream interpretation and the enigmatic question of the death drive.

Chapters 3 and 4 will attempt to extend the scope of consideration of the pre-oedipal or pre-symbolic mother-infant relationship by focusing on a ‘third’ time-space that exists between them, and the remains of this space in the infant’s unconscious respectively. Through the theoretical explication of two non-concepts, what I have termed the “third aesthetic” and the “O-Function”, I have endeavoured to develop a framework, from a psychoanalytic perspective, which considers how the inauguration of a trace is established so that the infant may seek out or create meaning at a later stage of life following maturation or individuation. The chapters are not however interested in defining the construct of meaning per se, which is invariably a subjective and existential endeavour or idiom, but are rather concerned with what may provide a possibility for subsequent meaning-making endeavours. The notion of a third space, which alludes to a meeting point of two subjectivities which in turn proliferates a third arena of negotiation, considers *other* (liminal) spatial and temporal possibilities that exist (or rather ex-sist) between the mother and the infant. This third time-space (the “third aesthetic”), which takes its cue from “*chora/khōra*” (as explored by Plato, Julia Kristeva and Jacques Derrida) and the “potential space” (as identified by the psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott), will be developed (or in line with an introduction that was conceived *a posteriori* perhaps it should be written “was developed”) through a consideration of thirdness (or more specifically thirdness under erasure, and the refusal to enclose it within a triad), the aesthetic, metaphor and metonymy, and rhythm. What remains (*restance*) of this third energetic body in the infant’s unconscious (the O-Function) will be considered through the tropes of the trace, the gift and cinders, as well as through the ineluctably uncanny rhythms of *desistance* (of the future-to-come).

Chapter 5 investigates how the third aesthetic and the O-Function are effected by the configuration of the “dead mother” (as theorised by the French psychoanalyst André

Green), a mother who remains psychically or psychologically unavailable for the infant. It will explore how the mother's recognition of the infant's otherness and a certain ethic of (silent) love that she imparts to the infant, remain critical in generating and sustaining the momentum of the third aesthetic. In the instance of the dead mother, the mother remains 'out of tune' with the infant, which in turn obstructs the passage and flow of the energetics of the third aesthetic so that its fluidity and mobility are supplanted by the solidified mechanics of paralysis and cadaverisation.

In the last chapter, I will attempt to imagine what type of approach to writing would be needed in order to explore the impossible possibility of the non-concept. This will involve a consideration of Derrida's musings on psychical or dream writing, Cixous's work on the *poethics* of writing and Barthes on the *signifiance* of textuality. The chapter will investigate how these writers have endeavoured to open up a space for the imaginary traces of the writing body. To end off, the chapter will offer a recapitulation of the central themes, or more precisely, the central aporias of the research project.

## 2. THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF DELIMITATION: THE REFUSAL OF CONCEPT

If I knew the names of things of acts of places, I would not write, I would name, and everything would be said. If I knew your name, I would call you. I would cry out the name that summarizes you, and so it would be Sunday and I could rest.

Hélène Cixous (2004: 5)

As soon as it *thinks itself*, language becomes corrosive.

Roland Barthes (1977: 66)

What terrifies you? The lack of closure. From which springs your struggle against in-finity. Origin and end, form, figure, meaning, name, the proper and the self: these are your weapons against that unbearable infinity.

Luce Irigaray (1992: 71)

To risk meaning nothing is to start to play.....

Jacques Derrida (1981b: 14)

Only a political or theoretical commitment that can confront its own internal paradoxes, its inherent or constitutive inconsistencies, and its necessary if changeable limits can be said to have come of age.

Elizabeth Grosz (1997: 73)

### No-Thing as Something or Something is Nothing

This chapter aims to map out some of the key (meta-) philosophical positions of this thesis, as well as trace certain phenomena and ideas that have radically challenged the capacity of psychoanalysis to construct and represent, fuelling at times a debilitating nexus of language and that which problematises conceptualisation (the ‘non-concept’ being one possible name for this confounding configuration). The chapter’s attempt to foreground a particular philosophical or meta-theoretical approach inspired by the writings of Jacques Derrida is effectively an attempt to engage with the problems of making use of language to describe that which may ultimately be extra-linguistic or pre-linguistic. It explicates three central themes in Derrida’s writings focussing particularly on the movement of what he provisionally calls ‘*différance*’ which he regards as neither a word nor a concept since *différance* has no proper name in our language. It then moves on to explore several areas in psychoanalysis (Lacan’s work on cause, lack and desire, Kristeva on melancholia and abjection, the ‘navel’ in dream interpretation, and the death drive) which have irrefutably challenged its omniscient (omni-scientific) status. While the exploration of these areas are not directly relevant to the theoretical developments in the following chapters, I think that it is important to nevertheless offer them up for consideration so as to create a precedence for this

research project, a historical legacy of potentially non-conceptual phenomena (lest we forget that psychoanalysis was founded on the radical discovery of the unconscious) which highlight the difficulty that psychoanalysis would have in falling prey or succumbing to any all too easy reductionism particularly when it comes to these areas which have refused simple conceptualisation.

To begin with and as a point of departure in *approaching* (the more substantial possibility of *rapprochement* remaining a possibly unattainable ideal) that which may in the end signal a certain non-conceptuality, I will briefly discuss Heidegger's (1993: 96-97) meditation on nothingness which functions as a useful example as/of an example of the way in which theoreticians/writers/philosophers have endeavoured to engage and create some kind of (ultimately) non-reciprocal dialogue with something as no-thing, which in turn inspires a vacuum, gap or abyss in knowledge and consciousness. What remains are seemingly insurmountable or unanswerable questions. Heidegger suggests how the "nothing" is rejected and abrogated by science whereby it is concerned exclusively and insistently with beings, motion, essence, something<sup>1</sup>. For science, the nothing may inevitably be an "outrage and a phantasm" that it wishes to know nothing about. With a "studied indifference" science abandons this nothing as "what there is not". However, as Heidegger perceives, perhaps one is conceding this (the) nothing by giving it up and not concerning oneself with it (assuming that one can speak of concession when nothing is conceded). The engagement and elaboration of the question of the nothing ("How is it with the nothing?", "What is the nothing?", for example) should render one into a position where an answer manifests as a possibility, or the impossibility of an answer remains. But more fundamentally, an enquiry into the nothing creates an impasse in that it automatically and in advance is positing the nothing as a being, as something that 'is' such and such. Interrogating the nothing "turns what is interrogated into its opposite", but the question (What is the nothing?) deprives itself of its own object because every answer to this question remains impossible from the start because it necessarily assumes a form – the nothing 'is' this or that - that is an object. "Thinking, which is always essentially thinking about something, must act in a way contrary to its own essence when it thinks of nothing". To add insult to injury, if the nothing is nothing

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<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere, Heidegger (1971: 170) writes that "science always encounters only what *its* kind of representation has admitted beforehand as an object possible for science".



and thus represents total indistinguishability, then it is impossible to obtain a distinction between the imagined and the 'proper' nothing. These are just a few of the problems and conundrums that may present themselves in contending with what resists and defies conceptual encoding. However what frequently emerges is that this supposed 'nothing' is indeed *not nothing* but rather 'something', though this 'something' designates "no presence at a distance". It is an "index of an irreducible exterior", a movement, a dissemination that indicates an "absolutely irreducible alterity" (Derrida, 1981b: 91-92). It remains a motif of heterogeneity that cannot be exhausted of all meaning and exceeds any appropriation, interiorisation, idealisation or the promise of a monolith of full and present Meaning<sup>2</sup>. The overwhelming reliance on language in service of description invariably problematises the very scope of attempting to determine or delimit such alterity which ideally requires some 'genre' exterior to language – a meta-language – an unlikely possibility – an ultimate impossibility as possibility.

## THE (META-)PHILOSOPHICAL CONNECTION

### Derridean Poetics

In his text, *Archive Fever*, Derrida (1996) cites Nietzsche as claiming to recognise thinkers of the future by their capacity to espouse the modality of *perhaps*. This citation seems rather apt in light of Derrida's oeuvre because to engage with it in its vibrancy and ebullency, "to capture it without trying to hold it captive" (de Nooy, 1998: 3), is an inherently precarious enterprise given that Derrida works at the limits of language, at the ungraspable other of thought. There is a quest to locate a 'mode'

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<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, after outlining the numerous binds and aporias that emerge in relation to the nothing, Heidegger finally does suggest that in the fundamental mood of anxiety, and only for a very transient moment, one is able to attune to the nothing itself, one is brought before the nothing itself. Anxiety in this sense does not signify anxiousness or fearfulness. It differs from fear in that one becomes afraid *in the face of* this or that particular being which threatens in a particular way. There is thus fear in the face of something in particular. In contrast, anxiety is anxiety in the face of....., not in the face of this or that thing - "Anxiety in the face of...is always anxiety for....., but not for this or that". There is something that cannot be determined, an essential impossibility of determination. It is precisely this indetermination that comes to the fore whereby one "can get no hold on things". In the slippage, the receding of beings, it is this "no hold on things" that overwhelms. This *certain* anxiety can awaken at any moment, needing no unusual event to rouse it. It is always (al)ready, though it only manifests very seldomly whereby "we are snatched away and left hanging" and in its face all utterance falls silent (Heidegger, 1993: 101-102; 106). For Heidegger, the compulsive talk that is utilised to shatter the vacant stillness of the malaise of anxiety merely confirms the presence of nothing.

that does not fall within the realm of ontological grammar – a fundamental impasse that Derrida (1992: 18) identifies as the “problem of language before linguistics”. Moreover, Derrida’s (1981b: 62; 83; 78) texts are punctuated by lacunae which mark “the sites of a theoretical elaboration which remains.....*still to come*” so that nothing can be *immediately given*, and this in turn limits effective transformation and the proliferation of motifs of homogenous volumes. The *still to come* imposes “the *determined blank or playing space*” of textuality. The determination of Derrida’s texts is insistently *otherwise*, necessarily fissured so as to facilitate something other than a circular closure of interpretation and representation. It is concerned with the “movement by means of which (the) text exceeds its meaning, permits itself to be turned away from, to return to, and to repeat itself outside its self-identity”. In Derrida’s (2003: 17-18) texts, there is a dimension of “undecidability” with “many ways of hearing and understanding a sentence” so that one is compelled to “change the rules, to read differently, if only at another rhythm”<sup>3</sup>. This approach is informed by the inevitable refutation of the promissability of language, of a language that would be able to contain or retain the repletion of meaning - “Language or speech promises, promises *itself* but also goes back on its word, becomes undone or unhinged, derails or becomes delirious, deteriorates, becomes corrupt just as immediately and just as essentially” (Derrida, 1989: 93-94).

Levinas (1996: 55) questions whether Derrida’s work constitutes a line of demarcation which separates the dogmatic from the critical. Indeed, Derrida’s concerns demonstrate a growing awareness of the difficulty of thinking. Derrida’s oeuvre is where one treads “a *no-mans land*, an in-between that is uncertain even of the uncertainties that flicker everywhere. Suspension of truths! Unusual times!”. It inaugurates a new mode of thought which entails an inversion of the abyss into condition, of the limiting concept into precondition, of defect into source. It seems as if nothing is left inhabitable for thought. Levinas (1996: 56-57) terms this “a new *frisson*, Derrida’s poetry”, which in the aftermath signals a desertion of an impossible presence, “a project impossible of accomplishment, ever deferred, a *messianic future*

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<sup>3</sup> Cixous (1984: 151) suggests that this undecidability in Derrida’s texts pushes “his work to the limit where logic vacillates”. The undecidable is where “nothing cuts, decides, where everything is unhinged” so that it obeys a new law of the “logic of non-logic”. The undecidable also implies that as soon as one attempts to arrest or coin a concept it should rather quickly be placed back “into that general movement of oscillation in order not to make of it a master concept”.

as that missing present". A desertion of presence carried out to the extreme point of a desertion of truth implies that meanings are no longer responsive to the "summons of Knowledge". Truth no longer functions at the level of the eternal or omni-temporal. Meanings no longer converge on truth, signifiers function without signifieds, language no longer possesses full meaning guides. All, as Levinas suggests, is otherwise – wholly otherwise. Derrida's deconstruction of presence, his liberation of the temporal from the subordination of the present whereby the past and future are no longer modifications or modulations of the present, possesses broad implications for consciousness which in effect loses its Cartesian privilege as a consciousness of self-presence, unity and mastery.

In his essay, "The Double Session", Derrida (1981: 194) offers a warning in the course of a discussion on potential Hegelian or Platonic overtones of the word "Idea" in Mallarmé's writing: "But a reading here should no longer be carried out as a simple table of concepts or words, as a static or statistical sort of punctuation. One must reconstitute a chain in motion, the effects of a network and the play of syntax". For Johnson (1981), this warning applies equally well to Derrida's own writing which is constructed as a moving chain or network which assiduously frustrates and thwarts the desire for conclusion or stasis. Derrida's writing mimics the *movement* as opposed to the fulfilment of desire, refusing to stop and totalise itself. As Derrida (1993b: 199) proposes: "I never write or produce anything other than this desterrancy of desire, the unassignable trajectories and the unfindable subjects". His texts espouse ambiguities, parentheses, unnamed allusions, mystifications and disseminative logic. In endeavouring to deconstruct the 'either/or logic' that encompasses the spectrum of occidental metaphysics, Derrida's writing attempts to create an "other" logic. He is concerned with certain textual marks which he terms "undecidables" (Derrida, 1981: 42) that can no longer be incorporated into discursive binary oppositions. These undecidables resist and disorganise any neat dichotomies without ever constituting a third term so that neither/nor is *simultaneously* either/or. As an example, one could cite the word *supplement* which appears frequently in Derrida's lexicon. In French, the word *supplément* means both "an addition" and "a substitute" so that "instead of 'A is opposed to B' we have 'B is both added to A and replaces A'. A and B are no longer opposed, nor are they equivalent. Indeed, they are no longer even equivalent to themselves. They are their own *différance* from themselves". The logic of the

supplement thus wrenches apart the very structure of the binary and espouses a subversion of meaning whereby “the shadow presence of the other meaning is always there to undermine the distinction” (Johnson, 1981: xiii). The doubleness of the word *supplement* in turn proliferates the text’s signifying possibilities. Moreover, two seemingly oppositional terms come to function in a nexus of supplementarity whereby, as Derrida (1982: 17-18) points out in Freud’s oeuvre as an example, “every apparently rigorous and irreducible *opposition* (for example the opposition of the secondary to the primary) comes to be qualified, at one moment or another, as a ‘theoretical fiction’”. All oppositions appear “as the other different and deferred”. Derrida’s (1978: 352) oeuvre signals an other way which interrogates the very “structrality of structure”, calling into question what reduces the signifier to thought, the conferment of a centre, a fixed locus or origin, and a privileged reference which seeks to orientate, balance and organise a structure and which in turn limits the play of that structure. His work functions at the limits of the discursive.

One possibly limited attempt at dealing with the limitations of language is a *certain* exigency that motivates Derrida to write “sous rature”, which Spivak (1976: xiv) translates as “under erasure”. This process entails writing a word, crossing it out, and then printing both the word and the deletion. Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. However, since it is necessary (in an endeavour to foreground some concept or notion through a linguistically flawed system), it remains legible<sup>4</sup>. As an example, Derrida (1976: 19) writes: “...the sign is (“is” is crossed out) that ill-named thing (“thing” is crossed out), the only one, that escapes the instituting question of philosophy: ‘what is....?’. This linguistic orientation highlights the necessity of both using (the written declaration, the printing of a word) and erasing (the crossing out) language simultaneously. Spivak (1976: xviii) suggests how the process of this curious practice alludes to a strategy “of using the only available language while not subscribing to its premises”, or “operating according to the vocabulary of the very thing that one delimits” (Derrida, 1982: 18). For Derrida (1978), language contains within itself the necessity of its own critique, the resources for its deconstruction. This notion illuminates writing “under erasure” whereby one is forced to proceed by

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<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere, Derrida (1989: 2) has described this process as “writing without writing, using words without using them: in quotation marks, for example, under a non-negative cross-shaped crossing out, or again in propositions of the type: ‘If I were yet to write a theology, as I am sometimes tempted to do, the word ‘Being’ ought not to appear in it,’ etc”.

ellipses and relinquish the very concept that language describes at the very moment that it is mobilised and utilised in the process of description. In addition, the crossing out signifies the mark of contortion and the strain of linguistics as a system that fails to capture the 'thing', the absolute presence of a concept. Within and through language, there is always difference, heterogeneity and lost presence. As Derrida (1976: 18) writes: "The order of the signified is never contemporary, (it) is at best the subtly discrepant inverse or parallel – discrepant by the time of a breath – from the order of the signifier". Language cannot bring forth presence, it is the place where "the completely other is announced as such – without any simplicity, any identity, any resemblance or continuity – within what is not it" (Derrida, 1976: 47). Word and thing can never fall within the realm of unity. The structure of language is predicated on an *other trace* which remains non-simply present and cannot be captured in its full being.

## **Aporias**

In *Aporias*, Derrida (1993: 1-3) explores if one is able to transgress the borders, edges, extremities and ends of truth, "letting oneself be carried *beyond* the limits of truth". The expression "the limits of truth" implies that truth is precisely limited, finite and confined within its borders. As a result, the truth "is not everything one would say, for there is more, something else or something better: truth is finite (*finie*). Or worse: truth is finished (*c'est fini*)". Derrida investigates the discursive nature of truth and death in this text in order to reveal how such concerns allude to the "*rhetoric of borders*", the lines of delimitation pertaining to proprietorial rights over one's existence, the proper (possibility) of our existence, "a treatise about the tracing of traits as the borderly edges of what in sum *belongs to us (nous revient)*, belonging as much to us as we properly belong to it". He questions the nature of borders as they pertain to death and truth, "wander(ing) about in the neighbourhood" of these questions. With the threshold of death, for example, one is engaged with a certain possibility of the impossible, a certain impossibility as nonviability, as nontrack or barred path. Derrida (1993: 22) suggests how the word "death" is absolutely "unassignable or unassigning with respect to its concept and to its thingness". When speaking about death, everything transpires at the limits of truth and untruth. Derrida is interested in what is involved in the crossing of the ultimate border, crossing the

threshold, passing the term of one's life. The crossing of borders always announces itself in accordance with the motion of a certain step which crosses a line of indivisibility<sup>5</sup>. Yet as Derrida (1993: 8) perceives, is such a crossing possible and can one testify to it? This concern places one on the path of the *aporia*, that which is "the difficult or the impracticable, here the impossible, passage, the refused, denied, or prohibited passage, indeed the nonpassage, which can in fact be something else, the event of a coming or of a future advent which no longer has the form of the movement that consists in passing, traversing, or transiting". The *aporia* refers to a precarious positionality which highlights the problem of that, something other, which signifies a potential refusal of disclosure, that which may be indelibly lost and which cannot be colonised, and that which may ultimately be dissociated from any possible originary configuration or the possibility of a movement that can be diachronically coded.

The "nonbelonging" (Derrida, 1993: 8-9; 12-13) of *aporia* "trembles in an unstable multiplicity" so that any possible context is not rendered as absolutely saturable or saturating. No context is able to appropriate or determine "meaning to the point of exhaustiveness". The *aporia* signals that which exceeds meaning and the pure discursivity of meaning. What is at stake in *aporia* is the "not knowing where to go", an enduring impasse that 'positions' one before "a door, a threshold, a border, a line, or simply the edge or the approach of the other". In the extreme, *aporia* obfuscates the way and separates one in the very place where *it would no longer be possible to constitute a problem*, the very project or problematic task remaining impossible. Derrida questions whether one is even able to speak of the experience of the *aporia* (and if so, in what sense) because one is absolutely exposed without protection, without a possible problem or substitution, "disarmed, delivered to the other, incapable even of sheltering ourselves behind what could still protect the interiority of a secret". In the place of the extremity of *aporia*, *there is no longer any problem*. This is not as a result of the fact that the problem has been solved or solutions found, but rather one can no longer find a problem that would constitute or sustain itself, a problem that one "would keep in front of oneself, as a presentable object or project,

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<sup>5</sup> Derrida (1993: 10) highlights how the French word 'pas' signifies not only step as in "the gait, the pace, the rhythm, the passage, or the traversal" but also inaugurates a mark of negation, a certain 'not'. This negation suggests the difficulty of passage or journey - a forbidden venture.

as a protective representative or a prosthetic substitute, as some kind of border still to cross or behind which to protect oneself". The esoterics of the aporetic are central to Derrida's work which highlights the traces of undecidability, paradoxical dislocations and conditions of impossibility, as well as the edges of borders that proliferate the liminal. The aporia of the impossible calls upon a temporal structure where there is an instantaneous dissociation from the present, a "*différance* in being-with-itself of the present" (Derrida, 1993: 17; 20-21). Something in the present is thus always differentiated, unknown, temporally deferred or delayed<sup>6</sup>. The heterogeneous 'logic' of the aporia fosters a paradoxical effect so that "the partitioning (*partage*) among multiple figures of aporia does not oppose figures to each other, but instead installs the haunting of the one in the other". In one instance, the aporia is rendered impermeable, derived from "an opaque existence of an uncrossable border", where the door remains permanently barred or only opened in accordance with an unlocatable condition. In another case, the aporia is derived from the fact that there is no limit, there is no longer a border to cross, since the limit remains "too porous, permeable, indeterminate". Yet another instance or variation of aporia signifies that which is impossible whereby it functions as a nonpassage which "does not allow for something that could be called passage, step, walk, gait, displacement, or replacement, a kinesis in general. There is no more path". The impasse is rendered impossible since the future advent of an event bears no relation to the passage of what happens or comes to pass. The aporia may thus come to signal a refusal of trajectory - the end of *trans* (transport, transposition, transgression, translation). In short, it is that which "cannot pass (*passer*) or come to pass (*se passer*): it is not even the *non-pas*, the not-step, but rather the deprivation of the *pas*" (Derrida, 1993: 23).

Derrida (1993: 32-33) proposes that the question of knowing what it is "to experience the aporia", to put the aporia into operation, remains. This however is not necessarily a failure or simple paralysis, "the sterile negativity of the impasse", but is instead a question of inherency and insurmountability. A solution for escaping the bind of the impasse is more than likely to be equated with a cessation of understanding. The aporetic elicits a plethora of questions without concomitant answers or solutions. Does one pass through the aporia? Is one immobilised before the threshold, to the

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<sup>6</sup> This notion of the deferral of presence to itself will be considered in detail throughout the thesis.

point of having to turn around and seek another way? What takes place with the aporia? Is the aporia *there where* it is impossible to go? All of these questions function as indices of the “coming to pass” when it is met by a limit. Throughout Derrida’s text on the aporetic, there seems to be the adoption of a form of posing – the posing of numerous questions that in the end may signal their own unanswerability. In addition, the notion of impossibility adds an impossible complement, a complement of impossibility to possibility, so that one is faced with a paradoxical proposition of the possibility of an impossibility [the aporetic supplement of the possible, the “paradoxical possibility of a possibility of impossibility” (Derrida, 1993: 70)]. There is an absolute heterogeneity in the modality of the possible. This leads Derrida once again to question whether it is plausible to situate the aporia in the impossibility or in the possibility of an impossibility, which cannot necessarily be equated with impossibility, for the latter scenario accedes to a possible gesture of an impossibility as opposed to merely conceding an impossibility which would bar absolutely. Therefore in the proposition of the possibility of an impossibility, “the impossibility would be possible and would appear *as such*, as impossible, as an impossibility that can nevertheless appear or announce itself *as such*” (Derrida, 1993: 73; 76). The limits of the *as such* allude to the limits of truth and the possibility of truth. Death (to be expected, *à laquelle s’attendre*) is the most unique and ultimate occurrence of this possibility of an impossibility because the nonaccess to death as such (nonaccess functioning as the only possible access) signals “access only to the aspect of the border that can only be the threshold”. The access to death is thus as nonaccess to a nonborder. Interestingly, as Derrida points out, death (an aporetic form of the nonsaid) is always the name of a secret since it signs the irreplaceability of absolute singularity (no one can die in my place). It puts forth the common, public name of a secret. The aporetic is ultimately interminable, *without end*, foiling “every methodological strategy and every stratagem of delimitation” (Derrida, 1993: 79-80). It is indeed a “strange topography of edges” where rigorous specificity remains untenable.



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## White Mythology

Derrida (1982: 219-220) is a philosopher who is deeply engaged with the problem of the aporetic and his concern with metaphor, with attempting to decipher the figure of metaphor in the philosophical text through some kind of systematic treatise, highlights the need “to recognise in principle the *condition for the impossibility* of such a project”. Effectively the aporia emerges in the attempt to account for (the concept of) metaphor by making use of metaphor to explicate it. Metaphor issues from and corresponds to a system of tropes or figures which remain in “systematic solidarity” to, or contemporaneous with, the tropes or figures in the system that metaphor would seek to dominate through explication. Metaphor colludes with the discourse it would seek to dominate. It thus remains in the impossible (aporetic) position of attempting to dominate that from which it is a derivative, to saturate that which can never entirely be saturated. Metaphor is so deeply enveloped in the field of the text that one would, in attempting to account for it as the concept of the concept, require some kind of ‘metaphor’ that remains outside the system or field - the impossible aporetic of “the metaphor of metaphor”, a “meta-metaphorics” (Derrida, 1982: 224), an extra metaphor that remains extraneous to the entirety of the system that it circumscribes. This would imply and call for a language to reflect on language, a meta-language (since the delineation of metaphor is constituted by the fabric of language), something outside of language (but as and through a language with an intention to account for or convey) to reflect on and describe the permutations of the linguistic condition. What will become clear during the course of this thesis is the aporetic bind of attempting to explore that which exists (ex-sists) outside the system of language. In his essay on ‘white mythology’, Derrida is keenly interested in the ways in which metaphor is implicated in philosophical (theoretical) language, the *usure* of metaphorical puissance in philosophical exchange, “metaphor *in* the text of philosophy”. Derrida makes use of the word *usure* as an indication (an ineluctably metaphorical one at that) of that which constitutes the very history and structure of the philosophical metaphor. *Usure* in French signifies both usury, the acquisition of too much interest, and using up, deterioration through usage. The “metaphor of (the) *usure* (of metaphor)” thus inscribes an irreducible effect of both profit and loss. The involvement with metaphor reveals “how metaphysics’s eternal attempt to *profit* from

its ventures is based upon an irreducible *loss*, an ‘expenditure without reserve’” (Derrida, 1982: 209-210). Derrida cites Anatole France’s *The Garden of Epicurus*, which explores how the sensory figure is sheltered and used (up) in every metaphysical concept whereby abstract notions always hide a sensory figure. Indeed, metaphysics is connected with “the erasure of the efficacy of the sensory figure”, the sensory image being “deflowered and deteriorated by the history of the concept”<sup>7</sup>. The text suggests how conceptual encoding effaces an “original figure”, that which is beneath the metaphor which simultaneously hides and is hidden. For France (cited in Derrida, 1982: 210), the sensuous figure remains determinable however hidden it may be. It is possible to reactivate the primitive inscription, whereby the process is analogous to chemists who have reagents which render the effaced meaning of a papyrus or parchment visible again: “If an analogous process were applied to the writings of the metaphysicians, if the primitive and concrete meaning that lurks yet present under the abstract and new interpretations were brought to light, we should come upon some very curious and perhaps instructive ideas”. Derrida (1982: 211) however is not convinced of such a possibility and suggests that the primitive, sensory figure is not exactly a metaphor because it is “a kind of transparent figure, equivalent to a literal meaning (*sens proper*)”. It manifests as a metaphor only when philosophical/theoretical/conceptual discourse puts it into circulation. In this very process, the first meaning and the subsequent displacement are then forgotten. The metaphor is no longer noticed and it is taken for the proper meaning at the expense of

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<sup>7</sup> Metaphysics is concerned with aspects of reality that frequently lie beyond the grasp of empirical certainty – time and space, being and knowing, truth and presence and so forth. It endeavours to capture truth in an ultimate and unified point, an ultimate origin (the *logos*), and is thus logocentric in its quest for this undivided origin. The imposition of the binary oppositional structure remains fundamental to this epistemological tradition. Metaphysical thought bisects ‘reality’ along oppositional lines by setting up two opposites (a thesis and an antithesis). These traditional oppositions are lodged in a violent hierarchy where one pole invariably takes a privileged or superior position in relation to the other. In such a dichotomy, the primary term is typically considered the subject or locus of meaning, while the secondary pole is cast as its negation, exclusion, a/object or other. One pole is assumed to be prior and superior to the second which is inevitably considered to be external, derivative, and accidental in relation to its first. Bennington (1993: 16-17) suggests that the construction of discursive structures is predicated on an unquestioned value of *presence* so that the metaphysics of presence thinks in two moments: “presence first, of the world to a gaze, of consciousness to its own inspection, of a meaning to a mind, of life to itself, of a breast to a mouth; absence next – the world veiled, consciousness astray, non-sense, death, debauchery, language, weaning”. If one thinks the second moment as a derivation of the first, then one returns the complex to the simple, the contingent to the necessary and so on, and it is this that marks the order of *logos*. Derrida’s work endeavours to unfix metaphysical thinking by disrupting its foundations and dislodging its certitudes so that thought is no longer ordered according to a hegemonic schema. The pervasiveness of metaphysics in the occidental intellectual tradition, however, ensures that one can never entirely escape its paradigms in that no critique can ever entirely evade what it attempts to criticise.

the effacement of the original figure. Consequently, we become “unwitting metaphysicians in proportion to the *usure* of our words”. *The Garden of Epicurus* suggests how “any expression of an abstract idea can only be an analogy. By an odd fate, the very metaphysicians who think to escape the world of appearances are constrained to live perpetually in allegory. A sorry lot of poets, they dim the colours of the ancient fables, and are themselves but gatherers of fables. They produce white mythology. Their output is mythology, an anemic mythology” (Cited in Derrida, 1982: 213). White mythology, as Derrida (1982: 213) explains, has “erased within itself the fabulous scene that has produced it, the scene that nevertheless remains active and stirring, inscribed in white ink, an invisible design...”. White mythology alludes to the hidden history of a metaphoric concept, something ‘originary’ which has been lost in metaphoric construction and development. Language thus becomes originarily metaphorical in that it is metaphor that relates language back to its ‘origin’. This origin however is in a sense a pseudo-origin for the ‘originary origin’ is permanently effaced by this metaphorically constructed origin, so that this latter origin is the only ‘origin’ that may be considered through language as such.

Derrida endeavours to engage with this notion of ‘white mythology’ not in order to reject what has been proposed, but rather for the purposes of reconsideration. He suggests how the movement of *The Garden of Epicurus* implies a continuist presupposition in that it considers the developmental mutation of a sensory meaning which is ultimately rendered metaphorically. This delineation however fails to take into cognisance that perhaps this ‘originary figure’ is indelibly deracinated from its origin and cannot be recuperated. As Derrida (1982: 215) writes: “The history of a metaphor appears essentially not as a displacement of breaks, as reinscriptions in a heterogeneous system, mutations, separations without origin, but rather as a progressive erosion, a regular semantic loss, an uninterrupted exhausting of the primitive meaning: an empirical abstraction without extraction from its own native soil”. The concept of *usure*, the simultaneous profit-loss configuration, is implicated in the constituents of metaphor itself and therefore something which originally signified a “tropic and prephilosophical resource” (Derrida, 1982: 229) is transformed into a metaphysical-metaphoric configuration which arises at the expense of the “archaeological simplicity of a proper origin, the virginity of a history of beginnings” (Derrida, 1982: 229). Between the erasure of the sensory and the movement of

metaphorisation, there is an energetic absence, an enigmatic division, which in turn renders it implausible to make use of something other, *from the exterior*, to interrogate the metaphoricity of metaphor, the construction of metaphor as metaphor. I think that Paul Ricoeur (2002: 203) usefully sums up the impasse when he suggests that there is “no discourse on metaphor that is not stated within a metaphorically engendered conceptual network. There is no metaphorical standpoint from which to perceive the order and the demarcation of the metaphorical field. Metaphor is metaphorically stated”. Metaphoricity is absolutely uncontrollable in that “there can be no principle for delimiting metaphor, no definition in which the defining does not contain the defined”. In this way, any discourse can never wield absolute authority over its metaphoric productions, or perhaps it can only do so “around a blind spot or central deafness” (Derrida, 1982: 228). Any discursive genre is a product of metaphor in that the entire discursive delimitation of metaphor already lends itself to being constructed and worked by ‘metaphors’.

Metaphor always risks carrying itself elsewhere, disrupting semantic plenitude, wandering off and no longer designating “the truth which attunes it to its referent”. Even if it espouses a mimetic function (an attempt to imitate some-thing through analogy which would offer resemblance or similarity or likeness<sup>8</sup>) there is always already the possibility that it may stray from this condition of knowledge in service of truth. It may venture forth alone, “unloosed from the very thing it aims at”. It may accentuate the gap between “the nonmeaning preceding language (which has meaning)” and the “truth of language which would say the thing such as it is in itself”. In nonmeaning, “language has not yet been born”, whereas in the truth, “language is to be filled, achieved, actualised, to the point of erasing itself, without any possible play, before the (thought) thing which is properly manifested in the truth”. ‘Nonmeaning’ alludes to a space which is prior to appropriation by/through language. ‘Truth’, on the other hand, manipulates and manoeuvres language so that it is assumed to no longer be multi-referential but rather refer absolutely to the thing-in-itself. In accordance with this nonmeaning-truth delineation, meaning still resides and exists in nonmeaning, yet in this ‘nonmeaning’, the truth “still might be missed”, and the thing may not manifest itself “in the truth” (Derrida, 1982: 241). Hence, the

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<sup>8</sup> Mimesis is what “gives us to see in action that which nonetheless is not to be seen in action, but only in its very resembling double, its *mimēma*” (Derrida, 1982: 239).

possibility for meaning in nonmeaning signals the possibility of a detour where truth (actualisation of the thing) may be (forever) lost. Metaphor may never find its proper analogy, its truth and its presence, what it is supposed to resemble. It is never exhausted in the history of its meaning nor the visible or invisible presence of its theme. In metaphor there is something elliptical which “gets carried away with itself” and cannot be what it is “except in erasing itself” (Derrida, 1982: 268; 271). The movement of metaphor invariably risks an irrevocable loss of meaning since it cannot necessarily appropriate an *unnameable* articulation which remains irreducible. There is a “*wearing away*” (Ricoeur, 2002: 202), a fading of the sensuous/sensible as the metaphysico-metaphoric concept gains ascendancy.

### ***Différance***

Metaphor signals an ineluctable loss of meaning-truth and alludes to the difficulty of exploring metaphor with or through the framework of metaphor. It highlights the aporetics of ‘meta-metaphorics’, and adds to (as supplement) Derrida’s preoccupation with what precedes or exceeds language, with “the other of language without which language would not be what it is” (Derrida, 1978: 31), with what is “neither rhetorical nor linguistic, nor even discursive”. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Derrida has introduced a penumbra of non-concepts to “mark the limits of the linguistic turn” (Derrida, 2001: 76), which he has variably termed as ‘trace’, ‘text’, ‘writing’, ‘dissemination’, ‘spectre’, ‘hymen’ and so on. It is important to note that while these ‘non-concept’ concepts (given the difficulty of escaping the bind of conceptualisation when attempting to describe even that which may ultimately resist, refuse or evade conceptualisation) form a chain where each may be substituted for the other, they are not, as Spivak (1976: lxx) reminds the reader, exactly the same because “each substitution is also a displacement and carries a different metaphoric charge”. In this section, I would like to explore the aporetic challenge that Derrida’s non-concept of what he provisionally calls ‘*différance*’ has posed to his thinking and writing. In his seminal essay entitled “*Différance*”, Derrida (1982: 3-4) immediately notifies the reader to a “silent lapse in spelling” in the word ‘*différance*’. The insertion of the letter *a* signals a “mute irony”, an “inaudible misplacement”, which in turn fosters an “insistent intensification of its play”. The graphic difference (*a* instead of *e*), the marked difference between two apparently vocal notations, cannot be apprehended in

speech<sup>9</sup>. ‘*Différance*’ is neither a word nor a concept. Instead, it facilitates the “possibility of conceptuality, of a conceptual process and system in general” (Derrida, 1982: 11). It cannot represent the calm, present, and self-referential unity of a concept. From the outset, Derrida foregrounds the difficulty of utilising or explicating such a notion (“in principle and in the last analysis this is impossible, and impossible for essential reasons...”). He endeavours to reconstruct and reassemble in the configuration of a *sheaf* the “different directions” in which he has provisionally negotiated this precarious nomination of *différance*. He insists upon the word *sheaf* because, *inter alia*, it aptly captures “a complex structuring of a weaving, an interlacing which permits the different threads and different lines of meaning - or of force - to go off again in different directions, just as it is always ready to tie itself up with others”. *Différance* bypasses the order of apprehension in general and it is offered “by a mute mark, by a tacit monument”, remaining “silent, secret and discreet as a tomb”. It is a tomb that “cannot even be made to resonate”, a “pyramidal silence”, and a “strange space”. For Derrida (1982: 5-6), the endeavour to conceptualise *différance* is infused with equivocation and instability. As he playfully intimates:

What am I to do in order to speak of the *a* of *différance*? It goes without saying that it cannot be *exposed*. One can expose only that which at a certain moment can become *present*, manifest, that which can be shown, presented as something present, a being-present in its truth, in the truth of a present or the presence of the present. Now if *différance* *is* (and I also cross out the “is”)<sup>10</sup> what makes possible the presentation of the being-present, it is never presented as such. It is never offered to the present. Or to anyone. Reserving itself, not exposing itself, in regular fashion it exceeds the order of truth at a certain precise point, but without dissimulating itself as something, as a mysterious being, in the occult of non-knowledge or in a hole with indeterminable borders (for example, in a topology of castration)<sup>11</sup>. In every

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<sup>9</sup> A central issue that Derrida’s work addresses is the speech/writing binary whereby western metaphysics has exalted speech as the privileged medium of meaning (phonocentrism) at the expense of writing which is seen as its derivative, a threat to the true carrier of meaning, a tainted substitute for the sovereignty and supremacy of speech. In this way, writing implies repetition, risk of loss, absence, distance, ambiguity and death.

<sup>10</sup> The “is” is crossed out in Derrida’s original text in order to gesture towards the impossibility of representation in presence. *Différance* cannot be implicated in the immediacy of presence.

<sup>11</sup> As mentioned in the first chapter, Lacan’s “typology of castration” assigns the hole or lack to a place and therefore institutes a metaphysical position (albeit a negative one) of constructing absence, the

exposition it would be exposed to disappearing as disappearance. It would risk appearing: disappearing.

The above passage highlights the detours, locutions and syntax in which the text is forced to take recourse (refuge). From the beginning, Derrida has had to “delineate *that différance is not*, does not exist, is not a present-being (*on*) in any form; and we will be led to delineate also everything *that it is not*, that is, *everything*; and consequently that it has neither existence nor essence. It derives from no category of being, whether present or absent”. *Différance* cannot be reduced to any ontological appropriation, yet in the very opening of the space in which ontology produces its process, *différance* mysteriously inscribes and exceeds ontology “without return”. As a consequence, there is nowhere to begin to trace the sheaf of *différance* because “what is put into question is precisely the quest for a rightful beginning, an absolute point of departure, a principal responsibility”.

*Différance* does not operate according to principles, postulates, axioms or definitions, nor does it proceed along a linear trajectory. In the etching of *différance*, “everything is strategic and adventurous” (Derrida, 1982: 7). It is strategic because no transcendent truth is able to colonise the totality of the terrain or field. It is adventurous because the strategy adopted is not a simple strategy that develops tactics according to a final goal, theme or destination. One is forced to develop a strategy without finality, “blind tactics”, because *différance* proliferates the concept of *play* which in turn announces “the unity of chance and necessity in calculations without end”. *Différance*, which maintains a certain necessary relationship with the structural limits of mastery, alludes to that which is most irreducible. Although it is neither a word nor a concept, Derrida attempts a semantic analysis in order to explicate what is at stake. The verb *différer* (from the Latin verb *differre*) possesses two meanings<sup>12</sup>. The first meaning or motif refers to “the action of putting off until later, of taking into account, of taking account of time and of the forces of an operation that implies an economical calculation, a detour, a delay, a relay, a reserve, a representation...”. *Différer* in this sense is to temporise, to take recourse in the “temporal and

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lack, the hole, as a transcendental principle that can be pinned down as such and thereby govern a theoretical discourse.

<sup>12</sup> In English, the two distinct meanings of the Latin *differre* have become two separate words: to defer and to differ.

temporising mediation of a detour” which suspends accomplishment or fulfilment (of desire, will and so on) and simultaneously, in this very process of suspension, annuls or tempers its own effect. It is the “temporising detour of deferral”, a “kind of infinitesimal and radical displacement” (Derrida, 1982: 14). The other meaning of *différer* refers to that which is not identical, a “dissimilar otherness”, whereby an interval, a distance, *spacing*, must be produced between. Derrida (1982: 8-9) proposes that if one were to conceptualise *différance* in adherence with classical strictures, it could be said “to designate a constitutive, productive and originary causality, the process of scission and division which would produce or constitute different things or differences”.

Derrida suggests that if one accepts the form of the question, *what is différance?*, then one is forced to conclude that *différance* has been derived, has happened, can be governed, mastered and controlled. Moreover, one must examine and interrogate this question as it appropriates the status of a question and turn it back on itself otherwise one automatically retreats into what one has endeavoured to disengage from, that is, a quest to construct knowingness through *différance*. *Différance* is never present as such in that “each element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element” (Derrida, 1982: 13). *Différance* is what disrupts the possibility of a linear or chronological temporality so that, in one of Derrida’s (1993: 14) majestically playful conundrums, “the now is and is not what it is. More precisely, it only ‘scarcely’ is what it is. Insofar as it has been, it no longer is. But insofar as it will be, .....it is not yet”<sup>13</sup>. In this way, Derrida posits presence as a “determination and as an effect”, a determination or an effect within a system that is no longer that of presence but of *différance*, where the binaries of activity/passivity, cause/effect, determination/indetermination, no longer hold. This reconsideration of presence also impacts on the understanding of consciousness as the perception of self in presence. Freud, as Derrida suggests, was a writer who “put consciousness into question in its assured certainty of itself”. He called the authority of consciousness into question and thus the primacy of presence as consciousness. More significantly, he did so on the

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<sup>13</sup> The convolutions of Derrida’s commentary on temporality will be addressed in detail in Chapter 4 on the O-Function.



basis of the motif of *différance* – “All the oppositions that furrow Freudian thought relate each of his concepts one to another as moments of a detour in the economy of *différance*. One is but the other different and deferred, one differing and deferring the other. One is the other in *différance*, one is the *différance* of the other” (Derrida, 1982: 18-19). As an example, Derrida suggests that the difference between the pleasure principle and the reality principle is “only *différance* as detour”. Indeed, the pleasure principle and the reality principle do not oppose each other as thesis and antithesis (emerging into synthesis), but rather form “an alterity that is even more irreducible than the alterity attributed to opposition”. For Derrida, the only instance that seems to contradict pleasure is the pleasure principle itself in that it is divided from itself, different and deferred in relation to itself, so that it “*unleashes* in itself the *absolute* other” (Derrida, 1987: 283-85). Derrida cites Freud (1991a: 278) in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*:

Under the influence of the ego’s instincts of self-preservation, the pleasure principle is replaced by the reality principle. This latter principle does not abandon the intention of ultimately obtaining pleasure, but it nevertheless demands and carries into effect the postponement of satisfaction, the abandonment of a number of possibilities of gaining satisfaction and the temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure.

Derrida (1982: 19) proposes that the above cited passage of Freud’s text, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, touches on the “point of greatest obscurity, on the very enigma of *différance*, on precisely that which divides its very concept by means of a strange cleavage”. This is as a result of the fact that one is forced to contend *simultaneously* with *différance* as the economic detour which aims at coming back to the pleasure that has been deferred by calculation, and *différance* as the “relation to an impossible presence, as expenditure without reserve, as the irreparable loss of presence, the irreversible usage of energy, that is, as the death instinct, and as the entirely other relationship that apparently interrupts every economy”. In this proposition, Derrida is speaking of a relationship between a *différance* that is able to make profit on its investment (an economical configuration that is able to retreat back to the pleasure that was deferred), and a *différance* that misses its profit (the noneconomical ‘position’ that signals the death of pleasure which remains indelibly lost). The

economic character of *différance* however in no way implies that deferred pleasure can always be found again because, as Derrida (1982: 20-21) suggests, “we must conceive of a play in which whoever loses wins, and in which one loses and wins on every turn”. Moreover, if the deferred pleasure remains implacably and indelibly postponed, it does not mean that a certain presence remains absent or hidden because *différance* is what “maintains our relationship with that which we necessarily misconstrue, and which exceeds the alternative of presence and absence”. That which exceeds all putative oppositions is excluded from every process of presentation by means of which it would be possible to call upon it to show itself. As a result, the unconscious, for example, is not “a hidden, virtual, or potential self-presence. It differs from, and defers, itself”. It is woven of differences and sends out delegates, representatives and proxies but without necessarily the guarantee that it “might be present, be ‘itself’ somewhere, and with even less chance that it might become conscious”, that it might be a virtual and masked consciousness. The radical alterity of the unconscious is marked by an irreducibility so that the language of presence and absence (absence constructed and assumed as a consequence of the absence of presence) is wholly inadequate in the description and reading of its traces. It cannot be reduced to the simplicity of the living present as “an originary and unceasing synthesis”, a synthesis assiduously directed back on itself. The unconscious does not allude to the horizon of reconstructed - past or future - presents. Instead it signals the “‘past’ that has never been present, and which never will be, whose future to come will never be a *production* or a reproduction in the form of presence”. Like *différance*, unconscious traces cannot be thought on the basis of the presence of the present. The unconscious trace is never as it is in the presentation of itself because it erases itself in presenting itself. In short, *différance* challenges the possibility of delimiting the ontology of presence which it continuously dislocates and displaces. It carries itself beyond in a movement that dissociates being and knowing, existence and knowledge. It is a fracture of the Cartesian *cogito* which confers knowledge on *what and who* I am. Not only is there no kingdom of *différance*, but *différance* instigates the subversion of every kingdom “which makes it obviously threatening and infallibly dreaded by everything within us that desires a kingdom, the past or future presence of a kingdom” (Derrida, 1982: 22 -24). There is no essence to/of *différance*, and it remains foreign and unnameable, not provisionally so but rather because there is no name for it at all. There never has been and never will be “a unique word, a master-

name”, “a primary prescription or the prophetic annunciation of an imminent and as yet unheard-of nomination”. That which is termed X (*différance*, for example) is written completely otherwise.

While Kristeva (1984: 140) acknowledges the radicality of *différance*, its capacity to indicate the “exorbitant mobility” of logocentrism and push it “further and elsewhere”, she nevertheless takes up (and on) a full critique of *différance* in her seminal text, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, under a chapter entitled “Non-contradiction: Neutral Peace”. This critique warrants elaboration in that it presages what will be developed in this research project. Kristeva’s arguments indicate a head-on confrontation (a revolution) as opposed to the “non-contradiction” of Derrida’s position. From her point of view, *différance* is neither positive nor negative and therefore lacks the force and productivity of either pole. As a consequence, heterogeneity, or what Kristeva (1984: 141-142) terms ‘negativity’, “has become positivised and drained of its potential for producing breaks”. It holds itself back in a process of delaying (*retardment*) or deferment and thus becomes merely positive and affirmative in its inscription and institution through retention, as opposed to being able to produce genuine rupture. Through this *ingathering* (*recueillement*), *différance* absorbs oppositions and contradictions which are rendered as efficacious through a negativity that “concatenates, reactivates and generates”. Kristeva further suggests that *différance*, and its concomitant effacement, is a movement that “retreats before the thetic” and therefore it cannot assure a position for the subject to engage within symbolic structures<sup>14</sup>. Sheltered by the pre-symbolic realm (what Kristeva terms the ‘semiotic’<sup>15</sup>), *différance* “denounces the economy of the symbolic function and opens

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<sup>14</sup> The break into, and boundary of, the symbolic order is the thetic. The thetic is a rupture which distinguishes the semiotic (drives and their articulations) from the symbolic order, marking the “threshold of language”. It produces the positing of signification, enunciation and proposition (Kristeva, 1984: 45). It represents moments when the unstable semiotic is harnessed to provide organisation, structure and order, and it organises the drives into symbolically amenable forms (Grosz, 1989).

<sup>15</sup> The semiotic and the symbolic are two heterogeneous orders in the production of discourse, constitution of the subject, and regulation of social relations. Their interaction is dialectic and together they provide the energy and impetus for all individual, social and textual experience. The two orders permanently and dynamically coexist and are inseparable from the signifying process that constitutes language (Kristeva, 1984). In order to discover the semiotic, one needs to go beyond the “theatre of linguistic representations” and consider “pre- or translinguistic modalities of psychic inscription” (Kristeva, 1987b: 5). It consists of drive-related and affective meaning organised according to primary processes whose sensory aspects are often nonverbal - sound and melody, rhythm and colours, odours and so on (Kristeva, 1995). The semiotic is thus correlated with pre-oedipal pulsions remaining heterogeneous to symbolic representation (Kristeva, 1984). It signals its presence in discourse through

up a space that the latter cannot subsume". Therefore it is forced to give up on the subject and his/her functioning as social practice, as well as the subject's capacity for *jouissance* or disintegration because the subject needs to be anchored within the symbolic in order to be decentred. Moreover, "neutral in the face of all positions, theses and structures", *différance* invariably remains "equally restrained when they break, burst or rupture", demonstrating "disinterestedness towards (symbolic and/or social) structure", and remaining "silent when faced with its destruction or renewal". Kristeva regards the "neutral peace" of *différance* as an abdication of responsibility that "gives up on the subject" in that it fails to implicate itself directly in socio-symbolic structure or its collapse, except as an oblique anteriority, an *a priori* movement that engenders possibilities and openings for symbolic structures. De Nooy (1998) suggests how the assignation of the label of 'neutral peace' to Derrida's philosophy is situated antithetically to the Kristevan position of revolution where there is no place for a non-committal movement that blurs the contrasting opposing forces. Derrida is more concerned with conceiving common ground and the *différance* of irreducible differences.

Kristeva (1984: 143-144) further proposes that *différance* "brushes aside" drive residues and corporeal pulsions which "return, heterogeneous, to interrupt its contemplative retention". Instinctual heterogeneity, which Kristeva regards as neither deferred nor delayed, is "precisely that which *enters into contradiction with différence* and brings about leaps, intervals, abrupt changes, and breaks in its spacing (*espacement*)". For Kristeva, contradiction is the irruption of the heterogeneous which "cuts short" any *différance*. Moreover, the drive residuals highlight an impossibility of gathering up heterogeneity into *différance* without leaving any remainders so that the return of the heterogeneous element in the movement of *différance* "brings about the revolution of *différance*: expenditure, semantico-syntactic anomaly, erotic excess,

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effects of rhythm, nonsense, alliteration, wordplay, repetition and the dominance of sound over sense (Graybeal, 1994). The semiotic is the repository of drives in language, being the precondition of language itself, and the element in signification that recuperates the body back into the very structures of language. It therefore manifests as the subversive and revolutionary potential of all signification, radically subverting discursive structures (Kristeva, 1980; 1984). In short, it is the repressed condition of symbolically regulated language (Grosz, 1990). Kristeva's description of the symbolic relies heavily on Lacan (as explicated in the first chapter). It is in their elaborations of the pre-symbolic mode that they opt for different directions. For a discussion of pre-symbolic differences between Lacan and Kristeva, the reader is referred to Gallop (1982) *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction* (see especially pg 124).

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social protest, *jouissance*". The heterogeneous element poses a direct threat to the barrier which protects the trace and its effacement and indeed "tosses it aside" through the expenditure of non-deferred energy charges that can no longer be held in abeyance. Instead of maintaining the scene of *différance*, the energetic forces and discharge of the heterogeneous element, which fosters a sense of scission and division, produces "flashes, ruptures and sudden displacements" (Kristeva, 1984: 145) which could "pierce and abolish" *différance*, and therefore because it retreats before the thetic, all symbolic functioning would cease and the way for psychosis would open up. *Différance* risks terminal rupture when the instinctual heterogeneity of the drives, the explosive force of negativity (which operates within and against *différance*), breaks in and cuts it short. Owing to its retreat before the thetic function and its refusal to anchor itself within symbolic positioning, *différance* may be swept away entirely by a sea of madness. Kristeva also considers another possibility whereby heterogeneity may be indefinitely deferred by *différance* so that the latter confines itself "within a non-renewable, non-productive redundancy, a mere precious variant within the symbolic enclosure: contemplation adrift". This would in turn render *différance* as superfluous and stagnant, a mere esoteric "device of the signifier's drifting" whereby "emptied of its heterogeneous contradiction, withdrawn from material discontinuity and social imbrication, the flow of the drives is merely mimed within a simulacrum and its unfolding, a sidestepping". In this way, there would be a "hollowing out of the drives" (Kristeva, 1982: 98-99). As mentioned, Kristeva's critique of Derrida's *différance* highlights a seminal difference in their work in that she views heterogeneity as an invasive tactic of opposition, contradiction, struggle and revolution, whereas for Derrida this heterogeneity remains somewhat evasive, escaping in a non-oppositional way<sup>16</sup>. De Nooy (1998) points out that Kristeva's disagreement with Derrida emerges out of the proposition of positionality, of positions and the positing of theses. For Kristeva, some type of provisional position needs to be affirmed against which heterogeneity can launch its

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<sup>16</sup> Kristeva's notion of opposition however should not be confused with a simple binarity. Instead, as de Nooy (1998) points out, it is an opposition within sameness that creates alterity. For Kristeva, the notion of alterity stemming from the same does not preclude opposition or even contradiction. She stresses, for example, the inextricable nexus, and interdependence between the semiotic and the symbolic in her work whereby each manifests aspects of the functioning of the other. The symbolic requires the creative transgression of the semiotic for renewal and regeneration, whereas the semiotic requires symbolic containment and regulation in order to avoid a descent into psychosis. Nevertheless, they remain "two heterogeneous realms" (Kristeva, 1984: 48).

assault. Derrida, on the other hand, prefers to avoid positionality in favour of movement, slippage, deferral and detour. *Différance* is a form of movement that eschews any set direction so that it “unceasingly dislocates itself in a chain of differing and deferring substitutions” (Derrida, 1982: 26). It avoids the engagement of a position in opposition. I have cited Kristeva’s critique of *différance* as a preface to a section in the following chapter (see “Meditation on *Athetic* Retreats”) where I will address these concerns in more detail once I have developed the non-concept of what I will term the ‘third aesthetic’ which remains inextricably connected to the movement of *différance*, and is thus subject to the same critical considerations and negotiations.

## **PSYCHOANALYSIS AT THE LIMITS OF LANGUAGE**

### **Strangers to Ourselves: Cause, Lack and Desire**

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, I would like to explore several areas within psychoanalysis which have radically challenged its capacity to reduce, categorise and conceptualise in a definitive, precise and comprehensive manner. Given the enormity of the task of attempting to address the implications of the cardinal thread of the fabric of psychoanalysis – the unconscious - I would like to focus specifically on Lacan’s consideration of the unconscious which I think not only pushes, subjectivity, knowledge, epistemology and so on to the extreme, but also vehemently refuses any neat concretisation or oversimplification. I think that it is sometimes easy to forget (or perhaps convenient to do so given the empirical demands of the scientific endeavour and those who consider it necessary to classify psychoanalysis within the discursive parameters of ‘science’) that this founding variable of psychoanalysis, the unconscious, gives psychoanalysis its distinctive character in that it opens up the space for writers like Frosh (2002: 123; 129; 135) to consider and advocate psychoanalysis as a “discipline dealing with the eccentric, the erratic and the excessive – with all that is ‘out of step’ with the apparent rationality of social circumstances”. Indeed, events frequently exceed the accounts that can be given of them so that something remains in excess (other than or more than), irreducibly extra-discursive, which signals that the “passionate intensity of unconscious fantasy can often/always be found hovering at the fringes of identity,

energising it but also battering it down". Psychoanalysis may reveal a point where language fails, "where language in all its guises is characterised by its insufficiency rather than its expressive capacity, where what is known in and by a person lies quite simply outside symbolisation". Moreover, as Frosh (2001: 631) suggests, the existence of the unconscious not only implies that "each of us is unaware of aspects of ourselves, but by its very nature the unconscious blocks the process of knowing, actively creating symptoms and blind spots all the time. If this is so, then not only is it impossible to know anything absolutely.....but the nature of knowledge becomes cloudy, infiltrated by all sorts of 'irrational' impulses". Psychoanalysis imbues subjectivity and experience with an element of the foreign, the uncanny. The German word '*unheimlich*', translated in Freud's work by the English word 'uncanny', literally translates as 'unhomely'. The subject of the uncanny gestures towards the province of that which elicits dread and horror, repulsion and distress, with the negative '*un*' signifying something "eerie, weird, arousing gruesome fear". Freud (1955: 224; 220; 244) suggests how the uncanny is "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar", what is "secretly familiar", because the uncanny is something which has become alienated from the psyche as a result of repression. There is thus an element of the unhomely (*unheimlich*) in the homely (*heimlich*), something foreign and unfamiliar in the familiar. The word '*heimlich*' belongs to two sets of ideas, signalling what is familiar and agreeable, as well as what is concealed and kept out of sight. A similar ambiguity attaches itself to the English word 'canny' which refers not only to what is 'cosy', but also to that which is endowed with occult or magical powers. In the notion of homelike, belonging to the house, homely, *heimisch* (native), there is thus a trace of something surreptitious that remains recalcitrant in the face of knowledge and insight. *Heimlich* is a word whose meaning develops in the direction of ambivalence until "it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*". As an example, Freud (1955: 226; 237) cites the perpetual recurrence of the same thing, an unintended recurrence of the same situation, as that which creates the impression of the uncanny. It is precisely the "factor of involuntary repetition which surrounds what would otherwise be innocent enough with an uncanny atmosphere, and forces upon us the idea of something fateful and inescapable, when otherwise we should have spoken only of 'chance'". For Derrida (1996: 46) everytime that the word *unheimlich* appears in Freud's text, one is able to "localise an uncontrollable undecidability in the axiomatics, the epistemology,

the logic, the order of the discourse and of thethetic or theoretic statements". The uncanny is, as Royle (2003: 1) suggests, a "crisis of the proper" in that it entails a critical disturbance of what is properly one's own and pertains to a certain strangeness of framing and borders, an experience of liminality.

Lacan (1998: 18) is psychoanalyst who shatters the notion of any sense of familiarity in that his work promotes an irreducible knottedness in human experience, a radical disjunction and extremity in or estrangement of being. He pushes psychoanalytic concepts to a proximity of rupture, to a zero point, and in doing so he espouses a conceptual resistance where he plays with "the refusal of the concept". Lacan suggests how the conceptualisation of the concept is not entirely dissimilar to approaches imposed on one by infinitesimal calculus because "it is only by a leap, a passage to the limit" that a concept created is able to correlate with or realise the reality it is supposed to apprehend. Bowie (1991:171-72) astutely perceives how the Lacanian project is "uncommonly audacious" in that it endeavours "to write into the text of psychoanalysis the terms and conditions of its own impossibility"<sup>17</sup>. Lacan seeks to construct a theory within which uncertainty and unknowingness are able to play themselves out, circulate freely and "rescue the sciences of mind from their myths of plenitude and redemption". In this way, a conceptual elaboration of the unconscious must take into account the failure of omniscience. This notion affirms Lacan's (1998b: 97) conceptualisation of Freud's innovations in that he suggests that what is novel in Freud's propositions of/as knowledge is that there is no presumption that the Other as the locus of language and understanding "knows anything about it" – 'it' being a certain knowledge that resists the implication that it is already available as knowledge, that it falls within the ambit of symbolic language, and that it is able to be acquired. For Lacan (1998b: 119; 125; 139), thinking does not necessarily enable conceptual precision. There is "some relationship of being that cannot be known" where knowledge is said to be impossible, forbidden and prohibited (*interdit*). However, Lacan plays with equivocation whereby this supposed forbidden knowledge is not really so if "it is said between the words, between the lines". Lacan attempts to "expose the kind of real to which it grants us access" where there is an

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<sup>17</sup> Lacan (1998b: 34) rather provocatively suggests that the reader "is not obliged to understand (his) writings. If you don't understand them, so much the better – that will give you the opportunity to explain them". While this may open up the domain for creative struggle, it more than likely also leads to a degree of *méconnaissance* – explanation without understanding, being duped by the signifier.



attempt “to show where the shaping (*mise en forme*) of that metalanguage – which is not, and which I make ex-sist – is going. Something true can still be said about what cannot be demonstrated”. Knowledge ultimately remains an “enigma presented to us by the unconscious” whereby the latter evinces knowledge that escapes the speaking being. As a result, the unconscious cannot be merely viewed as a dynamic and descriptive concept since it is also a function of cause which designates a locus of opacity. Cause alludes to the notion that “the unconscious is not the fact that being thinks” (Lacan, 1998b: 104). It is ultimately that which remains almost unanalysable and impossible to understand by reason because there remains essentially in the function of cause a certain gap, something non-conceptual and indefinite. In the gap characteristic of cause, there is something of the order of the non-realised so that between cause and that which it affects, there remains something that may not be determined, something “that doesn’t work”, an impediment where something stumbles. The unconscious is thus experienced as discontinuity, vacillation, split, rupture and lack, which in turn facilitates a *certain* ‘absence’ as non-simple presence. Even if the unconscious is ‘presented’, “this discovery becomes a rediscovery and, it is always ready to steal away again, thus establishing the dimension of loss” (Lacan, 1998: 22-25). The unconscious, where “something other demands to be realised”, is always manifested as that which vacillates in a split in the subject. The gap of the unconscious is however pre-ontological in that it does not lend itself to ontology and it remains ontically elusive and fragile. It is neither being nor non-being, but rather the un-realised - that which does not lend itself to ontologisation and representation.

The intricacy of the unconscious as cause exemplifies the difficulty of neatly capturing the utility value or function of the unconscious, as well as the complexity of easily determining its trace or influence on psychic development whereby it eludes and transcends absolute definition and empirical grasp and subsequently renders a space which overwhelms linguistic/textual appropriation and confluence. As a result, what remains is the potential for the unconscious to be misrepresented in the slippage and rupture of meaning. All such attempts at conceptual precision must be couched and framed tentatively and with considerable uncertainty because, according to Lacan, the unconscious assiduously subverts and undermines any potential position of all-encompassing knowledge and illumination. It properly thwarts the “myth of a subjective cohesion” (Rose, 1982: 30) and continues to operate from a position of

challenge and radical revision so that any sense of subjectivity is necessarily accompanied by an irreducible foreignness and alterity [As Lacan (1977: 23) states: “I is an other”]. This rendition of radical otherness contains broader implications for the dynamics of subjectivity in that the subject is displaced from a position of mastery, authority and control. The gesture towards otherness puts the self into question. Rose (1982) stresses that Lacan viewed the Freudian reading of division and precariousness within subjectivity as pivotal to psychoanalysis’s most radical insights. Lacan (1977) has made a substantial contribution to the exploration of how the unconscious thwarts and subverts the self’s coherence and unity. His (and indeed Kristeva’s) emphasis on the ego’s *mèconnaissance* or delusional mastery, his conceptualisation of the subject as being petrified by the signifier, his proposition that the subject is governed by split, gap (*béance*), and lack (*manqué*), all motion towards the position that the subject is primarily an effect as opposed to an agent of the unconscious. There is something which transcends the agency or the capacity of the individual to colonise and appropriate, to know as such. There is an acknowledgement that knowledge is necessarily accompanied by that which shadows edification, an irreducible otherness and unknowing, something which is indelibly lost in the moment of linguistic construction and conceptualisation. It is indeed a case of undoing any omniscient referent and contending with the abyss of the veil, the void of uncertainty. It is, as Irigaray (2000: 8) poetically conveys, “like a silent word, a living mystery, a dialogue beyond words”.

The notion of cause also emphasises an essential feature of psychoanalytic epistemology whereby, as Le Guen (cited in Perron, 2001) points out, absence or lack manifests as a necessary signifier of being. Lack is regarded as an integral source of representation, as well as implicated in the process of symbolisation whereby the child begins to symbolise as a result of the sense that something is lacking. For Lacan (1998), the experience of the subject at the level of lack, the central lack being facilitated by the subject as desiring which is fundamentally insatiable, manifests as an inescapable ontological experience. Mitchell (1982: 5) proposes that the Lacanian subject is not an entity with an identity, but rather “a being created in the fissure of a radical split”, an entity “actually and necessarily created within a split”. Lack is accentuated by the individual’s desiring function and capacity, by the loss of the order of the real which signals the “lack of a lack” (Lacan, 1998: xli). The dimension of

desire proliferates as a consequence of primordial absence which signals something fundamentally impossible about satisfaction itself. The object that is longed for is always accompanied by a concomitant loss, and as a result any possible satisfaction will always contain this loss within it (Mitchell, 1982). Moreover, the demands (of love especially) that the child makes on the mother are imbued with a loss that will continue to plague and “persist over and above anything” (Rose, 1982: 32) that the mother could possibly confer, reciprocate, respond, say and so on. The demand in itself “bears on something other than the satisfactions it calls for” (Lacan, 1977: 286) so that, as Rose (1982: 32) points out, each time the demand of the child is answered by the satisfaction of its needs, “so this ‘something other’ is relegated to the place of its original impossibility”. This impossibility inaugurates the desiring function which alludes to something which is always left over, in excess, a ‘remainder’ of the subject, but which has no content as such. The scenario is rendered as “the problematics of desire...involving an impossible object” where an object does not exist except insofar as it is designated as an eternally missing object (Dor, 1998: 192). For Fink (1995), desire in its strictest sense has no object and it is therefore a continuous quest for something else where no specifiable object is capable of satiating it. The only object implicated in desire is that which *causes* desire, a cause, a constitutive moment that brings it into being, though, as Bowie (1991) astutely perceives, ‘source’, ‘aim’ and ‘object’ never enter into alignment when desire comes into ‘being’. Desire is inherently caught up in a metonymic movement and deferral of one signifier to another. It is radically and fundamentally elsewhere, always in motion and indelibly referring to an indefinite series of signifiers (Dor, 1998).

Lacan takes this notion of lack even further in his writings in Seminar XX, *Encore*<sup>18</sup>, where his struggle with limits (of knowledge, language, *jouissance*) is exemplified. Here Lacan (1998) refers to an *other* as opposed to a phallic *jouissance* (the only type of *jouissance* available to the subject of the symbolic), where the latter implicates the

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<sup>18</sup> Fink (2002) points out that ‘encore’ refers to the idea that something more or still is needed, an experience is not sufficient, not enough, and therefore it needs to be repeated. ‘Encore’ has to do with “the discordance between knowledge and being” whereby “we are still (*encore*) caught up in the insufficiency of knowledge”. This lack is what “directs the game of *encore* – not that by knowing more about it, it would direct us better, but perhaps there would be better *jouissance*, agreement between *jouissance* and its end” (Lacan, 1998b: 120).

subject in the dialectic and circuit of desire<sup>19</sup>. *Other* jouissance “ex-sists” in the “not-whole” of the Other of the signifier, and refers to what the subject loses at the advent of the entrance into the symbolic order<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, this ex-sistence implies a retroactive determination whereby “the not-whole is an aftereffect, *nachträglich*, only to be delineated by the impact of the Other of the signifier, which tries to establish a totalising effect through the One of the phallic signifier” (Verhaeghe, 2002: 113). This *other* jouissance ex-sists within the phallic economy and has to do with what remains outside of the symbolic order albeit from the inside (operating retroactively once the level of language of the symbolic order comes into play) as an ex-istence of a foreign body (of uncanniness). The two types of jouissance, phallic and other, “have a strange internal relationship to each other” (Barnard, 2002: 176) so that, as Verhaeghe (2002: 133) suggests for explanatory purposes, “a ‘primary’ element becomes delineated retroactively through the operation of the ‘secondary’ element, in which the primary is included, albeit as a foreign body”<sup>21</sup>. This *other* jouissance remains the Other’s other, part of the lack in the Other, a supplementary (as opposed to complimentary which would render it within a spherical whole) jouissance that

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<sup>19</sup> For Lacan (1998b: 55; 92), there is “no other apparatus than language. That is how jouissance is fitted out (*appareillée*) in speaking beings”. Language is posited as an apparatus of (phallic) jouissance which in turn renders it as deficient (*en défaut*) and limited, “something about it mustn’t be working”, it never fails to falter, to come up short. It is therefore “questioned, evoked, tracked and elaborated only on the basis of a semblance” – a semblance that alludes to something in excess, a semblance that indicates the direction towards which jouissance inevitably fails. Phallic jouissance is inherently fallible and disappointing, it fails to fulfil, it “lets you down, comes up short” (Fink, 2002: 38), and always leaves something more to be desired. It is merely “a semblance, an envelope around something else” (Verhaeghe, 2002: 119).

<sup>20</sup> The Other is the locus in which the chain of the signifier is situated. For Lacan (1977), everything emerges from the structure of the signifier, which in turn makes the subject an effect of the signifier, which is located in the realm of the Other. This relation of the subject to the Other is produced in the process of a gap or lack so that there is no reciprocity in the dialectic between the subject and the Other. The Other, as the locus of language, precedes the subject and is the first cause of the subject. The definition of the subject and the Other clearly constitutes an alienation whereby the subject can only be construed in terms of the locus of the Other which does not reciprocate. The alienated subject is thus a divided subject. There is no way to define the subject as an entirely self-conscious entity. Instead, the signifier producing itself in the field of the Other makes manifest the subject of its signification. But it functions as a signifier only to reduce the subject to being no more than a signifier. In short, the union of the subject and the Other leaves a loss so that if the subject tries to find itself in the Other, it will ultimately fail. The subject is literally petrified by the signifier which results in a loss of some of one’s being. The destiny of the subject is vacillation between petrification by the signifier and indeterminacy within the slippage of meaning. This manifests as the impasse of the subject as a product of the Other of the signifier.

<sup>21</sup> This notion goes to the heart of Lacanian epistemology where for Lacan (1998b: 62) the ideas of ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ are illusions in that what is said to be primary does not appear first but is rather established once repression comes into being. Something may be primary only retroactively, once the locus of the signifier in the symbolic order (and hence the modality of repression) is firmly established. Repression is always that which “speaks of something else”.

escapes the totality of the phallic function, a ‘knowledge’ that is acquired by the body in experience where experiencing causes its inscription on the body. Ultimately however Lacan (1998b: 4; 24; 74; 116; 7-8) insists that this *other* jouissance “remains a question” because if it could be articulated through signifiers then it inevitably would be capable of missing the mark. It is “something else altogether”, something more (*en plus*), though Lacan cautions against attempting to designate this ‘more’ any better. We should instead “rough it out”. This *other* jouissance is ineffable, something we can’t quite yet “put our fingertips on”. It is “promoted only on the basis of infinity” where it alludes to a realisation of a “fault (*faillie*) or gap” in phallic jouissance, to what escapes the locus of the Other.

### **Kristeva’s Uncanny: Melancholia and Abjection**

“To think the unthinkable: from the outset this has been Julia Kristeva’s project” (Moi, 1986: vi). Kristeva, following on from the Lacanian project of exposing the complexity and labyrinth-like quality of subjectivity, is certainly a writer who boldly ventures into tracing the aporetics of the unnameable, the unrepresentable, so that “alterity, otherness, and the stranger are always at the centre of her texts” (Oliver, 1993: 12). Roland Barthes (cited in Kristeva, 1984: 10) was once quoted as saying: “Several times you (Kristeva) have helped me to change, particularly in shifting away from a semiology of products to a semiotics of production”. Kristeva (1980: x) sets herself an “exorbitant wager” which involves an endeavour, as Rose (1993b: 42) suggests, “to confront language at the point where it undoes itself, pushing against that illusion of safety through which alone it can function, uncovering the psychic forces which sustain that illusion but which equally put it at risk”. Kristeva’s endeavours are inherently risky in that gestures towards the unnameable invariably bring it back from the beyond and place it within the bounds of linguistic description. One therefore comes up against the perils and paradoxes of such a project. De Nooy (1998: 3) however suggests that both Derrida and Kristeva “make no claims to seize and squeeze the incomprehensible but find provisional ways of stalking what hops beyond their grasp”. The only possibility is to posit provisional ways of indicating questions and ultimately limits within the horizon of the unconquerable. Kristeva’s work on melancholia, as an example, explores the possibilities of being engulfed by the unnameable, the invisible. “On the frontiers of life and death”, melancholia is a

“noncommunicable grief” remaining a “black sun”, which emerges out of an “eerie galaxy” so that its “invisible, lethargic rays” compel one “to silence, to renunciation” (Kristeva, 1989: 3). There is a nostalgic, elegiac search to recuperate something lost, which in turn perpetuates the perils of a loss of self and language. The pain of melancholia is exacerbated by the impression of having been deprived of an unnameable, supreme benevolence, of something unrepresentable. Kristeva proposes that the melancholic mourns not an object but the “Thing” which does not lend itself to signification, being the centre of attraction and repulsion. It is inscribed within one without memory (unspecified, unseparated, though the “buried accomplice of our unspeakable anguishes” Kristeva, 1989: 13-14) and becomes an object of desire, a vague indeterminate something. It is “an insistence without presence, a light without representation: the Thing is an imagined sun, bright and black at the same time”. The Thing “in-itself” ultimately “always remains to be conveyed”. It is rendered as the silence of *asymbolic* existence. Melancholic persons are atheistic in the sense that they are deprived of meaning and value, and become prisoners of affect which manifests as their thing. Kristeva (1989: 14-15) considers these melancholic individuals to be mystics in that they are “mute and steadfast devotees of their own inexpressible container”, devoting their tears and *jouissance* to “this fringe of strangeness”, “an archaic other that still eludes representation and naming”. Melancholic individual’s cannot endure Eros, the life giving force, and their mourning for the Thing inextricably links them to Thanatos, the death drive, against which they remain defenceless - “Messengers of Thanatos, melancholy people are witness/accomplices of the signifier’s flimsiness, the living being’s precariousness” (Kristeva, 1989: 20). Triumph over sorrow alludes to the ability to no longer identify with the lost non-object, and identify with a third party which gives shape, form and schema. Such an identification, which Kristeva suggests could be termed phallic or symbolic, ensures the subject’s entrance into the universe of signification which is positioned in opposition to the Thing as non-signifiable.

The speech of the melancholic is often repetitive, monotonous, interrupted, arbitrary, evasive, uncertain and exhausted. Melancholic persons indeed speak of nothing because they are glued to the total and unsignifiable Thing and are thus without objects – “Depressed speech, built up with absurd signs, slackened, scattered, checked sequences, conveys the collapse of meaning into the unnameable where it

founders, inaccessible and delightful, to the benefit of affective value riveted to the Thing” (Kristeva, 1989: 52; 64). Through the expression of their empty speech, melancholics “assure themselves of an inaccessible...ascendancy over an archaic object that thus remains, for themselves and all others, an enigma and a secret”. For Kristeva, successfully working through the process of mourning depends on the possibility of concatenating signifiers, of linking signifiers in a meaningful network or chain. When melancholic persons give up signifying and submerge in the silence of pain, they are celebrating the reunion with the Thing to which they are painfully riveted. The affect of sadness is the “ultimate yet *mute* witness” (Kristeva, 1989: 64) to having lost the archaic Thing. One however can only indirectly mourn for the archaic Thing - through and beyond the shadow of the actual bereft object. Even sublimation, which exemplifies an attempt to reach the Thing, “through melody, rhythm, semantic polyvalency, the so called poetic form, which decomposes and recomposes signs”, is only able to secure an uncertain hold over the Thing (Kristeva, 1989: 14). By denying the signifier, the melancholic denies the paternal function which ensures the continuity and generativity of the signifying network. The melancholic maintains a disavowed, weakened, ambiguous and devalorised paternal signifier which is deprived of its phallic power. As a result, depressed signs seem absurd, delayed and ready to be extinguished because of the splitting that effects them. At the level of the sign, splitting separates signifier from referent. It thus maintains the anguish of annihilation because it gradually eradicates the signifying system which manifests as the life-giving force of the symbolic individual - without it one would be forced to confront the terrifying abyss of emptiness. The “spectacular collapse of meaning” (Kristeva, 1989: 53) assumes that the melancholic person has had difficulty in integrating the universal signifying sequence. They are therefore, as Kristeva proposes, foreigners in their maternal tongue. They have lost the meaning, the value, of their mother tongues. The dead language which they articulate “conceals a Thing buried alive”, though this Thing “will not be translated in order that it not be betrayed; it shall remain walled up within the *crypt* of the inexpressible affect...with no way out”. Affect remains pivotal in the melancholic’s life because it is the only means of object constancy that ensures a nonverbal hold over a nonobjectal Thing. Moreover, the melancholic’s “alien, retarded or vanishing speech” leads to a skewed or warped temporality whereby they remain riveted to the past, and despite the fact that life progresses, they remain faithful to bygone days. There is no future. Instead

there is only an overinflated, hyperbolic past which infiltrates all dimensions of psychic continuity. This is undoubtedly a means for capitalising on the Thing, and brooding over it within the “enclosure of an exitless, personal vault” (Kristeva, 1989: 60).

I have cited fairly extensively from Kristeva’s text on melancholia not only so that the reader is able to gain some sense of the difficulty in attempting to yield an exact description for the non-concept of ‘the Thing’, but also as an indication of language in poetical captivation, of (perhaps the necessity of) resorting to metaphor, to the “imaginary of philosophy”, at crucial moments in the discussion. Kristeva’s text on melancholia demonstrates how the imaginary is essentially and inescapably linked to points of tension and aporias within the text whereby there is recourse to the poetics of the imaginary in an attempt to adumbrate the elusiveness of the Thing, in an attempt to describe through language that which remains still to be conveyed. The text also emphasises subjective experience which remains caught by something that fuels the potency of psychical process, without quite being able to grasp what it is, to render it symbolically, to nominate it linguistically. There is an invasion of foreignness, an explosion of strangeness, without the possibility for its domestication and taming, without the possibility for the comforts of representation. The individual is bombarded by the “powers of horror” (Kristeva, 1982), annihilatory anxiety in the face of a non-object as no-thing. Abjection is yet another example of Kristeva’s fascination with the unnameable, with the aporetics of conceptualisation, although here Kristeva extends this radical alterity to general developmental experience as opposed to confining it to a specific group of melancholically entranced individuals. Abjection delineates a peculiar time marking the threshold of language and a stable enunciative position. Understanding abjection involves understanding the ways in which the space between self and other is constituted. It is elaborated through a failure of recognition where “nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory” (Kristeva, 1982: 5). Abjection “preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body”. In Kristeva’s account, it is not a lack of hygiene or cleanliness that *causes* abjection, but rather something that “disturbs identity, system and order” where it remains undecidable, ambiguous and marginalized (Kristeva, 1982: 10; 4).



Kristeva (1982: 1-2) offers a poetic prelude in introducing the “massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness” of the abject which is neither subject nor object:

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced.....

The abject threatens binaries and is not an object that corresponds to an ego, an object that can be named or imagined (there is nothing “objective or objectal to the abject” Kristeva, 1982: 9); rather it is what is excluded by the superego. The abject is therefore a “pseudo-object” that “is made up *before* but appears only *within* the gaps of secondary repression” (Kristeva, 1982: 12). It signals the “violence of mourning” for an “object’ that has always already been lost”. It is the recognition of something impossible which possesses the quality of being opposed to I, and it functions as a radically excluded, jettisoned ‘object’ that beckons the subject towards a place where meaning collapses (it “beseeches and pulverises the subject” Kristeva, 1982: 15; 5). It is located “outside, beyond the set”, on the “edge of non-existence and hallucination”, in a space that is “never *one*, nor *homogenous*, nor *totalizable*, but essentially divisible, foldable, and catastrophic” (Kristeva, 1982: 8). The symbolic can only maintain its borders through the imposition of polarities and dichotomies, yet the abject threatens and points to the precariousness of these borders (it is a “terror that disassembles” Kristeva, 1982: 4-5). The threat of the abject is what is expelled by the symbolic and it therefore becomes the underside of a stable symbolic identity, an abyss at the borders of the subject’s existence. The abject shatters the wall, the bar of repression, and “takes the ego back to its source on the abominable limits from which, in order to be, the ego has broken away – it assigns it a source in the non-ego, drive, and death” (Kristeva, 1982: 15). In short, the abject attests to the impossibility of clear borders, lines of demarcation or divisions between the semiotic and the symbolic. It does not negate but rather excludes. However, what is excluded can never be fully obliterated but hovers at the margins and borders of subjectivity, continually threatening with disruption and potential dissolution.

## On Not Being Able to Interpret

It seems as if psychoanalysis works against the ideality of *Weltanschauung*, “an intellectual construction which solves all the problems of our existence uniformly on the basis of one overriding hypothesis, which, accordingly, leaves no question unanswered and in which everything that interests us finds its fixed place” (Freud, 1991b: 193). In this last section of the chapter, I would like to focus on two more phenomena in psychoanalysis – the ‘navel’ of dream interpretation and the death drive – which render it as ineluctably interminable, without an end in sight. The ‘navel’ of dream interpretation is “the place where it plumbs into the unknown”, though of course the world of dreaming, of sleeping, of waking - a “psychic no man’s land of waking and not waking” – offers up rich material in considering the problematics or aporetics of conceptualisation whereby, as Jacqueline Rose (2003: 109;114;106) suggests in an essay entitled “On not being able to sleep”, psychoanalysis may psychically overreach itself<sup>22</sup>. Derrida proposes that when Freud speaks of the navel of the dream (alluding to the “Dream of Irma’s Injection”) in his seminal text *The Interpretation of Dreams*, he confesses a feeling, a premonition which is located in a note added after a certain delay. In this note, Freud (1991c: 186, n2; 671-672) has a premonition that something, an inaccessible secret, *exceeds* or inhibits the analysis: “I had a feeling that the interpretation of this part of the dream was not carried far enough to make it possible to follow the whole of its concealed meaning. If I had pursued my comparison between the three women, it would have taken me far afield. There is at least one spot in every dream at which it is unplumbable – a navel, as it were, that is its point of contact with the unknown”. Later on Freud once again reiterates this notion:

There is often a passage in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream which has to be left obscure; this is because we become aware during the work of interpretation that at that point there is a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unravelled and which moreover adds nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream. This is the dream’s navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown.

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<sup>22</sup> For a reconsideration of Freud’s monumental text *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the reader is referred to Rose’s (2003: 105-124) essay which teases out the ‘uncanny’ elements that are implicated in the process of sleeping and dreaming, and waking (awakening) between – the place of transitional states that lead us back to the deepest recesses of the psyche.

The dream-thoughts to which we are lead by interpretation cannot, from the nature of things, have any definite endings; they are bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate network of our world of thought. It is at some point where this meshwork is particularly close that the dream-wish grows up, like a mushroom out of its mycelium.

Derrida's (1998: 11) reading of the above citation gestures towards something that resists analysis<sup>23</sup>. In this way, the navel of the dream no longer offers a provisional limit, a reserve of delayed meaning. Instead it "concerns rather a night, an absolute unknown that is originarily, congenitally bound or tied...to the essence and to the birth of the dream, attached to the place from which it departs and of which it keeps the birthmark: the umbilicus...". Every dream therefore contains within it a navel, at least one place, one marked *topos*, that remains impenetrable and unfathomable, detached from the context of the dream. This navel alludes to what is knotted, suspended into the unknown, remaining a "knot-scar that keeps the memory of a cut and even of a severed thread at birth".

Lacan is also interested in this gap, this umbilical hole. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan (1998: 23; 43-44) proposes: "What Freud calls the navel – *the navel of dreams*, he writes, to designate their ultimately unknown centre – which is simply, like the same anatomical navel that represents it, that gap of which I have already spoken". The Lacanian conceptualisation of the unconscious positions it in "profound, initial, inaugural" relation to the function of the cut. Lacan stresses the *pulsative* function of the unconscious, "the need to disappear that seems to be in some sense inherent in it – everything that, for a moment, appears in its slit seems to be

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<sup>23</sup> As I will make use of a considerable amount of Derrida's readings of Freud, I think that it is important to foreground these readings in terms of the acolyte (the follower) and its apparent opposite, the anacoluthon (what fails to follow, what is non-sequential, quite literally 'without-following'). True to the Derridean spirit, one cannot claim any simple polarity between the two terms because while they may be logically opposed, "what appears as a necessity is that, in order to follow in a consistent way, to be true to what you follow, you have to interrupt the following". Hence Derrida's relation to Freud is one of fidelity and betrayal in that he endeavours to understand and to do justice to what Freud writes "as far as possible and as closely as possible, up to a certain point". However, there is always the moment when he betrays Freud in that within the experience of following there is "something other, something new, or something different which occurs", and which Derrida signs by counter-signing – the counter-signature functioning as the "strange alliance between following and not following, confirming and displacing", the capacity for Derrida "to write in my turn" (Derrida, 2003: 7; 9-10; 13). Derrida's attempts to locate a break, an interruption, some inconsistency or inarticulation, functions as a "force of resistance which resists the authority of a given grammar" so as to disorganise it, "not as something absolutely wild but as some other force which compels us to write differently".

destined, by a sort of pre-emption, to close up again upon itself'. The unconscious is essentially constituted by that which is refused, and not by what consciousness may "evoke, extend, locate, bring out of the subliminal". As such, there are aporetic 'configurations' which remain beyond consciousness and which in turn problematise the possibility for representation or interpretation. For Derrida (1998: 11), the navel is a knot that cannot be untied, that indelibly exceeds the analysis - it cannot be easily contained within logocentric enclosures. It is "a thread that, even if it is cut, like an umbilical cord, nevertheless remains forever knotted, right on the body, at the place of the navel". The navel is a knot against which analysis is rendered inefficacious. Nevertheless, it inaugurates the birthplace to which the wish or desire of the dream is assigned. Like a mushroom out of its mycelium, Freud asserts how the dream-wish emerges and surges forth out of the densest point of this knotted meshwork which is destined for opacity and irreducibility. The place of origin of this desire, according to Derrida (1998: 15), is precisely "the very place where the analysis must come to a halt, the place that must be left in obscurity" because this place is "a knot or tangled mass of threads, in short, an unanalysable synthesis". In this way, the very source and structure of the dream-wish is potentially situated by a radically heterogeneous, insoluble knot that in its very secret cannot be rendered or confirmed by signification. Yet it is this ultimate knotted unknown that fuels the dream-wish and puts it in motion, makes it possible and presupposes it. Psychoanalysis is forced to contend with what remains indissoluble and therefore it is virtually impossible for it "to gather itself into the unity of a concept or a task" (Derrida, 1998: 20). There always already remains an unanalysable constraint, something radically incompatible and contradictory.

### **The Death Drive**

Freud introduces his polemical concept of the death drive [the "operation of tendencies *beyond* the pleasure principle, that is, of tendencies more primitive than it and independent of it" (Freud, 1991a: 287)] in an essay entitled, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', which ushered in a radical transformation in his thought. The pleasure principle follows from the principle of constancy, and possesses a tendency towards stability. However, it is incorrect to assume that the pleasure principle dominates the course of psychical processes. Instead there is a strong tendency towards the pleasure

principle, but this tendency is opposed by certain other forces which create discomfort and unpleasure. One of these forces of inhibition is the reality principle, which does not abandon the intention of ultimately gaining pleasure, but nevertheless demands the postponement of satisfaction and the temporary toleration of unpleasure for a period of time until it is appropriate to derive pleasure. After observing his grandson during what Freud subsequently termed the '*Fort-Da*' game, he proposed the centrality of the death drive in the constitution of the subject<sup>24</sup>. The game, which was "repeated untiringly" (Freud, 1991a, 284-285), involved the monotonous action of making a cotton reel disappear (signalling the departure of his mother) and then return. According to Freud, the game related to the child's "great cultural achievement - instinctual renunciation (that is, the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction) which he had made in allowing his mother to go away without protesting". He compensated himself for this through the game of making the cotton reel, the object, appear and then disappear. However, the mother's departure could not have possibly been viewed by the child agreeably or indifferently. Indeed, a substantial part of what is re-experienced under this compulsion to repeat elicits unpleasure within the ego because it illuminates the activities of repressed instinctual impulses. But this unpleasure does not necessarily contradict the pleasure principle for what is unpleasurable in one system may simultaneously satiate another. What is however a radical discovery for Freud is that "the compulsion to repeat also recalls from the past experiences which include no possibility of pleasure, and which can never, even long ago, have brought satisfaction even to instinctual impulses which have since been repressed" (Freud, 1991a, 290-293). Freud describes how patients repeat unwanted situations and painful and distressing emotions in transference, and "revive them with the greatest ingenuity", thus interrupting the course of a still incomplete treatment. There seems to be a "perpetual recurrence of the same (unpleasurable) thing" which leads Freud to assume that "there really does exist in the mind a compulsion to repeat which over-rides the pleasure principle".

The compulsion for repetition remains "more primitive, more elementary, more instinctual", and it overrides the pleasure principle. Moving from this notion, Freud

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<sup>24</sup> The German word 'fort' means 'gone' and correlates with the 'o-o-o-o' sound the child makes when throwing the cotton reel. 'Da' signifies 'there' and it is a joyful expression utilised to hail the reappearance of the cotton reel.

(1991a, 309) postulates that “*it seems, then, that an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore to an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces; that is, it is a kind of organic elasticity, or, to put it another way, the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life*”. Freud acknowledges that this statement automatically would strike one as peculiar for it implies an expression of the *conservative*, regressive nature of instinct working against progress and development; conservative instincts impelling towards repetition and thus rendering the aim of all life in death. The self-preservative instincts, which are attributed to living beings, are positioned antithetically in relation to the hypothesis that instinctual life aims to bring about death and a return, as regression or devolution, to an earlier state of inorganic existence. As a consequence, “Eros operates from the beginning of life and appears as a ‘life instinct’ in opposition to the ‘death instinct’ which was brought into being by the coming to life of inorganic substance”. These two instincts, Eros and Thanatos, are continuously “struggling with each other from the very first” (Freud, 1991a, 334 n1). Critically, the death drive, as an intrapsychic phenomenon, remains mute and barred. As Freud (1963: 22) suggests: “So long as that instinct operates internally, as a death instinct, it remains silent; we can only come across it after it has become diverted outward as an instinct of destruction”. Derrida (1996: 10-11) suggests that because the death drive always operates in silence, it never leaves any traces or archives of its own. It destroys in advance its own archive. “It works to destroy the archive: on the condition of effacing but also with a view to effacing its own ‘proper’ traces – which consequently cannot properly be called ‘proper’”. Through its silent vocation, the death drive is thus *anarchivic*, *archiviolithic* (anarchic and archive-destroying). It eludes perception except if it disguises itself, leaving no monument and bequeathing no document of its own. The archiviolithic drive is thus never present in itself or in its effects. It leaves nothing of its own behind, and as a principle of aggression and destruction it not only incites amnesia and the annihilation of memory, but also commands the radical effacement of that which can never be reduced to the mnemonic, the archive (the archive here never signifying memory as a “spontaneous, alive and internal experience”).

In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan (1998: 31) proposes that pleasure “limits the scope of human possibility” because the pleasure principle is

“a principle of homeostasis”. Instead, the individual is governed by *desire* with its concomitant fundamental insatiability lending an efficacious quality to it. Desire in essence “meets its limit somewhere”. It “finds its boundary, its strict relation, its limit, and it is in the relation to this limit that it is sustained as such”. There is something (as limit) which excludes the possibility for desire’s satiation, and which in turn proliferates the process and dynamics of this desire. Desire by its very nature signals a movement beyond conscious articulation, for it is barred or repressed from it and is thus, in principle, insatiable. Nevertheless, it continually threatens to subvert the unity and certainty of conscious demand because it is exclusively concerned with its own processes, pleasures and internal logic. Desire, which continually creates and exacerbates anxiety around its inherent non-fulfilment, manifests as a productive and active state for the subject because, according to Lacan, anxiety is that which does not deceive. Lacan subverts the notion of pleasure by introducing the framework of desire which can only be positioned in relation to that which ultimately remains insurmountable, to where it meets its limit. Lacan (1998: 49) further comments on how Freud’s discovery of repetition, the repetition compulsion in service of the death drive, can only be elucidated by foregrounding the relationship between thought and the real because “the real is that which always comes back to the same place – to the place where the subject in so far as he thinks.....does not meet it”. The order of the real assiduously eludes the subject and as such, repetition can never be reproduction – “There is never any ambiguity on this point: *Wiederholen* is not *Reproduzieren*”. Lacan (1998: 50-51) proposes that nothing has been “more enigmatic than this *Wiederholen*, which is very close, ....to the verb ‘to haul’ (*haler*) – hauling as on a towpath – very close to a *hauling* of the subject, who always drags his thing into a certain path that he cannot get out of”. In endeavouring to situate its agency, repetition generates an unknowingness and therefore institutes a cleavage within the subject whereby “any conception of the unity of the psyche, of the supposed totalising, synthesising psyche, ascending towards consciousness” must necessarily be abandoned. An encounter with the real (which Lacan terms as ‘*tuché*’) is always radically excluded and forever missed. This is because the real is “beyond the *automaton*, the return, the coming- back, the insistence of the signs, by which we see ourselves governed by the pleasure principle” (Lacan, 1998: 54-55). The real transcends the network of signification and therefore repetition cannot be confused with “the return of the signs, or reproduction, or the modulation by the act of a sort of

acted-out remembering”. Repetition is in essence “always veiled”, a “missed encounter”. It demands something novel and exciting and it is turned towards the ludic which finds its dimension in this newness and novelty. But whatever in repetition is modulated, is merely alienated of its meaning. The individual demands something new in his/her activities or games. This in turn creates a ‘sliding away’ (*glissement*) which conceals the true (real) essence, “what is the true secret of the ludic, namely, the most radical diversity constituted by the repetition in itself” (Lacan, 1998: 61). Lacan (1998: 62) stresses how the *Fort-Da* game is “the subject’s answer to what the mother’s absence has created on the frontier of his domain – the edge of his cradle – namely, a *ditch*, around which one can only play at jumping”. The child’s vigilance is aroused at the very point that the mother left him, the very point she moved away from him. This in turn fosters an “ever-open gap”, so that the act of repetition is in effect aimed at what is essentially not there as presence. Interestingly, Lacan does not view the cotton reel as the “mother reduced to a little ball”, but rather he proposes that “it is a small part of the subject that detaches itself from him while still remaining his, still retained”. It is precisely “in the object.....the reel, that we must designate the subject”. This ‘object’ is conceptualised in the framework of Lacanian algebra as the *petit a*. The *objet a* is an integral part of the residues of the real - a remnant of the real, of primal loss, “an excessive, residual scrap” (Barnard, 2002: 175). It is always a remainder *in excess* of the symbolically and sexually differentiated subject, ex-sisting as an uncanny form of life and associated with corporeal borderlines and orifices (oral, anal, scopic and so on). However, while the *objet a* may gesture towards the infinity of the real, it ultimately fails in this respect in that “it only dissolves, in the final analysis, owing to its failure, unable, as it is, to sustain itself in approaching the real”. The *objet a* is the *cause* of desire which is impossible to incorporate [it is a “void.....a desire that is based on no being” (Lacan, 1998b: 126)], but also impossible to sever. It can never be formalised for it assiduously evades the grasp of symbolisation in that it manifests, for example, in a particular tone or timber of the voice, a *certain* gaze and so on. Moreover, it acquires the status of an algebraic sign which signifies the object’s resistance to nomination through the uniformity and monolith of linguistic signification. One can at best loosen its association and generate a disseminative quality through the creation of a more elusive (abstract, mathematical) formulation.



Derrida (1987: 261-262) suggests that *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, a text which inaugurates the death drive in psychoanalytic epistemology, espouses a 'logic' of the beyond, a non-positional structure which "exempts it from the quest after a final judgement, that is of any judgement at all". Derrida is concerned with the *restance* of the text. *Restance*, the noun which is derived from the present participle of *rester*, to remain, signifies that which remains because it cannot be judged, an undecidable excess, the essential impossibility of holding onto any thesis within, any posited conclusion. As such, the *athesis* (predicated on the threshold of unleashed speculation) of *Beyond*, before and beyond any judgement, "speaks of the enigmatic death drive which appears disappears, appears to disappear, appears in order to disappear". Derrida describes the death drive as enigmatic because it "appears disappears while telling many stories and making many scenes, causing or permitting them to be told. It is the "speculative possibility of the totally-other (*than* the pleasure principle)". He considers the argument of the *Fort-Da* to be fragmentary and without conclusion, "more an argument in the sense of a schema made of dotted lines, with ellipses everywhere" (Derrida, 1987: 298). The content of the *Fort-Da* narrative is presented to the reader as filtered whereby "the most active selection is marked by ellipses", the most "efficacious lacunae" not punctuated (Derrida, 1987: 370). The "tissue of lacunae" weave and compose another fable, which is concerned with a return to a previous state. Derrida suspects an incompleteness when Freud (1991a: 284) remarks on the finality of the game – "This, then, was the complete game – disappearance and return". Derrida (1987: 313) questions whether Freud would have to insist upon completion if it was so obvious and certain. Derrida postulates an incompleteness not only because there is "something like an axiom of incompleteness in the structure of the scene of writing", but also because the *Fort-Da* is "the scene of an interminably repeated supplementation, as if it never finished completing itself". The scene of writing itself does not recount something – the very something that manifests as the *no-thing* of the event which may potentially be termed the *Fort-Da*. The real/reel of the *Fort-Da* "remains unrepresentable" though it produces the scene of writing, and it is in the *athesis* of this scene of writing that Derrida recognises the exemplary movement of *paralysis* where the step (*pas*<sup>25</sup>) beyond the pleasure principle remains interdicted (Derrida, 1987: 336).

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<sup>25</sup> As mentioned, 'step' in French is *pas*, which also signifies the 'no', negation. The *pas* is intimately

Derrida (1987: 341) proposes that what compels a hypothesis is the enigma which appears to reproduce no pleasure for any system. Ultimately, it is as if one is “pulling this nebulous matrix with chain fusions or fissions, with bottomless permutations and commutations, with disseminations without return”. When Freud (1991a: 307) links “some ‘daemonic’ force at work” to the manifestation of the compulsion to repeat, this demon, Derrida (1987: 341) suggests, is the very thing which *comes back* (*revient*) without having been summoned. It is the *revenance* (returning) which “repeats its entrance, coming back (*revenant*) from one knows not where.....inherited from one knows not whom, but already persecutory, by means of the simple form of its return, indefatigably repetitive, independent of every apparent desire, *automatic*”. This automaton “comes back (*revient*) without coming back (*revenir à*) to anyone, it produces effects of ventriloquism without origin, without emission, and without addressee”. It no longer obeys the subject whom it plagues and persecutes with its return. The repetition compulsion haunts and demonises the pleasure principle, undermining, threatening and persecuting it by seeking something unbounded and primal. Moreover, Derrida (1998: 23-24) considers the repetition compulsion, “or everything that can be called by that name”, to be a “thread of irreducible resistance” which thwarts the possibility of assured meaning, meaning that ensures. It defines a *resistance that has no meaning*, and is therefore the resistance of/as non-resistance in that the repetition compulsion cannot confer meaning and thus resists analysis in the form of non-resistance (as a refusal to signify or as an intention to mean). For Derrida, if this resistance as non-resistance is “*itself of an analytic structure or vocation*”, if the repetition compulsion (“in the surest form of its ruse: disguised as non-resistance”) is indissolubly and inextricably bound up with the analytic process, then it would “permit one to recognise an affinity among the analytic, the demonic, and the thanatological”.

Derrida (1987: 381-382) proposes that the *athesis* of the text of *Beyond* transpires because its “proper object” cannot be the object of any thesis. Consequently, the postulation of a *hypothesis* (or even any hypothetical provisionality, the possibility of a provisional hypothesis) as the most general methodological and epistemological

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connected to Freud’s repeated gesture of taking another *step* forward that goes nowhere, the rhetoric of the *athesis* with which Derrida is seminally concerned.

category of the text is rendered problematic in that the irreducibility of the *athesis* remains as such - *recondite*<sup>26</sup>. Language foregrounds the difficulty of properly naming the thing-itself which is “a difficulty whose limits can only be indefinitely pushed back”. Derrida traces the necessity of this difficulty, this impossibility which begins with the necessity of *translating* an observation into descriptive language which in turn requires this translation to be retranslated into a language of theory. Subsequently, this theoretical language borrows schemas from scientific precedence, and as a result there is once again the necessity of translating or transposing from the borrowings of the already constituted sciences. All of these trajectories – transitional, transcriptive, transpositional, transgressive, transferential - open the very field of speculation. All of these movements in ‘*trans-*’, the movements that involve repetitions, displacements and speculations, are however unable to access or inhabit the threshold of the origin. The step (*pas*) or the *trans* always already returns, comes back, by tending toward the annulling of its own process. The oppositional limit between perception and its other cannot be erased. As a result, the “entire stock of metaphors and of metaphors of metaphors” (Derrida, 1987: 384), all of these metaphors clustering around the notions of repetition, of analogy, of correspondence, of relay, are ultimately rendered as transcriptions and translations of something inaccessible and hermetic. There is only the possibility of moving, of playing with metaphor, which in turn fuels and fosters the ludic quality, the gameliness of the speculation of the origin. Derrida (1987: 391) astutely perceives how acts and performances (discourse or writing, analysis or description and so on) are inextricably linked to the objects they designate; they can be cited as examples of precisely that of which they speak or write. Therefore, an “auto-reflective transparency” cannot be achieved, a “reckoning is no longer possible”. Ultimately, the death drive and the repetition compulsion add a supplement of the abyss so that “after all the exhausting crises, indecisions, departures-returns, all the additional steps and no more steps (*les pas de plus et les plus de pas*), doubtless the problem remains ‘unresolved’” (Derrida, 1987: 388). The irresolution of the scene of writing signals the impossibility of

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<sup>26</sup> Freud, for example, (1991a: 331) writes how “science has so little to tell us about the origin of sexuality that we liken the problem to a darkness into which not so much as a ray of a hypothesis has penetrated. In quite a different region, it is true, we do meet with such a hypothesis; but it is of so fantastic a kind – a myth rather than a scientific explanation – that I should not venture to produce it here, were it not that it fulfils precisely the one condition whose fulfilment we desire. For it traces the origin of an instinct to *a need to restore to an earlier state of things*”.

conclusion and solution - “the beyond of pleasure remaining the end of pleasure” (Derrida, 1987: 397).

The death drive undoubtedly remains a grand enigma within psychoanalytic epistemology and alludes to something irreducible at the core of its supposed representation. Even though the self-destructive function plays a corresponding role for the death drive (self-destruction manifesting as the basic expression of the death drive which aims at the reduction of internal tension), Green (1999: 84) asserts that one should not “defend the idea that the self-destructive function expresses itself primitively, spontaneously and automatically”. The difficulty remains in attributing to the death drive a precise correspondent function. In sado-masochism, for example, the death drive may alloy with the sexual drive. However, other forms of destruction (serious forms of depression leading to suicide and psychoses revealing ego disintegration) may not exhibit this fusion of the two drives. Moreover, in more esoteric and archaic forms of anxiety such as catastrophic and unthinkable anxieties, fears of annihilation or breakdown, feelings of futility, of devitalisation, or of psychic death, sensations of gaps, bottomless holes and abysses, it is more arduous to establish an exact corresponding function since there is the possibility, as Green suggests, that these manifestations, in part or in totality, may be connected to primary masochism which is “located at an endopsychic level, prior to any form of expression”<sup>27</sup>. For Green, there is no clinical argument which furnishes proof of the death drive because “any clinical picture is open to various interpretations and cannot be a direct expression of drive functioning”. Even though the death drive is predicated on clinical experience it still ultimately remains a theoretical postulate. The ramifications of this statement once again highlight an area of concern which alludes to the difficulty of identification and nomination, of offering a name, a definition and a structure to describe an energetic phenomenon that continues to foster assiduous speculation. However, as Derrida (1996: 10) proposes, the death drive manifests as an “invincible necessity” in the development of Freud’s oeuvre even if it remains a speculation that never adopts the form of a fixed thesis, or a postulate that is never

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<sup>27</sup> Winnicott (1974: 103-104), for example, utilises the term ‘breakdown’ rather elusively to allude to “the unthinkable state of affairs that underlies the defence organisation”. It is the fear of an original, primitive agony that remains shrouded in the unconscious. He utilises the term ‘unconscious’ to refer to the process of ego integration in which the still inchoate ego is “not able to encompass something”, and gather all phenomena into the arena of personal omnipotence.

definitively posited - something unrepresentable motioning towards an inorganic state of nothingness.

Finally, this stake of the unrepresentability of the death drive is what interests Kristeva (1989: 26-27) who is concerned with what level in the psychic apparatus one may possibly record “the being of its nonbeing”. She suggests how this drive is constituted by “fantasy and fiction – in short, the level of imagination, the level of writing – which bears witness to the hiatus, blank, or spacing that constitutes death for the unconscious”. Freud’s postulation of the death drive not only shifted his interest from the theoretical model of the first topography (conscious/preconscious/unconscious) toward that of the second topography (id/ego/superego), but also crucially, as Kristeva writes, towards the analysis of imaginary productions (religion, art, literature) where he locates in them a “representation of death anxiety”. An imaginary rendition of the death drive may “locate within its own fabric, such as certain dreams disclose it for us, that nonrepresentative spacing of representation that is not the *sign* but the *index* of the death drive”. Kristeva suggests how the dreams of borderline patients, schizoid personalities or those undergoing psychedelic experiments are often “‘abstract paintings’ or cascades of sounds, intricacies of lines and fabrics, in which the analyst deciphers the dissociation – or a nonintegration – of psychic and somatic unity. Such indices could be interpreted as the ultimate imprint of the death drive”. The work of death at the zero degree of psychicism is thus weaved into the *dissociation of form* itself, “when form is distorted, abstracted, disfigured, hollowed out: ultimate thresholds of inscribable dislocation and *jouissance*...”. In this way, the notion of representation is confounded by the movement of surreal displacements and dislocations, by the movement of disfigurement and fracture. The death drive is ultimately regressive and therefore it thwarts the stability of symbolic representations by perpetuating a frisson of imaginary dissociation and disintegration – through the lines rather than questing to settle on them.....

## Elliptical Transgressions

The exploration in this chapter of various and potentially non-conceptual phenomena that psychoanalysis has attempted to grapple with gradually reveals and calls into question the adequacy of language and thus the status of knowledge, of what can be known with certitude. A crucial problem or central aporia lies in attempting to capture in or through language that which transcends any simple polarity of absence or presence. What we are dealing with is in itself *other* than any simple absence or presence. It dislocates and displaces itself, making itself disappear in its appearance whilst still paradoxically marking experience. For a start, the attempt to note this 'it' through language or textually (the non-concept, the nothing, *différance*, *other* *jouissance*, the Thing, the abject, the navel and so on) alludes to the way in which the text is "marked in its interior by the multiple furrow of its margin". The 'it' intimates an "invisibility without return" and it escapes all endeavours at determination, every nomination it may receive from the text of metaphysics. The 'it' cannot be appropriated by some proper name since all attempts at nomenclature merely suggest that the 'it' remains sheltered, and therefore dissimulated, in any of the possible names furnished. All names that the 'it' receives in our language, the language of the symbolic, will continue to be determined by the implications of metaphysics or logocentrism. Any possible name cannot be the "primary prescription or the prophetic annunciation of an imminent and as yet unheard-of nomination". As Derrida (1982: 24; 27) writes: "What we know, or what we would know if it were simply a question here of something to know, is that there has never been, never will be, a unique word, a master-name". There is no ultimate name that can capture the 'it' or the non-concept in its fullness because at least for now, we are faced with what Irigaray (1985: 106-107) has identified as a "postponed reckoning" or "historical lag" in elaboration whereby certain phenomena continue to resist adequate symbolisation, formalisation and nomination thus signifying "the powerlessness of logic to incorporate in its writing all the characteristic features". Frequently, we have resorted to reductionism and minimisation in order to keep these phenomena "from jamming the works of the theoretical machine". The purity of logic is however necessarily underwritten by an ensuing aporia, a caesura, a schism. There is always already something (as no-thing) that resists transcription and universal quantification so that any fantasy of an a priori harmony, a totalising mutuality between signifier and

signified, is subverted, and the possibility for synchronised correspondence between language and what it is supposed to classify or categorise, what it is supposed to hit, remains to be accomplished. For Lacan (1998b: 82), the elaborate metaphor of form (as active) inseminating matter (as passive) participates in “the fantasy of an inscription of the sexual link” which attempts to “make up for what can in no way be said”. As Fink (2002: 31) suggests: “Lacan is generally suspicious of the whole and is ever pointing to the hole in every whole, to the gap in every psychoanalytic theory that attempts to account for everything, whether to explain the whole of the patient’s world or to reduce all of psychoanalytic experience to, say, a relationship between two bodies (in a ‘two-body psychology’) or to a ‘communication situation’”. Lacan (1998b: 42-43) actively works against a view of the world as “perfectly spherical”, as constituting a whole, in that he regards the possibility for such encapsulation as “a view, gaze, or imaginary hold”. Lacan emphasises the Freudian revolution that removed consciousness from the centre of the individual, and his work attempts to proliferate this radicality (of decentring) by subverting the centre through the movement of the ellipse which disrupts the return and flow of centricity by puncturing it with lacunae. The subject “turns in an ellipse” and therefore it turns to fall in a state of unknowing, of not-knowing, so that the very idea of a centre of ultimate self-possession and reflexivity is obliterated. The ellipse creates a sense of dislocation and moments of alterity which opens up experience to a wholly other reading (Critchley, 1999). It falls short of being circular and it is this lack of circularity which problematises the return of the identical to itself whereby the ellipse does not come back full circle to the same. In this way, the endeavour to generate questions about experience always already assumes the anteriority of the limits of its answers. We are limited by language to address that which ultimately escapes language so that in some way we are unable to conceptualise otherness without conferring upon it a form of sameness and familiarity through language. Yet in spite of these very considerable limitations, we should at least continue through persistence to push towards the very limits of knowledge, towards what refutes delimitation through a radical discontinuity, dislocation and disjunction without return, towards the irreducibility of otherness, towards the impossible ideality of the mystery of the other, towards that which “would open up a new age of thought, with a changed economy of truth and ethics” (Irigaray, 2000: 110). This new age however cannot presume that the “all” of a (discursive) system can prescribe the “not-all” of each

particular relation established. This “all” cannot project itself onto a given space-map (for the purpose of guaranteeing the totality of a system) and thereby colonise the *between* (the “excess factor”) by conferring upon it a value based on “punctual frames of reference”, calculation and determination. If the “all” appropriates in advance for the “project of exhaustive formalisation” then the remainder is rendered as finite and the movement of fluidity is reabsorbed into a solidified form. Ultimately, the “all” cannot account for the zone of silence that fails to be circumscribed because “the zone of silence (that) lies outside the volume defined by the place from which discourse is projected” (Irigaray, 1985: 108-112).



### 3. THE THIRD AESTHETIC

Why don't I choose a theme that one could easily discover? but no: I sidle along the wall, I do sleight-of-hand tricks with the melody that is discovered. I walk in the shadow, in that place where so many things happen.

Clarice Lispector (1989: 66)

In the course of a single second, our senses of sight, of hearing, of smell, register (knowingly or not) a swarm of events, and a parade of sensations and ideas passes through our heads. Each instant represents a little universe, irrevocably forgotten in the next instant.

Milan Kundera (1990: 25)

Far beneath the level of storms I slept. I moved within colour and music as inside a sea-diamond. There were no currents of thoughts, only the caress of flow and desire mingling, touching, travelling, withdrawing, wandering – the endless bottoms of peace. I felt only the caress of moving – moving into the body of another – absorbed and lost within the flesh of another, lulled by the rhythm of water, the slow palpitation of the senses, the movement of silk. Loving without knowingness, moving without effort, in the soft current of water and desire, breathing in an ecstasy of dissolution.

Anaïs Nin (1979: 4-5)

History's third dimension is always fiction.

Hermann Hesse (2000: 39)

enter.....between.....a silence.

Jacques Derrida (1981: 226)

Our dialogues are often mute. This does not prevent them from taking place.

Hélène Cixous (1997: 46)

The monument of psychoanalysis must be traversed- not bypassed – like the fine thoroughfares of a very large city, across which we can play, dream etc: a fiction.

Roland Barthes (1975: 58)

#### Prayers and Tears

In this chapter, I would like to open up possibilities for the exploration of the space or 'structure'<sup>1</sup> of what I will term the 'third aesthetic', and implicate this spatio-temporal potentiality as integral to providing a matrix for facilitating the infant's future quest

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<sup>1</sup> I have placed the word 'structure' in inverted commas because if there is the possibility for 'structure', then it is not an easily identifiable or readable framework. It is more *astructural* or de(con)structed in ethos, shaking the very foundations of "logocentric assuredness" (Derrida, 1981b: 24) and resisting any static, synchronic motif. As such it is an "outrage to representation" (Smith, 1996: 88), passing beyond conventional structures to the "outer boundaries" of experience, to an "other scene", "another horizon", "an elsewhere", where identity and presence are disfigured (Kristeva, 1984: 17; 27; 100). If 'structure' can claim to nominate, then it is necessary to transform and displace it, reinscribe and modify it, and thereby produce new configurations. 'Structure' must "continually, interminably be undone" (Derrida, 1981b: 24). It seems to me that 'space' is a more appropriate term because, according to Derrida (1976: 68-69), it is "always the unperceived, the nonpresent, and the nonconscious", signalling the "very limits of phenomenology" and marking the "*dead time* within the presence of the living present, within the general form of all presence". It is the "becoming-absent and the becoming-unconscious" of experience. It should be noted that space does not exist in a vacuum or independently and it is always already, in accordance with *différance*, mediated by the temporal.

for meaning-making and negotiation. In an essay entitled “The Dead Mother”, Andre Green (1986: 150) notes the catastrophic ramifications of the mother’s abrupt detachment from her infant, the radical transformation in the infant’s psychical life as a consequence: “One does not need to give a lengthy description of the narcissistic traumatism that this change represents. One must however point out that it constitutes a premature disillusionment and that it carries in its wake, besides the loss of love, the loss of *meaning*, for the baby disposes of no explication to account for what has happened”. The *loss of meaning* thus manifests as a seminal repercussion of the dead mother configuration. I was inspired by this quote to grapple with and consider what pathways facilitate meaning-making psychoanalytically speaking, given that the construct of meaning has been primarily explored and critically noted by the existential-phenomenological schools. This chapter however is not interested in defining the construct of meaning per se, which is invariably a subjective and existential endeavour or idiom, but is rather concerned with what may provide a trace for the infant to seek out meaningfulness at a later stage of life following maturation. I utilise the notion of meaning in its more traditional existential-phenomenological sense. As a broad definition (for it is not possible to describe specifically the construct of meaning without resorting to a phenomenological investigation of the scene of an individual’s life experience), Viktor Frankl (1970: 8), for example, suggests how the “will to meaning” (as opposed to drive or need which would reduce meaning to homeostasis, to physiological or biological stasis) functions as a central tenet of human existence whereby there is an attempt to seek out potentialities, possibilities, and meaning through life, experience, creativity, encounters and so on. The creation of meaning is unique and specific to the individual. Yalom (2001: 132) regards humans as meaning-seeking creatures and he considers one of life’s major tasks as the endeavour to “invent a meaning sturdy enough to support a life”. He proposes that this somewhat elusive construct of life meaning is frequently connected to questions around values, passion, motivation, vitality, direction creativity, significance, engagement, dedication, purpose and self-actualisation. This chapter follows on from the psychoanalytic tradition that is primarily concerned with the infant’s post-natal experience of his/her first object, the mother or caregiver, and the dynamics that ensue as a consequence (it will make use of the work of D.W. Winnicott and Christopher Bollas, and in the next chapter that of Wilfred Bion). It endeavours to locate an anterior ‘framework’ of meaning-making potential within the

context of the pre-symbolic realm (in its broad sense it refers to the realm prior to the order of acculturation, language acquisition and so on), and it will argue that this early encounter between the mother and the infant, and more specifically a ‘third’ space that exists between them, remains critical in inaugurating the possibility for meaningfulness at a later stage of life. It should be stressed that the epistemological angle or orientation of this chapter (and of the thesis in its entirety) places emphasis on its explorative aspect. In this sense, it is more an exploration of possibilities as opposed to a project of colonisation and omniscient precision. As a useful analogy, I cite Derrida (1982: 3) on the notion of the ‘sheaf’ in attempting to provide an explanatory framework for his concept of *différance*:

On the one hand, I will not be concerned, as I might have been, with describing a history and narrating its stages, text by text, context by context, demonstrating the economy that each time imposed this graphic disorder; rather, I will be concerned with the *general system of this economy*. On the other hand, the word *sheaf* seems to mark more appropriately that the assemblage to be proposed has the complex structure of a weaving, an interlacing which permits the different threads and different lines of meaning - or of force – to go off again in different directions, just as it is always ready to tie itself up with others.

In a similar vein, the present project is not interested in tracing some kind of narrative affirming a historical context which would confer legitimacy or verify the existence of this space of the third aesthetic. Instead, it will explore the general system of this economy, some characteristics, features and aesthetic patterns that inhabit this space, without asserting anthropological or historical authorisation, without tracing some teleological or linear regression towards its absolute origin or genesis. It is not concerned with “how an original and individual repression became possible within the horizon of a culture and a historical structure of belonging” (Derrida, 1978: 197), with how a hereditary mnemonic trace mediates and impinges on the development of subjectivity. The aim of concentrating on the particular dimension of the chapter’s focus is as a result of the pragmatic restraints of length limit and so as not to overwhelm the possibility of strategic or in-depth focus. Through the configuration of the sheath, the above citation from Derrida also emphasises the hybridity, fluidity and heterogeneity of signification which proliferates difference, deferral, and at times,

transient moments of meaning. The sheaf comes to signal the infinite possibilities of meaning that are able to launch themselves in new directions as they are also able to temporarily merge signifier with signified.

### **The Inaccessibility of *Asymbolia***

The temporal location of this project is the pre-oedipal, pre-symbolic realm of the mother-infant dynamic, the space of what Bollas terms the “unthought known”- that which is ‘known’ (not so much as an object representation, but rather as a recurrent experience of being – a more existential as opposed to a representational knowing) but not yet thought (as the maturation of the cognitive faculties would permit). It is essentially a space that is situated prior to linguistic acculturation and acquisition, highlighting the limitations and problematics of representation because the shadow of this archaic experience alludes to a period when the possibility for cognitive and linguistic representation and processing remains uncertain, and therefore any subsequent signification may have to take into account the “wordless element in the adult” (Bollas, 1987: 3-4). It is, as Freud suggests, “a prehistoric period of life”, almost as if the infant is “not yet in the land of the living”<sup>2</sup>. The ‘unthought known’ is the “place where knowledge unravels from its own self-possession, from its pretension *as* knowledge” (Rose, 2003: 151), functioning as “a force of dissemination that moves us to places beyond thinking” (Bollas, 1992: 17). Rose (2003: 149-150) proposes that Bollas’s work vividly captures “the dilemma of psychoanalysis in relation to unconscious processes which cannot be known”. Indeed, his project of writing endeavors to seize something too evanescent for the conscious mind, the “ungraspable unconsciousness of the unconscious, and the endless, unstoppable play of its work”, the unconscious as a limit to knowledge, at the limits of knowledge, as a break on what is possible for the subject to know. As such, how is one able to think, through language, through the subsequent maturation of the cognitive and linguistic faculties, that which is primordially known but not yet processed or thought. This question-statement foregrounds the complexities and difficulties of representing that which remains nebulous and even perhaps in the end signs its own ineluctable

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<sup>2</sup> For a richer contextualisation of this notion, especially in its relation to the dreamer/sleeper, the reader is referred to Rose’s essay “On not being able to sleep” (2003: 105-124, especially pages 117-118).

implausibility. Kristeva (1980: 272) proposes how the discovery of the Freudian unconscious “severs the always possible umbilication of man to the child”. Infantile sexuality, for example, entails an examination not necessarily of the one who does not speak, but rather what within the speaker is not yet spoken, or may remain indelibly unsaid (unnameable) within the gaps of speech. Infancy is rendered as a place of ‘error’, mythic, where such an error cannot be rectified by the inextricable alternative of cause and effect. Projected into/onto the supposed place of infancy are universalised endeavours which endow the infant with the dictates of distorted symbolic memories and discursive structures. Ultimately, as de Nooy (1998: 7) suggests, infants are “*unthinkable* in the sense that we have no way of understanding what goes on for them without reducing it to what we know”. Kristeva stresses the importance of emphasising the heterogeneity between the semiotic disposition (the libidinal-signifying organisation in infancy) and the subsequent symbolic functioning of the speaker following language acquisition. Moreover, the pre-symbolic ‘organisation’ thwarts the opportunity for neat representation because, according to Kristeva (1980: 276-77), it can only be grasped by the adult as regression – *jouissance*<sup>3</sup> or psychosis<sup>4</sup>. The discourse on infancy involves “a confrontation between thought and what it is not, a wandering at the limits of the thinkable”. Any attempts at recuperation of the supposed place of infancy are imbued with the specific attributes of the speaker’s libido. Kristeva even indicts the radical Lacanian

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<sup>3</sup> Kristeva views literature and the arts as the arenas within which the tensions, contradictions and *jouissance* of being subjects-in-process find exploration and expression. Her book *Revolution in Poetic Language* addresses precisely this issue and sees the works of writers like Lautréamont, Mallarmé and Joyce as controlled experiments in the disruption of the symbolic by the semiotic, and the interrogation of the social realm and subject by that which threatens their unity and rationality. For Kristeva, aesthetic practices prevent the solidification of boundaries, definitions, and identifications, thus requiring the subject to acknowledge the reality of difference and otherness (Graybeal, 1994). Art or literature, precisely because it relies on the notion of the subject, is the privileged place of transformation or change. It is the most conspicuous realisation of the signifying subject’s condition. Avant-garde writing, with its semiotic disposition, parallels the logic of the unconscious and therefore assumes the privilege of communicating regression and *jouissance* (Roudiez, 1984). The avant-garde text is “a heterogenous process, a structuring and destructuring practice, a passage to the outer boundaries of the subject and society” (Kristeva, 1984:17). Literary texts of the avant-garde disrupt the flow of signification, setting up a play of unconscious drives that undercut the stability of received social meaning. This results in a momentary release of libidinal pleasure – the untranslatable *jouissance* (Leland, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> The psychotic forecloses or repudiates maternal castration and hence the representation or registration of the Father’s Law. Foreclosure is not only the denial or negation of observation, but also the failure to register an observation. The son fails to represent the Name-of-the-Father (*Nom/Non du Père*) and therefore is unable to be positioned in the symbolic. The ‘I’ remains unlocated and unstable, functioning outside the symbolic (Grosz, 1989;1990). In psychosis, “symbolic unity is wiped out in favour of arbitrariness of an instinctual drive without meaning and communication; panicking at the loss of all reference, the subject goes through fantasies of omnipotence” (Kristeva, 1980:139).

perspective of removing the unnameable in infancy and placing it within the real as “nevertheless remain(ing) all-encompassing within the Name-of-the-Father” since it is simultaneously impossible yet invariably persistent within the triad of the structure of the real-imaginary-symbolic. It seems as if the unnameable, with the subsequent ‘error’ that is generated through speculation and surmise, still constitutes the ultimate limit of meaning where transcendence takes root. Even endeavours to propose *spaces*, spatial representation and variation of which the subject is a phenomenal actualisation, must necessarily be subjected to some teleological format because it is provided for within the forum of symbolic language.

The space of the ‘unthought known’ or pre-symbolic alludes to *another* form of knowledge where the jouissance of its acquisition is in effect the jouissance of its experiencing [or as Lacan (1998b: 97) puts it: “...the jouissance of its exercise is the same as that of its acquisition”]. This other knowledge thus belongs to the order of experience which is effected by what Lacan (1998b: 44) terms ‘*llanguage (la langue)*’<sup>5</sup>, which presents the symbolic, signifying subject with enigmatic effects that remain in excess of what can be spoken through articulated knowledge, indicating something (which is no-thing in its ex-sistence) which comes from elsewhere. Verhaeghe (2002) suggests how the body ‘knows’ something through experience and it is this experience that inscribes *another* knowledge and jouissance on the body. This inscription however is not subject to the exchange of the signifying order in that “the jouissance one experiences and yet knows nothing about put(s) us on the path of ex-sistence” (Lacan, 1998b: 77; 98). This other knowledge refers to what is not-whole in the Other, which in turn permits it to keep ex-sisting. The locus of the Other of the signifier knows nothing of it, this not whole part – “It is the Other that makes the not-whole, precisely in that the Other is the part of the not-knowing-at-all in this not-whole”. It is not surprising that Lacan is forced to describe this lack (as excess) in the Other, and hence in the subject of the signifier, in negative terms given that it can never be expressed in signifiers. For Verhaeghe (2002: 127), this negative effect “has everything to do with a certain characteristic of this impossible to grasp other

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<sup>5</sup> Fink points out how Lacan (1998b: 138; 36) creates the term *lalangue* by placing together the feminine article *la* with the noun *langue*. This feminine article is no coincidence in that *lalangue* “designate(s) what each of us deals with, our so-called mother tongue (*lalangue diet maternelle*)”, referring to the primary, raw materials of language “that has nothing to do with the connotation of the signifier, but that elaborates and perfects it”. Language is a function of *lalangue* whereby the latter constitutes the former through enigmatic excess.

dimension: its infinity”, where infinity “opens up a dimension that cannot be caught in the order of the signifier”.

### *Chora/Khōra.....*

The spatio-temporality of the pre-symbolic is a dimension that is maternally connoted by what Kristeva terms “*chora*”. The *chora* is an “ancient, mobile, unstable receptacle, prior to the One, to the Father, and even to the syllable” (Kristeva, 1987b: 5). It denotes an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movement, and it precedes evidence and verisimilitude. Although the *chora* can be designated and regulated, it can never be definitively posited. One can never give it an axiomatic form since it is not a position, model or copy, but rather analogous to vocal or kinetic rhythm – deprived of unity and identity. It precedes the establishment of the linguistic sign and manifests as a space where the subject is both generated and negated. It is a subversive space where the subject is threatened with annihilation and simultaneously produced (Kristeva, 1984). It is not easy to make this concept intelligible since it is not, strictly speaking, intelligible. For Moi (1986), Kristeva is acutely aware of the contradictions involved in attempting to theorise the untheorisable *chora*. It is problematic to account for this non-concept since it is essentially a pre-linguistic construct, and raises the difficulty of imposing a linguistic framework on it. This is perhaps why Kristeva’s position is frequently bewildering and opaque since one needs to be acutely aware of the inherently paradoxical nature of attempting to give axiomatic form to something deprived of unity, identity and coherence. Nevertheless, language is paradoxically the only tool one has to describe something that effectively eludes signification and definition. The *chora* is an “uncertain and indeterminate *articulation*” whose rhythm ruptures the very discourse of representation that offers its theoretical description and elaboration. It is, in short, a primordial matrix of divided subjectivity – a space of inscription of archaic experiences of difference, which are preconditions for signifying representations (Crownfield, 1994). In describing the *chora*, Kristeva acknowledges the need to extract it from knowable, empirical, ontologising representations (de Nooy, 1998).

While the maternal body functions as the ordering principle of the *chora*, it is not identifiable as the body of any individual subject. It is rather a “fantasmatic figure”.

The *chora* encompasses and transcends both the masculine and the feminine. As Moi (1995:165) notes: “The opposition between feminine and masculine does not exist in pre-oedipality”. The maternal is a disruptive and deconstructive force that undermines all fixed identities, including those of masculine and feminine. The semiotic *chora* is thus linked to the maternal rather than the feminine, is available to both males and females, and always accompanies and threatens the symbolic (Edelstein, 1992). The maternal operates as a function that can be performed by both sexes since Kristeva desires to transcend the dualistic logic of opposition that espouses dichotomous categories (Oliver, 1993). In this way, Kristeva does not propose the category of motherhood as an essential, reified structure or defining metaphor of feminine identity (Crownfield, 1992). The maternal functions as a metaphor for the split subject and the very notion of difference within. Kristeva’s concern with the maternal is a concern with alterity whereby the maternal functions as a metaphor for a more general and diffuse struggle against identity (Grosz, 1989). The maternal is the “ambivalent principle” which “stems from an identity catastrophe that causes the Name to topple over into the unnameable that one imagines as femininity, non-language or body” (Kristeva, 1986:162). It is an identity that splits, a process without a subject, an unspoken *jouissance*, the source of the semiotic and a place of splitting that slips away from the discursive hold, from the threshold of the symbolic (Kristeva, 1980). It is a precondition of the symbolic, remaining unrepresentable, and yet a necessary condition for all representations (Grosz, 1989). Rose (2003: 151) poses a very pertinent question when she enquires as to what happens to our relationship to knowledge when mothers are around - “What does thinking about mothers do to thinking?” [Here Rose (2003: 156) utilises mother as fact, but also the “mother, or her space, as the vanishing point of all identities, where no form of knowing could ever reach”]. I would extend this question most critically to the process of the maternal because the notion of the maternal facilitates “hermeneutic arrest”, a violence committed to consciousness as process.

The aspect of the maternal that I would like to stress for this project, and in affirmation of Kristeva’s notion of the maternal, is that the maternal signifies that which pushes towards the limits, the boundary, the threshold, of subjectivity and signification. It assumes a transcendental function that resists any assignation or specificity. It is neither subject nor object, but *between* the two. It is, as Kristeva



(1986: 172) suggests, “neither present nor absent, but real, real inaccessible”. What the feminine and the semiotic *chora* with its ethos of the maternal have in common is there dissident status of marginality – the feminine as marginal under patriarchy and the maternal as marginal to language and subjectivity (Moi, 1995). The actual mother is not ultimately intended to represent the space of the maternal *chora*. Instead, as Smith (1996: 93) suggests, the space encompasses aspects of maternity, the maternal process deprived of an identity, that is, the identity of an actual mother who would inhibit the negativity of the maternal through her socialising role. The maternal alludes to the elusive, rhythmic movements of the semiotic over and against the sense of structure and restraint exhibited by the mother. The enigmatic qualities of the maternal could never exclusively sustain an autonomous mother subject. The maternal is, as Wiseman (1993: 99) suggests, a *function* “satisfied by whoever breaks through the symbolic screen of language and culture to reach the semiotic”. It thus designates both a space and a series of functions and processes (Grosz, 1989). For Edelstein (1992: 42), the maternal reveals the impossibility of the ‘proper’ (what she terms the *maternelle propre*) and the possibility for transgression. It is always elsewhere, other to itself, referring to a process rather than an actual object entity. The maternal possesses the quality of an “impossible syllogism”, of the ‘configuration’ of “it happens, but I’m not there. I cannot realise it, but it goes on” (Kristeva, 1980: 237).

While I have stressed a particular reading and interpretation of the maternal, it should be noted, in concurrence with Edelstein (1992), that Kristeva’s use of the maternal as more metaphorical than biological poses similar problems that numerous feminists (Grosz, 1990, for example) find in separating Lacan’s notion of the phallus from the actual penis. Indeed, Oliver (1993) suggests that Kristeva’s notion of the maternal *chora* is extremely polemical, particularly amongst feminist critics. She attributes this reason to the fact that it is not homogenous and univocal but rather fluid and polysemic. As a consequence, its meaning and function assiduously shift and remain in flux, and this is evident in the numerous contradictory ways that critics have responded to the maternal. As an example, the maternal has certain analogous features or resonances with Kristeva’s ideas on the pregnant body. Pregnancy and ‘art’ (in its avant-garde form, and especially poetic language) are two privileged sites

of the maternal<sup>6</sup>. On the process of pregnancy, Kristeva (1980: 238) writes: “Through a body, destined to insure reproduction of the species, the woman-subject, although under the sway of the paternal function (as symbolising, speaking subject and like all others) more of a *filter* than anyone else – a thoroughfare, a threshold where ‘nature’ confronts ‘culture’”. Elsewhere, Kristeva (1986: 182) suggests how the “heterogeneity that cannot be subsumed in the signifier nevertheless explodes violently with pregnancy (the threshold of culture and nature)...”. It is precisely these types of quotes that have lead Butler (1993: 175) to conclude that Kristeva “reifies maternity and then promotes this reification as the disruptive potential of the semiotic”. As a result, she continues, the univocal signification of the paternal law is displaced by an equally univocal maternal corporeal signifier “which remains self-identical in its teleology regardless of its multiplicitous manifestations”. Here Butler presents a very critical point because perhaps we cannot escape the inevitability of the inflation of a discursive structure (even if it is not intended) owing to the fact that we are creatures of the symbolic and language. Perhaps ultimately even the conceptualisation of that which exceeds the discursive cannot escape its symbolic, discursive construction, its positioning within the binary, within a teleology that in the end encompasses something monolithic. The expression of semiotic irruption is after all still dependent on symbolic mediation which buffers against madness. There is always the danger, as Gallop (1982: 123) indicates, that “any position can become assimilated into the symbolic order as a codified, fixed representation. No ‘experience’ or ‘identity’ can guarantee one’s dissidence”. This notion alludes to the bind or impasse that Derrida (1981: 26) refers to when he suggests how in psychoanalysis, the lack, the void, the break and so on, “have been given the value of

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<sup>6</sup> For Kristeva (1984), poetic language is one of the most lucid examples of the semiotic-maternal gaining the upper hand and exposing the infinite possibilities in language. Poetic language is language that is other to itself. In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva establishes a necessary relation between the heterogeneity of the drives and the plurivocal possibilities of poetic language. Poetic language is the linguistic occasion on which drives shatter the univocal terms of language and reveal an irrepressible heterogeneity of multiple sounds and meanings. The semiotic represents the multiplicity of drives in language which disrupt its signifying function. The semiotic, through rhythm, assonance, intonations, sound play, and repetition, represents or recovers the maternal body in poetic speech. (Butler, 1993). Poetic language is thus considered transgressive of discursive modes or operations of language, and disruptive of meaning and signification. It is explicitly involved in the destructuring and structuring of language at the periphery of the symbolic. For Kristeva, this is the nature of all *signifiante*. The revolution in poetic language is also a revolution in the subject because any theory of language is also a theory of the subject. Indeed, poetic language puts the subject on trial and shatters the unity of the subject-position by revealing a subversive semiotic disposition that calls into question subjectivity and the entire domain of textual practice (Kristeva, 1980).

a signified or, which amounts to the same, of a transcendental signifier: the self-presentation of truth (veiled/unveiled) as *Logos*". The radicality and otherness of (non-)concepts like 'the void' have the potential to be recuperated back into symbolic sameness, into an ineluctable symbolic presentation. It seems as if a non-concept cannot escape its discursive inevitability once there is an attempt to identify and describe it. Moreover, it seems as if the establishment of a pre-symbolic space always falls prey to the structuring order of the binary whereby it functions or is set up in the system as an antithetical component in relation to the hegemony of its symbolic opposite. Language as a descriptive and ultimately symbolic tool does not offer a neat resolution for this irreconcilable bind. Perhaps resolution may only be found with the inauguration of what Derrida terms (1995: 90) a "third genus of discourse", an other discourse, a discourse that transcends the *logos* – assuming that this could be possible, though Derrida draws attention to the impossibility of such a possibility, especially if one considers our overwhelming dependence on the system of language in service of description.

The notion of a maternal is inherently complex and ambiguous (alluding to the difficulty of defining functional and set parameters), and while I have stressed a particular reading – the maternal as a process signifying something unmasterable and heterogeneous, the maternal as calling into question, evoking questions without lucid answers – I do concur with Gallop that sometimes and perhaps invariably the maternal is necessarily conflated with actual mother, and it is difficult to dissociate the one from the other. As Gallop (1982: 116) writes: "Certainly it is a stultifying reduction to subsume femininity into the category of maternity. But it is an opposite and perhaps equally defensive reduction to believe in some simple separation of the two categories". Gallop suggests that the relation to the maternal only approaches its full complexity with some recognition that the actual mother both is and is not the maternal. This statement highlights the notion that the actual mother is linked to, but not necessarily equated with, the maternal. In true Kristevan fashion, all is not exactly as it seems so that even if there is the possibility to conflate the experience of mothering with the process of the maternal, there is still something in the latter that remains impervious. In addition, as Edelstein (1992) notes, if as Kristeva has argued that the maternal is as much the site of the avant-garde artist as it is of the mother, then the maternal must operate primarily functionally or metaphorically, especially

considering Kristeva's (1984) proposition that the avant-garde transgressor is always male since only men can occupy a secure position as a speaking subject within the symbolic, and it is only from a position within the symbolic that it can be ruptured or transgressed. In this way, Kristeva's emphasis on marginality (from the symbolic) can be viewed in terms of *positionality* rather than of essences (Moi, 1995). In attempting to address Gallop's statement, I would suggest that the maternal might incorporate features or aspects of the experience of mothering, though this experience can never assert some kind of control over the maternal. As an example, I cite once again Kristeva's (1986: 178) musings on the pre and post-natal experience of the mother:

A mother is a continuous separation, a division of the very flesh. And consequently a division of language – and it has always been so. Then there is this other abyss that opens up between the body and what had been its inside: there is the abyss between the mother and the child. What connection is there between myself, or even more unassumingly between my body and this internal graft and fold, which, once the umbilical cord has been severed, is an inaccessible other? My body and...him. No connection. Nothing to do with it.....Trying to think through that abyss: staggering vertigo. No identity holds up.

In this passage, as Gallop suggests, the mother's dilemma is represented – the experience of an intra and interpersonal heterogeneity that she cannot master. There is thus something beyond her capacity to assert or dominate. The mother does not possess omniscient control over this enigmatic process nor does she author it and command “the authority to signify the experience, to intend its meaning or represent it” (Gallop, 1982: 117). Furthermore, as Weir (1993) suggests, the mother's position in the symbolic (as a speaking being) remains coextensive with her semiotic relation to the child. This serves to establish her divided subjectivity whereby positioned both within the symbolic and semiotic dimensions (and the subsequent tension that such a position creates), the mother functions as the subject-in-process/on-trial par excellence. Indeed, as Rose (2003) suggests, motherhood owes its most fundamental allegiance to the “disunity of being” so that what passes through the mother, “gnaws....at the symbolic's almightiness” (Kristeva, 1986: 185). Elsewhere, Kristeva (1980: 237) designates the mother/maternal (the mother subsumed by the ‘ethos’ of the maternal) scene as a place where “cells fuse, split and proliferate.....fluids change

rhythm.....within the body, growing as a graft, indomitable, there is an other. And no one is present, within that simultaneously dual and alien space, to signify what is going on". Maternity is the "splitting, fusing, merging, fragmenting" (Grosz, 1989) of a series of corporeal processes exterior to the control of the subject so that the actual mother does not find her identity affirmed by the maternal but rather her corporeality, her position, on the threshold between nature and culture. Motherhood is characterised as an uncanny experience, a space both double and foreign where no one is present to signify it.

Kristeva reconfigures and revises the notion of the *chora* from Plato's *Timaeus*- a text which narrates the story of the creation of the universe, of a self-contained, complete and harmonious cosmos where the *chora* functions as the medium within which Platonic intelligible forms and paradigms are phenomenalised in relation to the order of the world. The *chora*, according to Plato, is not matter but rather space. It is a field or medium, "some kind of dialectical glue", as Kintz (1994: 148) suggests, which fuels the interaction between Being (that which always is and never becomes) and Becoming (that which is always becoming and never is). As *Timaeus* (1929: 49a) proposes:

We began, in fact, by a distinction between two terms (Being and Becoming), but have now to call attention to a third.....In our original distinction we introduced no further *third term*, as we supposed that these two would suffice us; now, it seems, our discourse compels us to attempt the exposition of a perplexed and obscure concept. What quality and nature, then, must we ascribe to it? Something of this kind: that it is the receptacle, the foster mother as I might say, of all becoming.

He continues further:

Now the same thing must be said also of that which receives all bodies. It must be called ever self-same, for it never departs from its own quality. For it is always receiving all things and has never anywhere a shape in any way like any of the things that enter it. For it is there as a natural matrix for all things, moved and variously figured by the things that enter it, but through their agency takes on diverse appearances at diverse times" (50b-c).

Plato conceives of the *chora* as a matrix or receptacle whereby “anything that is to receive in itself every kind of character must be devoid of all characteristics” (70). It is thus an eternal, receptive, unchanging, amorphous, unreadable, constant space, which necessarily provides the function, an imprinting surface, for all reading, interpretation and experience to proliferate, though in its capacity to hold the imprinting, it ostensibly never alters or exerts any influence on it. What remains crucial for this particular project is Plato’s conceptualisation of the *chora* as inaugurating ‘thirdness’, a critical ‘third’ element, which is instrumental in the generation and transpiration of relational experience.

A conspicuous distinction between Kristeva’s and Plato’s delineation of the *chora* is that Kristeva (1984: 25) incorporates the “‘energy’ charges, as well as ‘psychical’ marks” of the drives into her conceptualisation of the *chora*. It is “a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated”. The *chora* is assiduously in motion, intimately connected to the facilitation and structuring disposition of the drives, as well as primary processes which displace and condense both energies and their inscription. In contrast, Plato’s notion of the *chora* is not imbued with same quality of flux, fluidity and motion. It does not proliferate relativity. For Kristeva, the *chora* functions as a site of spacing inflected with the process of performance of embodied beings. It is a moving dialectic wavering and vacillating between and through the corporeality of the subject and creating infinite interpretation. While Plato conceives of the *chora* as a disembodied, neutral medium whose function is that of an imprinting surface, Kristeva intimates that the inscriptions of such a medium need to be read and that its traces and imprints are inextricably connected to the maternal body<sup>7</sup>. Such a reading though would need to incorporate a radical shift in thinking about language and subjectivity because the *chora* is not yet organised into symbolic language, and must be deciphered through the aesthetic of other languages such as rhythm, gesture, sound, ellipsis, tactility and

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<sup>7</sup> The maternal body designates a relation of primary continuity *between*, rather than a discrete object entity. Poetic language, as an example, suggests a dissolution of a coherent, signifying subject into the primary continuity of the maternal body. As Kristeva (1980: 136) suggests: “Language as symbolic function constitutes itself at the cost of repressing instinctual drive and continuous relation to the mother. On the contrary, the unsettled and questionable subject of poetic language (for whom the word is never uniquely sign) maintains itself at the cost of reactivating this repressed, instinctual, maternal element”.

so on. As such, the 'notion' of the *chora* can only be illuminated within a theory of the subject that does not reduce the subject to a category of understanding, but rather facilitates "within the subject this other scene of pre-symbolic functions" (Kristeva, 1984: 27).

The *chora* functions as the basis for Kristeva's concept of negativity which signals that which is heterogeneous to language - the materiality of the corporeal structure, the unconscious and the process of drives. In negativity, the signifier is strongly allied to the drives and corporeality whereby "the full force of their activity cannot be grasped or measured by consciousness, but instead their constant division and multiplication reflects the repeated division of matter that engenders *signifiante*, the production of meaning in excess of consciousness" (Smith, 1996: 110). "The concept of negativity, distinct from that of nothingness (*Nichts*) and negation (*Negation*), figures as the indissoluble relation between an 'ineffable' mobility and its 'particular determination'" (Kristeva: 1984: 109). Negativity therefore alludes to that which is other than stasis because it reformulates that which is static as a process that perpetuates motility. Moreover, "negativity is the liquefying and dissolving agent that does not destroy but rather reactivates new organisations and, in a sense, affirms". This statement by implication intimates that the ethos of negativity, through its mobility and heterogeneity, fuels the potential and possibility for *other* configurations by refiguring and reforming various dynamical patterns and connections (it "concatenates, reactivates, and generates" Kristeva, 1984: 141). As a consequence, negativity promotes the pattern and logic of alterity, and therefore transforms the subject into a subject in process/on trial (*le sujet en procès*) so that the subject (and as such all relational dynamics) is inexorably infused with the irruptions of negativity as persistently reorganising, reconfiguring, reshaping. For Kristeva (1984: 118), the subject is always produced as "a process, an intersection – an impossible unity" because negativity registers a "*conflictual state*" which stresses the movement of heterogeneous inscriptions, the continuous deferral of consciousness from itself and the inevitable otherness within/of self. Negativity "brings us up against a limit: the limit of what a society, of what a subject, can recognise of itself" (Rose, 1993: 143).

The space of the *chora* undoubtedly poses a considerable challenge to the notion or notation of representation because, as Derrida (1995) reflects, *Khōra* immediately

signifies more than its name<sup>8</sup>. It signals “the other of the name and quite simply the other, whose irruption the name announces”. *Khōra* seems to defy the “logic of noncontradiction of the philosophers” of which Vernant (cited in Derrida, 1995: 89) speaks, the logic “of binarity, of the yes or no”. It derives from that “logic other than the logic of the *logos*”, and espouses a logic of ambiguity, equivocation, a para-logic or meta-logic, which alternates between the logic of exclusion (it is neither this nor that) and that of participation (simultaneously both this and that). This alternation stems from some incapacity (impossibility) for naming. It is alien to the order of the paradigm, the intelligible and the immutable model. It comes as in a dream. As a result, it is arduous to gain access to *khōra* because, as Derrida (1995: 90) intimates, it might not be possible to place one’s trust in an alternative *logos/mythos* when considering *khōra*. Perhaps a third genus of discourse is required in order to explicate. However, this third genre may only be a “moment of a detour in order to signal toward a genre beyond genre. Beyond categories, and above all beyond categorical oppositions, which in the first place allowed it to be approached or said”. A potential rendition of *khōra* highlights the impossibility of language in being able capture and define its ‘essence’. While Derrida pushes the (impossible) possibility of *khōra* to the extreme, playing precariously on the borders of nonconceptuality, he simultaneously alerts the reader to an irreducible inscrutability, to the very limits of what can be comprehended even if it were possible to generate a novel genre of discourse. However one cannot assume that spaces do not exist (or more accurately exist) because they cannot be conceptualised based on the tools that are available. Even though Derrida (1995: 126; 103) concedes to the difficulty of speaking or writing about *khōra*, he does regard it as “a necessity”. It is “an apparently empty space – even though it is no doubt not *emptiness*”. Irigaray (2000: 1) attunes herself (through writing-recognition) to the rhythms of this space of necessity when she suggests that “no space is yet fully occupied, but the spaces are not empty: they are inhabited by an invisible growth. Where it seems that nothing exists, there remains one presence, or a thousand”. While this necessary space may allude to something as a certain

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<sup>8</sup> Derrida suggests the word ‘*khōra*’ as opposed to ‘*the khōra*’ for the definite article presupposes the existence of a thing with a concomitant easy reference. *Khōra* does not designate any received type of philosophical discourse or ontological *logos* because it is neither sensible nor intelligible. Derrida however does concede that even if one says *khōra* and not *the khōra*, one is still making a name of it. Interestingly, the French pronoun *elle*, referring to *khōra*, includes both “her” (the mother or nurse-receptacle) and “it”. Moreover, as the reader will have noticed, Derrida resists translating the word *khōra*. The reasons for this will be explored further on.



irreducible alterity, it is always already undercut by the necessity or inevitability of its description through the medium or channel of the discursive. As Lacan (1998b: 32) writes: “How is one to return, if not on the basis of a peculiar (*spécial*) discourse, to a prediscursive reality? That is the dream – the dream behind every conception (*idée*) of knowledge. But it is also what must be considered mythical. There’s no such thing as a prediscursive reality. Every reality is founded and defined by a discourse”. Reflecting on the process of attempting to provide a space for the inconceivable, Smith (1996: 89) proposes:

Yet clearly our language-bound condition is such that any place which apparently cannot be thought or imagined is still subject to our need to name and describe. The moment a new conceptual vocabulary enters discourse, the subject of language sets about making it a comfortable home through naturalising its strangeness. Even writing that plays over vast spaces of emptiness is vulnerable to the reader’s domesticating imagination which attempts to house it in a topography that can be *represented*. Conceptualising such a place is a laborious uncertain task, but not impossible.

I think that it is important to gesture (however precariously or tenuously) towards these spaces of irreducible necessity, these spatio-temporal possibilities that (always) already facilitate all possibilities of inscription yet cannot be inscribed or prescribed, because these spaces offer a richer, though not necessarily more transparent, appraisal of a multi-dimensional reality. One however needs to be continuously reflexive and foreground the complexities, the intricacies, the ambiguities, that inevitably encompass the scope of such an endeavour. One should not attempt to colonise, naturalise or domesticate the foreign or uncanny quality of the space of the non-conceptual for the sake of “any philosophy directly issuing from the *Cogito*” (Lacan, 1977: 1), though of course there is always the risk of reductionism and homogenisation in the very act of linguistic-conceptual description. Instead I think that it is paramount to present the elisions and gaps as a result of the unknowingness, the flawed endeavour that necessarily confounds and accompanies such an exiled journey into the estranged and defamiliar. For Frosh (2002), the non-discursive does not imply that it cannot be spoken about but rather one needs to take into cognisance that there will always be something excessive or other to what is spoken. In

considering the possibilities of representing *écriture féminine* (writing said to be feminine), I think that Hélène Cixous (1986b: 92) usefully sums up the impasse of conceptualising and writing about that which defies such codification:

At the present time, *defining* a feminine practice of writing is impossible with an impossibility that will continue; for this practice will never be able to be *theorised*, enclosed, coded, which does not mean it does not exist. But it will always exceed the discourse governing the phallogocentric system; it takes place and will take place somewhere other than in the territories subordinated to philosophical-theoretical domination. It will not let itself think except through subjects that break automatic functions, border runners never subjugated by any authority. But one can begin to speak. Begin to point out some effects, some elements of unconscious drives, some relations of the feminine Imaginary to the Real, to writing.

For Derrida (1978: 98-103), very often problems presented to a particular discipline (in his instance, philosophy) are problems that it cannot resolve owing to what it has “held in store”. This is certainly not aided by the fact that the questions that need to be developed in addressing the problematics of otherness may fail in seeking out a language, a concept *given to the other*, because the phenomenon of the other is a *certain* non-phenomenon, its presence a *certain* absence – *certain* as opposed to pure and simple absence where a binary logic could make its claim. There is always the possibility of a “fragile moment when the question is not yet determined enough for the hypocrisy of an answer to have already initiated itself beneath the mask of the question”. Nevertheless, it remains crucial for a discipline to speculate, to reflect and “to question about itself within itself”, “within a recourse to experience itself”, as opposed to merely receiving what it gives itself which in turn neutralises the other. Any discipline can only *let itself be questioned*. In considering otherness or alterity, one may have to move toward what is no longer a source or site, towards “a space or a hollow within naked experience”, a space that carries one to the outer or inner reaches of experience. This hollow space is not an opening among others but rather “the opening of opening, that which can be enclosed within no category or totality, that is, everything within experience which can no longer be described by traditional concepts”. If the other is to remain as other than there needs to be a refutation of logos as absolute knowledge. Any rupture of logos however does not signal a descent

into irrationalism, but rather an affirmative “wound or inspiration” which facilitates the opening of possibilities so that the logos can “let itself be proffered toward the other beyond its own totality” (Derrida, 1978: 121-22). This otherness may reveal the discipline’s surface to be “severely cracked” whereby what was taken for its solidity is actually its rigidity. Otherness remains resistant to all categories and concepts which (pre)suppose “an anticipation, a horizon within which alterity is amortized”. It cannot be bound rigidly by a concept or thought on the basis of a horizon that assumes sameness. In approaching otherness, we are obliged to think in opposition to the truisms which we believe and still cannot not believe “to be the very ether of our thought and language” (Derrida, 1978: 118). In short, engaging with otherness leads to a difficult impasse. On the one hand, there is language with its possibility for a violent *rapprochement* of otherness in terms of sameness, “the necessity that the other .....not be respected except in, for and by the same”. On the other hand, there is the exclusion, the non-relation to this otherness which ignores and ultimately suppresses the other. It is this second option which Derrida (1978: 146) regards as “the worst violence, the violence of the night which precedes or represses discourse” because “pure non-violence, the non-relation of the same to the other.....is pure violence”, whereas “the irreducible violence of the relation to the other, is at the same time non-violence, since it opens the relation to the other” (Derrida, 1978: 183; 160). Gesturing, without suffocating, towards otherness or remaining silent? As de Nooy (1998: 7) suggests: “If the claim to comprehend the other.....is akin to seizing the other for oneself and squeezing its otherness out, then ignoring the other is no less crushing. We still need to put out a hand, but not a grasping hand, to make a gesture towards the unnameable, but not a gesture of dismissal. Violence cannot be totally eliminated but can be minimised. To save the threshold from becoming a thrash-hold, the appropriate gesture still needs to be found”. This apposite gesture towards the intricacies of otherness will continue to remain between silence and language.

The problem of rhetoric, in particular the possibility of naming, is a critical issue when considering *khōra* because it cannot be easily situated or “assigned to a residence” (Derrida, 1995: 92-95) as it is more situating than situated. It transcends the horizon of sense or meaning as it refers to meaning of being - ontology. As a result of these precautions and negative hypotheses that *khōra* alerts one to, Derrida resists translating the name *khōra* because “if it must be attempted, such an

experience or experiment (*expérience*) is not only but of concern for a word or an atom of meaning but also for a whole tropological texture". Whether one is concerned with the word *khōra* itself ('place', 'location', 'region', 'country') or what is termed the figures or tropes - comparisons, images, metaphors - proposed by Timaeus ('mother', 'nurse', 'receptacle', 'imprint-bearer'), the translation "remain(s) caught in networks of interpretation"; the translation is "lead astray by retrospective projections, which can always be suspected of being anachronistic". One can never propose the exact name or word, the *mot juste*, for *khōra* because its name is not an exact word. Ultimately, one cannot approach it, *itself*, without resorting to some point of view or anachronistic perspective. *Khōra* can only promise itself through a removal of determination, marks, impressions, forms. It never lets itself "be reached or touched, much less broached" and it resists inexhaustible interpretations which unsuccessfully endeavour to leave on it "the schematic mark of their imprint". *Khōra* does not furnish these interpretations "with the support of a stable substratum or substance"; it is not *a* or *the* subject. The hermeneutics of interpretation cannot inform, give form, to it except to the extent that *khōra*, as an amorphous space, *seems to receive* these types/interpretations and *give place* to them. For Derrida, even if Timaeus names *khōra* as a receptacle or place, these names do not designate an essence, a stable being. All acts of language, designations or sign postings which aim at *khōra* or its meaning invariably fail because these acts appeal to genus, species, individual, type, schema and so on.

Derrida's theoretical musings on *khōra* are extremely useful to cite because he exposes the notoriously difficult, if not impossible, challenge of engaging with that which teeters on the brink of the inconceivable. *Khōra* is deprived of a real referent. It is an X which possesses nothing as its own property because it remains unformed and amorphous. Derrida (1995: 97-99) suggests that "this very singular impropriety, which precisely is nothing, is just what *khōra* must, if you like, *keep*". One glimpses at the *khōra* in an aporetic way and as if in a dream. Any interpretation of it would have to possess a "teleological programming which annuls it while constituting it". It is a "sur-name" for *différance*, a kind of "allegory" of *différance* (Caputo, 1997b). Derrida's 'aesthetic' of conceptualisation and presentation functions as a type of critical index, agency or template against which one is able to assess (rather ironically) the viability of propositions and conceptions of the almost inconceivable.

It is as if his writings function as a critical oracle (or perhaps more accurately a critical maelstrom) where one presents any endeavours of excavating the unknown (of course such a hegemonic assertion, such a reification and canonisation of his work risks functioning as completely antithetical to the Derridean ethos of play and deconstruction). While there is the acknowledgement of the rigour of Derrida's exposition of the impossible, this chapter, like Kristeva's reading of the psychical energy charges of the *chora*, will gesture towards providing some ideas about what may inspire the movements of this non-conceptual, potential space. It should be reiterated that the emphasis on such a project is not to claim absolutely, but rather to explore through the archaic encounter of the mother and the infant, the complexities and multi-faceted quality of the potential energetic features and traces of this spatio-temporal possibility (which at times even escapes adumbration). While this chapter explores the specific mother-infant interaction, it simultaneously espouses an ethos which takes into consideration that the multi-layered dimensions and texture of any experience may not be completely captured by an attempt to describe it through linguistic-discursive narratives. It is within the realm of the otherness of space and time that what I have termed the "third aesthetic" is generated - a particular idiom of co-creation constituted by what Bollas (1987: 13) refers to as the "mother-infant culture", where the encounter between the mother and her infant facilitates a third space (the third aesthetic) that encompasses the dynamical interplay of two individual energies or corporeal entities.

### **Transitional Spaces**

The notion of the third aesthetic attempts to extend the scope of consideration of the mother-infant relationship by focusing on a third space that exists between them. The concept of a third space, which alludes to a meeting point of two subjectivities which in turn proliferates a third arena of negotiation, was initially foregrounded by Winnicott's (1991) notion of an 'intermediate area' or 'potential space' which, as Green (2000: 47) points out, remained seminal in transforming the "two-body psychology" that was attributed to the psychoanalytic scene of the 1950s. In effect, the notion of a third space considers other spatial possibilities that exist in relation to the interaction between two subjectivities. It is "as if the expression of the inner world could be transposed into the limited field of interaction between subject and object

and could reflect characteristics other than those usually deduced from a relationship between two parties standing in the external world. As if something poured from the internal to the external and would give birth to another form of existence before it would become entirely defined by its exteriority". Something in the generation of this co-created third space gestures towards a dimension that is able to incorporate features from the domain of each individual's intrapsychic world in addition to their inter-engagement. There seems to be some type of movement from the intra to the inter, from interiority to exteriority, that engenders new possibilities and qualities, the formation of a new type (culture) of energy or 'existence'. Winnicott (1991: 3) proposes that a "third part of the life of a human being, a part which we cannot ignore, is an intermediate area of *experiencing*, to which inner reality and external life both contribute". He suggests that this potential area functions as a "resting place" for the individual who must assiduously negotiate the demands of internal and external reality. Therefore this intermediate area of experience, which is never challenged (and, as Winnicott suggests, at a later stage expressed through art, religion, philosophy and other forms of creativity), provides relief from the burden or tension of this dialectical strain between internal and external reality. It is a "hypothetical area that exists (but cannot exist) between the baby and the object" - "a paradox" that Winnicott (1991: 107-108) "accepts and do(es) not attempt to resolve". Phillips (1988: 2) intimates how Winnicott wanted to find a way to examine the gaps as opposed to close in on them because they could be potential spaces for the imagination. He was preoccupied "by the idea of gaps, those 'spaces between' where there was room for the play of speculation".

For Winnicott, trust and play are two critical elements that generate this potential space. Trust is a sacred element in individual creative living and the potential space happens as a result of a feeling of confidence on the part of the infant during a time when s/he is captivated by a process of discovery. Indeed, this third arena is qualitatively variable in accordance with experiences of trust that the infant encounters. The capacity for play between mother and infant creates an intermediate playground, transforming the potential space into a creative playground. For Pizer (1996: 690) it is "the interweaving of tonalities and lyrics, of resonances and dissonances, (which) establishes the potential space with modes of playing". Winnicott (1991: 51) emphasises how "this area of playing is not inner psychic

reality. It is outside the individual, but it is not the external world". As such, in and through playing, "the child manipulates external phenomena in service of the dream and invests chosen external phenomena with dream meaning and feeling". It is these ludic symbols of early childhood that, according to Winnicott, persist in adult life primarily in the shape of dreams. It is not an easy task to conceptualise or write about the potential space because it gestures towards *another* scene, situated in the nuances and interstices of intra and interpsychic processes. It is a dreamlike space that disrupts the binarity between self and other, a "possible existence" of a place "that is not properly described by either of the terms 'inner' or 'outer'" (Winnicott, 1991: 106). Moreover, the potential space is capable of infinite variation, where experience is woven into the fabric of the imagination. Ogden (1985) proposes that the concept of potential space remains enigmatic and elusive because it is arduous to extricate the meaning of the concept from the elegant system of images and metaphors in which it is embedded. It is, as Davis and Wallbridge (1981) suggest, neither inside the world of dream and fantasy nor outside in the world of shared reality, but rather paradoxically in a third space that incorporates both of these places simultaneously. It is something that may transpire should there be sufficient room to grow and develop. This speculative or hypothetical area pertains more to *living* as opposed to mere functioning. The notion of living is imbued with a quality of richness and it is enhanced by the intensity of experience which resonates with the life experiences that transpire in the early stages of development. As a result, it is "not founded on the pattern of body *functioning* but is founded on body *experiences*. These experiences belong to object-relating of a non-orgiastic kind, or to what can be called ego-relatedness, at the place where it can be said that *continuity* is giving place to *contiguity*" (Winnicott, 1991: 101). This statement suggests that the potential space encompasses more than the exclusive domain of the tension of drive states motioning towards reduction and satiation. It incorporates the infant's capacity for relatedness and connectedness, often articulated through corporeal experiences – the sensation of being held, played with, tactility, audio-visual engagement and interaction, and so forth. In this way, there is a tendency to consider the body in metonymical extension, a body that is "moved, stirred, depressed, or exalted", and thus work against a "reduced conception of the body", of the body locked into the traditional either-or binary with the soul (Barthes, 1977: 60; 80).

## The Alterity of the Third

My utilisation of the notion of thirdness for the non-concept of the third aesthetic is more for the purpose of convenience because in my opinion, the notion of an ‘other space’ (to which I have attributed the term ‘third’), is infinitely and inherently more complex than a mere logical deduction or neat derivation (through synthesis) of a dialectic between two finite subjectivities or psychological entities. The third aesthetic is not a finite and uni-dimensional space that may be contained by a discrete third framework, but is rather *infinitely between* and infused with the trace and ethos of otherness and *différance*. This other or third space could never be incorporated into a neat synthesis without leaving a remainder, without leaving in excess. It cannot be “closed, mastered, encircled” (Derrida, 1981: 26). It forms part of a *liminal* space, a threshold which is opened up by “the incommensurability between the signifier and the signified” (Derrida, 1981: 18). The third is the effect of a position which alludes to what is generated by, but ultimately transcendent and exterior to the mother-infant engagement. In this way, thinking of the third does not include or presuppose a successful, harmonious dialectical mediation – a lifting up (sublation) into “the self-presence of an onto-theological or onto-teleological synthesis” (Derrida, 1981b: 44). The third emphasises an alterity, an outside as excess, that problematises the very possibility of recuperation or subordination within the symbolic, signifying system. I think that it is important to stress this reading of the third as insisting on the exteriority of otherness and fluidity, especially in light of Levinas’s (1969: 42) considerations of how the mediation of a third term (as category, concept, sensation or transcendental signifier) may potentially neutralise alterity by encompassing it within the totality of a conceptual system so that the “shock of the encounter of the same with the other is deadened”. Once again though, I am not entirely sure whether one can avoid the pitfalls of a third term or concept even if one foregrounds or inserts within the (non-)concept an irrevocable heterogeneity and exteriority (though of course one must at least try). This notion resonates with the above cited contentions of Butler (1993) who draws attention to how even non-concepts risk functioning as univocal signifiers which ultimately land up espousing an identical teleology to monolithic concepts. One needs to take cognisance of this critique or qualification whenever one is dealing with concepts that are purported to no longer be assimilated into the typography of a discursive system. This statement exposes the complexity,



the potential bind that one may face, owing to the fact that we are dependent on discursive, symbolic, language for describing extra-discursive, pre-symbolic spaces. It is, as Stanton (1986: 164) suggests, “endemic to any practice that tries to name the unnamed” whereby we remain embedded in the bind that the affirmation of the pre-symbolic creates. For either we nominate otherness and become entrapped within the structures of the already named; or else we do not name and remain trapped within the perpetuation of the same. Any inscription of difference needs to take into consideration its inescapable debt (oppression) to the corpus of the symbolic given that the symbolic functions as the realm where meaning possibilities may be linguistically rendered. As Derrida (1978: 354) writes: “There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language – no syntax and no lexicon – which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest”. Elsewhere, he suggests that even when there is an attempt to *break* with discourse, logic and grammar and seek out an “a-grammaticality”, one still has to *follow* grammar because there is “no pure a-grammaticality; or rather, there is pure a-grammaticality but as soon as it appears as such, or as it enters a text or a situation, it starts to become grammatical” (Derrida, 2003: 13).

### **Metaphor and Metonymy**

Before I continue with the discussion of my choice of the term ‘aesthetic’, I would like to consider how the space of the third aesthetic might be developed through the tropological forum of metonymy. I think that the emphasis on the excess of the third aesthetic problematises its containment within a metaphoric paradigm. However, before I am able to expand on this notion, it is important to offer an explication of the Lacanian terms of metaphor and metonymy. One of Lacan’s most highly innovative interventions into Freudian psychoanalysis was his use of linguistics developed by Saussure to explain the functioning of the unconscious. He regards the contents of the unconscious as signifiers<sup>9</sup>. The topography of the unconscious is defined by the

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<sup>9</sup> Lacan’s (1998: 20) fundamental premise suggests that “the unconscious is structured like a language” and that it consists of signifiers which have fallen below the barrier, that is, submitted to repression and prevented from traversing the bar (the division between the unconscious and consciousness) and

algorithm 'S/s'. This delineation reverses Saussure's formula, signified/signifier, by giving primacy to the signifier ('S') over the signified<sup>10</sup>. The signifier is granted priority because, in Lacan's understanding, the signified is in fact simply another signifier occupying a different position, a position below the bar within signification (bar = /) so that signifiers function in relation to other signifiers without ever arriving at a signified. Metaphor and metonymy are two central terms in the analysis of unconscious production. Lacan (1977) identifies metaphor, the substitution of one term for another, with the Freudian process of condensation<sup>11</sup>. The metaphoric process, the submersion of one term underneath the other, provides the general model for the unconscious symptom (it is also implicated in the poetic and creative endeavour). The term having fallen below the bar is repressed, and the signifier which replaces it becomes its symptom. It is during the transient moment of the symptom that the indefinite sliding of meaning constitutive of signification can be viewed as stuck so that the signifier is not free to form other connections and meanings, but is rather tied to particular significance. It is the "precise point at which sense emerges from non-sense" (Lacan, 1977: 158). The bar takes on a temporal dimension so that

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gaining access into consciousness. This seminal notion requires further clarification because, as Lemaire (1979: 100-101) suggests: "when we hear of people rejecting Lacanian formulae such as 'the unconscious is structured like a language', or 'the unconscious is a discourse' in the name of a purist adherence to the principles of linguistic science, we can consider them as dismissing, with too hasty a stroke of the pen, the richness of such analogical recourses". Therefore in the statement, 'the unconscious is structured like a language', the word 'like' is essential in highlighting that the process of the unconscious is analogous to the process of operationalisation of linguistic functioning because language at the level of the unconscious cannot be assimilated into language as a body of conscious communication. In Seminar XX, Lacan (1998b: 48) stresses his usage of the phrase 'like a language' as opposed to 'by a language' which would render the connotation differently. As Lemaire continues further: "We are also obliged to admit to a certain inability to specify the relations between these two languages, as thinking and unfolding the unconscious in analytic discourse means denaturing its essence". The language of the unconscious can never neatly and absolutely translate into the language of conscious communication, and as a result the unconscious will always expose the peculiarities, idiosyncrasies and slippages of linguistic discourse. The primary process of the unconscious signals an indelible flight from meaning which remains extremely arduous to grasp. It is for this reason that during one of the interviews that Lacan granted Lemaire, he proposed the following statement, which Lemaire (1979: 130) cites as: "the unconscious is a discourse, a language which is different from conscious language".

<sup>10</sup> The signifier is a form which signifies, whether it be visual, auditory, tactile and so on. The signifier is concerned with the process by which meaning is produced. The signified is the idea or concept that is signified by this process.

<sup>11</sup> Condensation creates a compression of two or more ideas so that a composite figure, image or name, drawing on and leaving out features of both, is formed. In this way, a single image in a dream, for example, is able to represent many different wishes or thoughts through the compression of common features and the elimination of relevant differences. Freud (1991c) regarded the process of condensation as overdetermined since one unrecognisable idea or memory can stand for a number of previously unrecognisable and far more important ideas or memories. It aids in disguising forbidden wishes by representing several unconscious contents through a single image, effecting great compression using an economy of omission (Grosz, 1990).

the signifier is not lost but rather delayed or deferred, and finds articulation in the transient moment of the symptom. Benvenuto and Kennedy (1986) describe the symptom as an anchoring point between signifier and signified. Lacan also proposes that metaphor undoes all previous connections between signifier and signified. It rips the signifier from its lexical connections. In this way, Lacan appeals to metaphor's ability to divest the material it uses of any previous connections so that it becomes relevant to the subject's unconscious dynamics. Metaphor is an element that has been emptied of its meanings and reintegrated into a different, signifying system<sup>12</sup>.

Metonymy, which Lacan (1977) identifies with the Freudian notion of displacement<sup>13</sup>, ensures that the repressed term always remains in a linear, syntagmatic, associative relation or connection to the rest of the subject's language. It signals the relation between two contiguous signifiers where the original signifier (what was originally or primally repressed) never traverses the barrier between consciousness and the unconscious. Unlike metaphor, which privileges repressed signifiers, metonymy bars the hierarchical repressive structure of metaphor so that relevant connections are primarily based on the connection between a term and what substitutes it. Therefore the original repressed constellation that fuels or motivates this movement of displacement and substitution is barred from conscious access. In this movement of one term to its substitute, Lacan will recognise the movement of desire. Desire too is based on a chain of substitution whereby the first (lost) object of desire (the need for union with the mother) generates a potentially infinite chain of

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<sup>12</sup> Metaphor is delineated in the following formula which offers an algorithmic representation of its process:

$$F (S'/S) = S(+s)$$

On the left-hand side, the original signifier (S) is vertically suspended under the substitute signifier (S') which has taken its place in representation. It does not abolish the original but covers over it. On the right-hand side, the plus sign between the brackets represents the crossing of the bar and the constitutive value of this crossing for the emergence of signification. The movement barring a signifier from consciousness and placing it in the unconscious position of signified (s) is therefore subverted. Metaphor opens up a host of new meanings which Lacan (1977) indicates by the plus sign in his formula.

<sup>13</sup> During the process of displacement, a significant unconscious wish is able to transfer its intensity or meaning to an indifferent term, allowing the latter to act as its delegate and thus disguise it. The insignificant idea is able to represent the more significant one without the repressed features of the significant idea breaching the barriers of censorship. Displacement ensures that apparently trivial, indifferent and insignificant material can represent highly significant unconscious elements. It disguises unconscious wishes by transferring their intensity and meaning to relatively innocuous ideas which function as their distorted representatives (Freud, 1991c).

(only partially satisfactory) substitutes (Grosz, 1990). Metonymy describes a movement from signifier to signifier, a movement which opposes any tendency towards mastery and the fixing of meaning. For Chaitin (1988), metonymy separates the subject from its attributes and produces a certain lack (*manque*), loss, or gap (*béance*) in and of being<sup>14</sup>.

In assuming the name of the third aesthetic as a movement of a (temporal) space that problematises conceptualisation, I have necessarily endeavoured to open up or proliferate the fluidity and multiplicity of this space, rather than suggest a neat closure, a unified and harmonious derivation of the mother-infant dialectic which would render it into a synchronous harmony. As such, I have attempted to resist triangulation whereby a third element in the equation, the third aesthetic, creates confluence or unification (in/through a trinity, triplicity) and closes off into a hermetically sealed system, a triadic schema. The question therefore arises as to how useful metaphor (the Lacanian rendition with its possibility for congealed, symptomatic meaning, however transient) is in subverting the purity of a potential, neat triadic system? Does metaphor not function as an example of the mediation of a third that neutralises the very alterity that accompanies this space of the third aesthetic and thus renders it within the ambit or body of a system? Assuming it is not possible to enclose the third aesthetic within a metaphoric system without risking neutralisation, what other forum or framework would be available so as not to metabolise or incorporate the radical alterity of this space? Or posed in a different way, is it possible to develop another (tropological) 'configuration' that would not function as an all-encompassing, oppressive meta-model or frame for the third aesthetic? It seems to me that there needs to be a radical reconstitution of the third aesthetic as metaphor (even if it is a metaphor for marginality, heterogeneity, estrangement and so on) because, as Kristeva (1987a: 30) suggests, metaphor should

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<sup>14</sup> The algorithmic representation of the metonymic process is as follows:

$$F(S...S') = S(-)s$$

The left-hand side of Lacan's (1977) formula can be read as the functional representation of the relation between two contiguous signifiers '(S...S)', two signifiers on the same level. The right hand side can be interpreted as a relation between a signifier (S) and a signified (s), which does not traverse the barrier of censorship, as indicated by the minus sign. The metonymic effect is caused by the linearity of a signifying structure – the juxtaposition of signifiers in a chain.

be understood as a “movement toward the discernable, a journey toward the visible”, a “sundered unity” which is “in the process of being set up”. However the attempt to reconsider something other than the metaphoric remains complicated from the very outstart especially if one considers Derrida’s (1982) proposition in “*White Mythology*” of how metaphor is the very condition of language, metaphysics, conceptualisation, nomination, description and so on. Indeed, what is proper to the movement of the third aesthetic is effaced or erased, wiped over by its metaphorical construction and conceptualisation (when attempting to describe it through language). One cannot escape the terrain of metaphor because it is inextricably bound to the condition of language, and it does not necessarily offer relief, exculpation, the possibility to “lift the weight of things and acts” (Derrida, 1978: 114). As a result, even if one suggests that the third aesthetic is a quasi or pseudo-metaphor, a metaphor about the impossibility of metaphor, one still incorporates such a delineation within the overriding frame of metaphor as a variation that still holds to the metaphoric system or oeuvre. An alternative solution, the displacement of metaphor with metonymy, is not necessarily a resolution because metonymy still partakes of a binary epistemology (the imposition of a metaphor/metonymy dichotomy), and even the very subversion of such a binary reveals that metonymy is not an impoverished metaphor, but rather “metonymy exists from the beginning and makes metaphor possible” (Lacan 1993: 227) and vice versa<sup>15</sup>.

Despite or in spite of the limitations that metonymy presents, its inextricable link with metaphor, its ultimate incapacity to transcend the figure of metaphor, I would like to

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<sup>15</sup> For Grosz (1990), there is an inextricable link between metaphor and metonymy, since the metaphoric process generates the signified from the chain of signifiers, and the metonymic process ensures that each signifier has multiple connections and associations which relate to other signifiers, and therefore give it meaning. Every condensation (metaphor) is also a displacement from the substitute to the original signifier, and every displacement relies on terms generated by condensation. The (metonymic) displacement is derived from the condensation, the original signifier of the metaphoric process. Another useful way of understanding this intimate connection is in terms of horizontality and verticality. Gallop (1985) suggests that in the metonymy formula, a horizontal configuration of S and S’ is paired with a horizontal line (the bar, the minus sign). In the algorithm for metaphor, a vertical disposition of S and S’ is not paired with a vertical line, but rather with a cross composed of a vertical and horizontal line (+). The structure of the metaphoric algorithm encourages the reader to only see the vertical line which “crosses the bar” (Lacan, 1977: 164). However, one is presented not with a vertical crossing line, but with the cross itself, two dimensional, nonlinear. The complete metaphoric process is a “double twist” or a “double triggered mechanism” (Lacan, 1977:166), because it involves both the emptying of sense (-) made possible by metonymy, and the formation of new meanings made possible by the ‘+’ sign. It is therefore virtually impossible to read metaphor without taking into account its metonymic substructure. The recognition of the two dimensions of the plus sign suggests that metonymy is necessary for metaphor.

propose that the trope of metonymy is more apt (though ultimately flawed because it is a metaphor of metonymy or metonymic metaphor) in creating dissemination which subverts or disrupts luminous unification. Such a proposition requires qualification and as such, in accordance with Derrida, if I propose metonymy then it must necessarily be written “under erasure” (*sous rature*). As mentioned, this linguistic orientation highlights the necessity of both utilising and erasing language simultaneously. The word is inaccurate and therefore it is crossed out. However, since it is necessary (in an endeavour to foreground some concept or notion through a linguistically flawed system), it remains legible. There is thus a simultaneous acknowledgement that metonymy may potentially gesture towards the radical alterity of the third aesthetic, yet it also remains inherently flawed owing to its location within logocentric discourse. One is thus rendered in an uncomfortable position whereby there is an attempt to “account for an error by means of tools derived from that very error” (Johnson, 1981: x). A critical reason why I have suggested a qualified metonymy is because its operations are more closely aligned with dissemination, which operates at the limits of intelligibility. Moreover, as Johnson (1981: xxxii) highlights, dissemination “attempts to work a violent but imperceptible displacement of the ‘triangular’ – Dialectical, Trinitarian, Oedipal – foundations of Western thought”. The dissemination of metonymy is therefore juxtaposed with the polysemy of metaphor, and in this very statement I am guilty of perpetuating a type of binarity or perhaps proliferating a certain oedipal configuration (maternal dissemination, paternal polysemination?), which falls into the very trap of triangulation<sup>16</sup>. However, as Johnson (1981: x) astutely perceives, “to show that the binary oppositions of metaphysics are illusions is *also*, and perhaps most importantly, to show that such illusions cannot simply in turn *be opposed* without repeating the very same illusion”.

My proposition that metonymy (as opposed to metaphor) is more apt as a tropological gesture for the radical alterity of the third aesthetic is as a result of its disseminative (rather than polysemic) capacity to subvert all recuperative gestures of mastery, foil attempts at dialectical closure and break the circuit of intentions or expectations through its ungovernable excess. It prevents the possibility of summing up and

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<sup>16</sup> Derrida (1981b) suggests how dissemination figures that which cannot be the father’s (as symbolic agent), though of course this does not necessarily and invariably intern it within the domain of the maternal as this would confer upon it an essence (in/as opposition perhaps?).

closing in on gaps at any possible point. In my opinion, metonymical dissemination or displacement is more useful in disrupting the sense of a neat, triangulated closure which would neutralise the *infinitely between* of the third aesthetic by imposing on it “discursive effects of an intention-to-mean” (Derrida, 1981:7). Before I offer an explication of dissemination, the reader should bear in mind (a bind once again!) that the very success of ‘presenting’ dissemination in a disseminative way would be a sign of failure because “to perfectly disseminate the exposition of dissemination would require a kind of textual mastery that would belong among the recuperative gestures that dissemination undercuts” (Johnson, 1981: xxxiii). If dissemination “cannot be summarised into an exact tenor, it is because the force and form of its disruption *explode* the semantic horizon” (Derrida, 1981b: 45). Dissemination refers to the impossibility of, the resistance (*restance*) against, delimitation, reinscription and reducibility. It always leaves an irremediable remainder, an after-effect which cannot be reincorporated into a teleological anticipation. It signals towards the impossibility of saturation so that to master is to miss. Dissemination is predicated on the disappearance of the mastery of meaning, even if it comprehends difference and plurality. As such it diverges from polysemy, “comprising both more and less than the latter”, and it “interrupts the circulation that transforms into an origin what is actually an after-effect of meaning” (Derrida, 1981: 21). In the symptom of metaphor or metaphor as symptom, as Kristeva (1987a: 23) suggests: “now, and thanks to Lacan, one analyses the symptom as a screen through which one detects the workings of *signifiance* (the process of formation and de-formation of meaning and the subject)”. In this way, metaphor creates the capacity for the construction of meaning in its plural, polysemic form and by implication this meaning may (even in its flux and heterogeneity) potentially be recuperated back into static classifications of dyadic or triadic configurations. One can detect or decipher within metaphor “an indefinite jamming of semantic features one into the other, a meaning being acted out” (Kristeva, 1987a: 37). While Derrida (1981b: 45) acknowledges that polysemia “represents progress in relationship to the linearity of the monothematic” that anchors itself to a principle signified, he nevertheless suggests that it is still organised “within the implicit horizon of a unitary resumption of meaning” – within the horizon of a teleological and totalising dialectic that annuls expansive and productive displacement. The dissemination of metonymy, on the other hand, “cannot be pinned down at any one *point* by the concept or the tenor of a signified” because it does not

traverse into (cognitively comprehensible) meaning, it does not cross the bar. It remains inherently and infinitely elliptical. The more or less which disjoins dissemination from polysemy is, according to Derrida (1981: 25-26), associated with castration, but with a certain exteriority of castration which signals “a fall with no return and with no restricted economy” so that it can “no longer be taken up and comprehended within the logocentric, sublimating field of talking truth, law, signification, full speech, the symbolic order, the intersubjective dialectic, or even the intersubjective triad”. Dissemination cannot simply be equated with castration (though it ‘possesses’ a castrating effect, a cutting off of meaning even in the celebration of its plurality) because the concept of castration has been metaphysically interpreted and arrested. If dissemination is associated with castration then it cannot be a castration as transcendental signifier, “the ultimate recourse of all textuality, the central truth, or truth in the last analysis, the semantically full and non-substitutable definition of the generating (disseminating) void in which the text is launched” (Derrida, 1981b: 86). Instead, it ‘is’ an *angle* of the play of castration which refuses to signify, and it opens up a *snag* that can no longer be mended or rectified, a spot where neither meaning (however polysemic) nor any form of presence can be pinned down. It effaces any metaphoric movement that would attempt to tie down, coagulate, condense, hypostatise, and compress the play of *différance*. It cannot be led back to a simple origin or presence, and it marks an irreducible and generative multiplicity.

Dissemination marks the essential limits signalling “the impossible return to the rejoined, readjusted unity of meaning” so that it *affirms* “the always already divided generation of meaning”, spilling it in advance (Derrida, 1981: 268). It can never manifest as an originary, central or ultimate signified, the place proper to truth. The interminable motion of dissemination therefore is insufficiently announced by polysemy, which according to Derrida (1981: 350), “always puts out its multiplicities and variations within the *horizon*, at least, of some integral reading which contains no absolute rift, no senseless deviation” so that in the end “meaning (is) at last deciphered, revealed, made present in the rich collection of its determinations”. All moments of polysemy are potential moments of meaning installed through plurality, “temporary detours of some passion, some signifying martyrdom that testifies to a truth past or a truth to come, to a meaning whose presence is announced by enigma”. As a result, the concept of polysemy is located within the confines of explanation,



within the enumeration and explication of meaning, so that meaning presents itself and gathers itself together. A nonmasterable dissemination is polysemia with a perpetual remainder, an irreducible polysemia (Derrida, 1982). While I have endeavoured to create some type of division between metaphor and metonymy and their active properties or functions of polysemy and dissemination respectively, such a division can only ultimately be utilised in the service of explanation because metaphor and metonymy (and by implication polysemia and dissemination) are inextricably linked in a dialectic of negation, creation, accentuation and definition. The efficacy of the displacement of metonymy, for example, is dependent on the establishment of an originary signifier of the metaphoric process, and similarly, dissemination is a type of polysemia that cannot be saturated, reduced, deciphered; it is both more and less. Metonymy therefore cannot evade its metaphoric origins or the way in which the metaphoric position constructs and informs its process. Given the limitations, it seems to me that metonymy is however more appropriate, though of course not ideal, in thwarting and subverting the “trinitarian horizon” (Derrida, 1981: 25) through its disseminative features. The algorithmic delineation of metonymy reveals it to function as a figure of the ellipse whereby its topological nature is not easily homogenised or rendered as synchronous. It fails to cross the bar to truth, meaning and signification, creating an (in) excess, an alterity and residue which disturbs the potential for hermetic, static, finite, triadic closure.

### **The Aesthetic (Of the ‘Third’)**

Ideally, I would like the term “aesthetic” to signify a particular idiom, form, gesture, culture, feature and way of ‘being’. However, as I shall describe, this may not be possible unless each of these positions are placed under erasure or in inverted commas because the third aesthetic defies and eludes the possibility for absolute structural (formal) definition. If anything, the aesthetic, as Barthes (1977: 84) suggests, must be brought closer “to the *drift*” – to a space of variation and floating. Bollas (1993: 40-41) is one writer who highlights some useful features of what the aesthetic may come to signify. He is concerned with the experience of the aesthetic (the enchantment, the allure of art in a sense), which occurs as a *moment* where time manifests momentarily or transiently as a space for the subject. Moreover, the

aesthetic reactivates the archaic, existential experience, the symbiotic reverie between mother and infant:

A spell that holds self and other in symmetry and solitude, time crystallises into space, providing a rendezvous of self and other (text, composition, painting) that actualises deep rapport between subject and object and provides the person with a generative illusion of fitting with an object, evoking an existential memory. Existential, as opposed to cognitive, memory is conveyed not through visual or abstract thinking, but through the effects of being. Such moments feel familiar, uncanny, sacred, reverential, and outside cognitive coherence. They are registered through an experience of being, rather than mind, because the epistemology of the aesthetic moment is prior to representational cognition and speaks that part of us where the experience of rapport with the other was the essence of being. Indeed, the aesthetic induces an existential recollection of the time when communicating took place solely through the illusion of deep rapport of subject and object. Being-with, as dialogue, is the communicating of the infant with the mother, where the mother's task is to provide the infant with an experience of continuity of being. Her handling and the infant's state of being are prior to the infant's processing his existence through mentation.

The notion of the aesthetic resonates with the archaic experience of the mother-infant encounter where the infant experiences distress and its dissolution through the "apparitional-like presence of the mother". The mother's form or manner of care, her "aesthetic of handling" (Bollas, 1993: 41-42), is internalised by the infant whereby her style of being with the infant through inactive presence, the satiation of need, soothing, playing, feeding and so on, precipitates transformations of the infant's internal and external realities. Bollas acknowledges in an endnote that while the maternal aesthetic originates from the mother, it becomes a mutual experience as the infant and mother discover new modes of connection. It is this mutuality which fosters the generation of the third aesthetic – intersubjective residues generated between the mother-infant engagement<sup>17</sup>. The experience which contributes to the

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<sup>17</sup> In *The Bonds of Love*, Benjamin (1988: 14) emphasises this notion of mutuality whereby she suggests that despite the infant's dependence on the mother, the mother is still grateful for the infant's cooperation and activity – his/her willingness to be soothed, acceptance of frustration, devotion to the

generation of the third aesthetic often exudes the quality of the momentary, of irreducibility, of an “indivisible unicity of the instant” (Derrida, 2000: 30) – as if it were a space that transcends linear temporality, a pre-temporal or *atemporal* archaic existence that indicates the infant’s state of being as prior to processing through mentation<sup>18</sup>. Of course, it is important to stress the *as if* of the above statement for the spatial is always already mediated by the movement of *différance* and thus by temporality. The archaic scenario between mother and infant is further complicated by the proposition that “the mother is less significant and identifiable as an object than as a process that is identified with cumulative internal and external transformations.....where the first object is ‘known’ not so much by putting it into an object representation, but as a recurrent experience of being – a more existential as opposed to representational knowing. As the mother helps to integrate the infant’s being (instinctual, cognitive, affective, environmental), the rhythms of this process – from unintegration(s) to integration(s) – inform the nature of this ‘object’ relation rather than the qualities of the object as object” (Bollas, 1987: 14). In effect, Bollas suggests that the infant internalises not simply an object (the mother, for example), but also a process (the aesthetic of her transformations). I would qualify and add to this notion by suggesting that the infant ‘internalises’<sup>19</sup> not only the process of the mother’s aesthetic of transformation, but more so the process and energies of the third aesthetic – a co-created intersubjectiveness which takes into consideration not only the way in which the infant responds and contributes to this space, but also the fluidity of boundaries of object-entities – a relational continuity *between* rather than a discrete object or subject<sup>20</sup>. If the infant experiences the mother less as an ideational

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breast, and focus on her face. Indeed, the mother feels comforted by this “glimmer of recognition” as a sign of mutuality that persists in spite of the infant’s tremendous dependence on the mother.

<sup>18</sup> I make use of Bollas’s (1993: 48) definition of mentation as “thought processing, whether organised or disorganised, conscious or unconscious”. In its breadth, it seems to me more accurate precisely because one cannot know with empirical certainty what transpires in the infant’s psyche. It is ultimately a speculative endeavour.

<sup>19</sup> The use of the word ‘internalise’ should not be equated with an outcome of an internal object or intrapsychic object representation in phantasy as the Kleinians would propose. It refers more to the ‘absorption’ (though not in any masterable sense) of the energetics of intersubjective residues of a non-simple present. For Benjamin (1988), the idea of internalisation implies that the other is consumed, incorporated and digested by the self, whereas that which cannot be consumed seems to elude the concept of internalisation or is at best only obliquely apprehended by it. For the purposes of this thesis, if internalisation is to be offered as a proposition, then it must be done so under erasure or with critical qualifications.

<sup>20</sup> As mentioned, Benjamin (2002) proposes that the infant’s response to the mother is of importance even though it has been less emphasised in the literature on development. She suggests that the infant’s devotion to the mother’s milk or acceptance of her soothing ministrations functions as a form of

object-representation and more as an existential experience of being, then it seems to me that one has to take into consideration that the infant will absorb certain rhythms or energies that are not necessarily attached to the mother as a discrete object-entity but instead are a metonymic extension of his/her relationship with the mother. The affirmation of an ex-sistential knowingness diffuses the sense of a specificity of a discrete object and pushes towards the very threshold of bounded relationality in that the infant internalises the “mobility of relations between” (Irigaray, 1992: 90), which are not attached to a specific object but rather to an excessive co-creation *between*, where energy circulates and a third space remains incessant yet furtive in relation to categories of apprehension. This type of description of the mother-infant dynamic seems to come closer to Kristeva’s ideas on a maternally connoted space – a maternal space which is fluid and heterogeneous, a maternal which designates a relational continuity *between* rather than a sense of something finite; a maternal which alludes to an other *jouissance* which precedes desire (of the symbolic) and the subject/object dichotomy that this desire presupposes.

In developing the notion of the third aesthetic, I have encountered the difficulty of attempting to write about a residual third spatio-temporal impossible possibility that obliquely ‘mediates’ (placed in inverted commas for it is not something that is authoritative) the interaction between the mother and the infant. At this juncture, one may possibly be entering into the domain of psychoanalysis’s most radical propositions where it is forced into the extremity of consequence because, as Jacqueline Rose (2003: 156) suggests, it may intimate that “subjects pass through each other like spirits in the night, more intimate, closer than any other form of contact could hope to be”. This citation from Rose seems to be substantiated by psychoanalytic concepts such as reverie which involves a “psychological source of supply of the infant’s needs for love and understanding” (Bion, 1962: 36) whereby

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mutuality and an affirmation of the mother’s agency. The infant’s responsiveness, however, cannot always necessarily be equated with reciprocity and one should take into consideration the asymmetry of the mother-infant relationship at times. Indeed, Frosh and Baraitser (2003: 786), in an article exploring recognition, responsibility and reciprocity *inter alia*, suggest that “reciprocity may ensue from the recognition given to the infant, but that is neither predictable nor necessary (and it seems likely that love of the child for the parent will be much more ambivalent than the other way around). Winnicott, for one, realises this, with his emphasis on how the infant uses the mother, the importance, for example, of her willingness to submit herself to the infant’s aggression, and her capacity to survive”.

the mother acts as a “container” for the infant’s experiences through modification of the infant’s sensations. Here we come close to a type of telepathic bonding where, as Freud (2001: 39) proposes, “processes in one person – ideas, emotional states, conative impulses – can be transferred to another person through empty space without employing the familiar methods of communication by means of words and signs”<sup>21</sup>. The dialogue between the mother and the infant thus takes place not only in and through language as we understand it as symbolic beings, but also through psychosoma rhythms where the mother responds with a sense of otherness in self, offering herself up as a “mobile receptacle” which fashions itself on the infant’s invocation and “follows its winding course” (Kristeva, 1980: 282).

I am alluding to liminal energetic spaces and dynamics which mediate intra and intersubjectivity by transforming discreteness into the proliferation of relationality and the *infinitely between*. I think that Rose (2003: 154-155) is particularly sensitive to the ramifications of this liminal relationality, a space which “dissolves all identity, wrests from us any certainty of being, turns us into shadows, spirits, ghosts”. In a sharp critique of object-relations theory, its staid or reactionary recuperation of a potentially radical stance, she suggests:

If object-relations theory, in its Winnicottian form, has taken upon itself to enter the space where Freud did not dare to tread, this particular form of danger – that there might be a world without boundaries where all founding distinctions are lost – seems, for the most part, to have been ignored (rerepressed one might say). Indeed, you could argue that the emphasis on the adequacy and inadequacy of the mother – what she can and should do – has served to make safe or occlude this space: not the space of a necessary lack-in-being in Lacanian terms, but the opposite, a space too full, a space that will become our dream of the mother, but which is in fact a space with no single origin, and for which no one is accountable, where the divisions inside my own mind, and between me and the other, are unclear.

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<sup>21</sup> For a very playful and astute analysis of the aporias of telepathy and psychoanalysis’s attempt to keep it at bay in attempting to promote itself as a scientific discipline, the reader is referred to Derrida’s (1988b) essay entitled “Telepathy”.

While the third aesthetic may at times allude to this too full space, a fullness which “derives from an indwelling of otherness” (Sprengher, 1990: 238) given the unique set-up or properties of the mother-infant engagement (the possibility for ‘magical’ connection, for something, as cited above from Rose, “closer than any other form of contact could hope to be”), the generation of the third aesthetic should not be confused or equated with the “terrifying consolation” of what Derrida (1988b: 36) terms “complete presence (*la toute presence*)” or “fusional immediacy”. Instead, it may gesture towards transient moments of approximated presence, qualified presence (given the limitations of symbolic subjugation, and the movements of *différance*), where the infant and the mother remain ensorcelled within the throes, the rhythms, of the pre-symbolic – as if suspended momentarily from the oppressive structures of the symbolic<sup>22</sup>. The third aesthetic is not not present, its just that it is rather not simply present (or absent, which would present itself in the ontology of a binary with the possibility for metaphysical revelation). Where the third aesthetic is concerned, presence presents itself as a chimera so that, irreducibly, “something promises itself as it escapes, gives itself as it moves away, and strictly speaking it cannot even be called presence”. The third aesthetic is *almost* inconceivable (Derrida, 1976: 154). The notion of absolute plenitude or presence in-itself, an all-encompassing “presence of the present” (Derrida, 1976: 309), an originary, essential, living present of presence, remains a logocentric myth that belies the sense of a divisive symbolic reality and the heterogeneity of experience that cannot be captured absolutely. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida (1976: 166) suggests how the phenomena of the myth of consciousness, the suppression of *différance* and the reduction of the opacity of the signifier, all lie at the origin of what is called presence. “That which is not subjected to the process of *différance* is *present*”. The present deludes one into believing that

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<sup>22</sup> As one possible example of how the mother-infant relationship evokes echoes of the mother’s own pre-symbolic language constellations, Kristeva (1980: 278; 136) suggests how infantality may be mobilised in the mother in response to her child: “...the adult, through her still infantile sexuality, is able to perceive in the discourse of the child (boy or girl) while it refers her to that level where her ‘own’ language is never totally rationalised or normated according to Cartesian linguistics, but where it always remains an ‘infantile language’”. This infantile language refers to the what remains from infancy in the language of the adult – the rhythm and musicality of language, the physical pleasure of producing vowels and consonants, rhyme and repetition, “syntactic liberties or lexical variations”, a “wondering or fuzziness” of language. What the mother identifies in her infant’s babbling is a sense of otherness within her – where her language can never be totally rationalised: “The child therefore becomes the real from which we begin our analysis.....of our language’s *infantile* attributes”. As de Nooy (1998: 13) writes: “The alterity of the infant remains unapproachable but can provoke an echo in the mother, causing a vibration in that tenuous thread that links the subject to the unknowable regions of her being – regression”. In short, the mother-infant engagement has the capacity to render a sense of otherness that has never ceased to haunt the mother’s language.

one is able to think time or space without *différance*. The present, however, is indelibly fissured by *différance*. As a consequence, there is always already infinite deferral and remains from the possibility of a pure, whole or utopian essence and simplicity of present ideality – an unceasing, full synthesis, a pure actuality of the now<sup>23</sup>. From another perspective, Milan Kundera (1995: 128-129) considers how “the present – the concreteness of the present – as a phenomenon to consider, as a *structure*, is for us an unknown planet; so we can neither hold on to it in our memory nor reconstruct it through imagination. We die without knowing what we have lived”. He further suggests how the “acousticovisual concreteness” of a present situation in all its continuity is transformed by the abstractions of our mind, our memory, so that reality can only be known in the past tense and not as it *is* – “The present moment is unlike the memory of it. Remembering is not the negative of forgetting. Remembering is a form of forgetting”. It is important to emphasise that the third aesthetic should not be viewed as a derivative of what Frosh (2002: 121) has identified as a “pasture of oneness” – the creation of a “transpersonal space without separations, a relational space of communication and contact, in which the boundaries of each self fade and a wholeness of contact with others is made possible”. This type of oceanic synthesis would neutralise the dissemination and *différance* that invariably accompanies the movement of the generation of the third aesthetic which requires the interplay of two individuals and the transpiration of infinite possibilities as opposed to a unified non-heterogeneous whole which would render between-ness redundant<sup>24</sup>. The *infinitely between* does not “lead to a fusion in which one or the other disappears, but to a mutual crossing of boundaries which is creative, and yet where identity is not swallowed up” (Whitford, 1991: 167).

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<sup>23</sup> Rather shrewdly, Derrida (2003: 8-9) confesses elsewhere (exploring the nexus of writing and desire) that the very presence that he opposes in his texts is “exactly what I’m after in life”. This however does not signify that he does not believe in what he writes. Instead, he tries to understand a certain “Necessity” (which he writes with a capital N) which compels him to deconstruct and write that there is an interruption and so forth. It is precisely because there is this Necessity that there is a desire for pure presence. Derrida attempts to articulate this Necessity which compels and urges him to write, and “this articulation means that it’s because there is no pure presence that I desire it”.

<sup>24</sup> In considering the ethics of intersubjectivity, Irigaray (2000) insists on the necessity “to be two” because is only the non-possessiveness of two-ness that leads to a respect for alterity and difference. This notion will be explicated further in Chapter 5.

## The Turn of Between-ness

While I have suggested that the third aesthetic is generated or co-created *in-between* the mother-infant engagement, this sense of co-creation and in-between-ness is differentiated from one particular entity through *spacing*, “the becoming-space of time” which in turn leads to deferral through *temporisation*, “the becoming-time of space” (Derrida, 1982: 8). While the mother and infant are responsible for generating the space of the third aesthetic [which however does not belong to either as it is “located elsewhere, distant, permissive, always already past” (Kristeva, 1980: 286)], there is simultaneously an irreducible mystery which encompasses this space in that the essence of kinesis, rhythm, motion, sound, gesture, vocality, tactility and so on, frequently elude the mastery of symbolic understanding. It is as if there is an empirical setting of the mother and the infant, as well as the phantasm of a fictional third space between them – an actuality and a spectral virtuality of a scene. The third aesthetic remains exterior to knowledge, cognition, construction and possession, and it resists “conformity, resemblance, or adequation between a presence and a representation”. As a result, the presence of the third aesthetic “is no longer a mother-form around which are gathered and differentiated the future (present) and the past (present)” (Derrida, 1981: 210). The entire possibility of the third aesthetic as a cognitively knowable, conspicuously present experience that can be excavated, uncovered or recuperated (through the psychoanalytic endeavour perhaps), and which determines subsequent significant past and future positions, is rendered problematical because the way in which it inscribes the possibility for future meaning-making endeavours prevents the establishment of causality – a casual link between the third aesthetic and a subsequent meaning-content configuration. I am suggesting that the nature of the presentation of the third aesthetic, its frequent passage through pre-verbal patterns of being, complexifies the establishment of aetiological or originary causation – a lost experience/origin, a single, simple founding moment that can be excavated for the purposes of casual connections. It is important to stress that the third aesthetic (in the form of what I have termed the ‘O-Function’, which will be explored in the next chapter) provides a frame, a matrix (as an oblique anteriority), but not content, for meaning-making possibilities. The third aesthetic cannot be conceptualised as a central present/presence of which the past and future would be but modifications. It cannot be wholly translated, modified or recuperated as a



conscious narrative (that was once unconscious) or as a subsequent determinant of future ontological meaning-content.

What is crucial to the fabric of the third aesthetic, the “inside of its proper interiority” (Derrida, 1981b: 94), is inscribed within one without memory that is susceptible to linguistic representation and codification. It is as if a certain element is lost from the archaic mother-infant relationship, yet some nebulous, esoteric trace remains (in the form of the O-Function). The idea of a reference would be misleading in that the third aesthetic refutes the idea of space-becoming-place whereby there is some subsequent point available for easy reference as object or referent. The lost element of the mother-infant bond is the thing out of which flows the undecidable, the virtual, for it is as if it can only be rendered in the pre-symbolic realm (as a mobile, rhythmic, energetic process, and as such it is not an object if by object one refers to a prescriptive enclosure, a closed, knowable, definable entity<sup>25</sup>). The third aesthetic partakes of the in-between-ness, the spacing between, where the *between* encompasses the scope of its movement. With all the undecidability of its meaning, the third aesthetic, like Derrida’s hymen, “only takes place when it doesn’t take place, when nothing *really* happens”. Nothing can *really* happen in the sense of cognitive-linguistic processing as a result of the in-between-ness, the no-thingness, the irreducibility and mystery of its function. And it is precisely this irreducibility, as Irigaray (2000: 69) suggests, that ensures the alchemy of between-ness, and “opens an abyss in consciousness, in knowledge, in truth”. The third aesthetic never presents itself in a codified, symbolic form. “It never *is* – in the present - ; it has no proper, literal meaning; it no longer originates in meaning as such, that is, as the meaning of being” (Derrida, 1981: 229), yet it inaugurates some possibility for potentially creating meaning. While it does not partake of meaning (resisting any possibility of ontologisation), it ‘facilitates’ the possibility of being able to create meaning at a later stage of life. It is indeed “a mark without a mark (margin)”, re-marking itself indelibly as disappearance, erasure and non-sense (Derrida, 1981: 212-213). It is a memory that does not evoke remembrance, a dismembered memory, an act that does not take place, a threshold that can never be surmounted. It is always “at the edge of

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<sup>25</sup> If there is an element of transcendence, of the beyond, between two individuals, then the gap should be sufficient to sustain the dynamic. “Why should an object between us be necessary?”, enquires Irigaray (2000:16).

being” infinitesimally inconsistent, undecidable – next-to-nothing (Derrida, 1981: 215).

## Rhythm

One of the major difficulties in capturing or codifying the ethos of the third aesthetic is as a result of its rhythmic properties. Indeed, the third aesthetic is a function of rhythm, marked by a rhythmic *différance*. For Lacoue-Labarthe (1998: 139-140), the question of rhythm marks the frontier of “that properly placeless and undefined domain of all one ‘knows’” – furtive presentiments, imprecise formulations, vague intuitions and so on. He cites two declarations on rhythm. The first is from Hölderlin: “All is rhythm (rhythmus); the entire destiny of man is one celestial rhythm”. The second comes from Mallarmé’s *La musique et les lettres* where he states, in the turn of a phrase; “.....because every soul is a rhythmic knot”. Such statements are in a way an emblematic formula of the enigmatic horizon of the problematic. Indeed, the question of rhythm alludes to what is ‘infra-theoretical’ which in turn goes back from Narcissus/reflection to echo, from the optical/verbal/specular to reverberation or resonance<sup>26</sup>. Rhythm evades any deciphering or decoding and does not fall under the jurisdiction of any metaphysical binary. It speaks a foreign, esoteric language – a language of inarticulated sounds, eyes and gestures. It remains prior to the figure or visible schema. It “throws off (scopic) perception, and *estranges*, defamiliarises, disturbs the familiar, the visible, the phenomenal” (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998: 194). It remains an “unspoken, connivance of the inexpressible, of a wink, a tone of voice, a gesture, a tinge, a scent”, and takes “refuge in tones to recover an underwater, trans-verbal communication between bodies” (Kristeva, 1986: 182). What is missing in rhythm is categorisation, schematisation, what is missing is the possibility to institute a cleavage between the recognisable and non-recognisable, the familiar and the uncanny, the real and the fantastic, the mimetic and non-mimetic, the visible and the audible, the temporal and the spatial – life and fiction. Benveniste (1971: 285-286) suggests how rhythm defies any fixed or stable form that may posit itself as an object, an imago, a figure or Gestalt. Instead, rhythm designates a form that is instantaneously assumed and constituted by mobility and fluidity. It is a form without

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<sup>26</sup> As Valéry (cited in Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998: 139) states: “It must be confessed that the self is nothing but an echo”.

any organic consistency, “improvised, momentary, changeable”. The phenomenon of rhythm is ultimately untheorisable. At the very frontier of the theoretical domain, it eludes any grasp because the very question of rhythm alludes to what the composer Gustav Mahler (cited in Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998: 196) once stated: “I don’t compose; I am composed”. As a consequence, one is “rhythmed” (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998: 202) so that rhythm no longer comes to one as a predicate. Rhythm is the pulsation or repetition marked by a caesura or gap which does not possess the “dialectical cadence” (Derrida, 1998b: 42) of a relation between rhythm and non-rhythm, the continuous and discontinuous and so on. It thus interrupts alternation, “the constraint of *opposition* in general” (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998: 212), any binarity or neat dichotomy. Rhythm alludes to the empty moment, the absence of a single, defining, pivotal moment in time. The maternal–infant encounter contains a number of cumulative experiences of gestures of sameness or *repetitive* sequences. These repetitive sequences or features are however marked or contained by the *différance* of rhythm, and as such, sameness emerges as otherness. The otherness of rhythm always already implies that which is “at the very edge of what of the subject can appear, manifest, or figure itself – the type and the stamp or impression, the pre-inscription which, conforming us in advance, determines us by disappropriating us and makes us inaccessible to ourselves” (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998: 202).

To be constituted by the signature of rhythm is, as Derrida (1998b: 31) suggests, to be “(de)constituted by the marks of this ‘caesuraed’ stamp”. Rhythm functions as the very condition of possibility for the subject, existing “before” – before any specular reflexivity, before any image. The motif of rhythm opens up a new problematic of the subject (of what prescribes or preinscribes it, of what divides it) whereby the metaphysics of subjectivity, that is to say the subject as determined by notions of consciousness, representation and optical or discursive subjectivity, is qualified by a psychoanalytic dimension with its emphasis on the workings and process of the unconscious. But simultaneously, the motif of rhythm renders it plausible to deconstruct, in a certain philosophy of psychoanalysis prevalent in the theories of Freud and Lacan, the hegemony of the visual, of the image and of the specular<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> It is perhaps Freud’s emphasis on castration anxiety [As Derrida (1998b: 35) writes: “Freud orders all interpretation around the articulation of discourse and figuration (*Darstellbarkeit*, figurability), a semiotics of verbal signifiers and visual forms”]; and Lacan’s mirror stage (which is concerned with

Rhythm belongs neither to the audible nor the visible [it is “silent movement” in time-space (Derrida, 2000: 37)], neither to specular figuration nor to verbal representation, though it structures them *insensibly*. The very structuration of what Derrida (1998: 33) has termed “rhythmo-typy, rhythmotypical or typorhythmic”, which remains outside the order of the sensible, opens up the *very possibility of an intelligible sense or meaning* even though it ironically does not belong to this possibility of meaning. As Bowie (1991: 194) rather usefully puts it: “...that which is excluded from sense-making is that which makes sense hang together”. Rhythm is ultimately an experience that cannot be theorised. It is a theoretical failure that undergoes repression, but it exerts a pressure in the form of a compression, a compulsion marked or scanned by traces which signal “that rhythmotypical compulsion constitutes (we should translate: de-constitutes), desists the ‘subject’ in the knot that lies at its core, in its ‘soul’, in its ineluctable destiny – any name you wish for the dis-location of this destinal site”.

### **Meditation on *Athetic* Retreats**

Any attempts at the elaboration (or perhaps more realistically adumbration) of a potential space, in this instance the third aesthetic, *another* spatio-temporal possibility, may fall prey to what Kristeva has addressed in her critique of *différance* (cited in the previous chapter). Kristeva (1984b) is primarily concerned with dynamising structure through an exploration of the speaking subject and his/her unconscious experience in relation to the pressures of social structures. This issue takes precedence over the deconstruction of phenomenological experience through an exposure and unravelling of its metaphysical attributes and an assertion of its infinite alterity<sup>28</sup>. Kristeva deals with the revolutionary potential of the negativity or heterogeneity of the drives which disrupts and ruptures subjective, linguistic and social experience. This semiosis however must be mediated by the symbolic in order to prevent madness or annihilation through *jouissance*<sup>29</sup>. Kristeva is interested in how

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the theory of fictional figurality whereby there is an inscription in the ontology of the figure, a figural and fictional ontology, that emphasises the gaze and the specular) that best exemplify this notion.

<sup>28</sup> The politics of this type of positionality refer directly to the divisions in the French intellectual movement of *Tel Quel* (and subsequently where Kristeva begins to dissociate her work from Derrida’s). For further reading on this issue, the reader is referred to de Nooy (1998), Kristeva (1984b), and Derrida (1981b).

<sup>29</sup> As a meta-critique, for we might as well proliferate the *différance* of critique, the infinite possibility for the manifestation and deferral of potential critical-interpretive possibilities, the reader is referred to critics like Butler (1993) who takes Kristeva to task precisely on this issue. Briefly, Butler argues that

semiosis invades as opposed to evades the symbolic. It is for this reason that she regards Winnicott's potential space (and a critique that applies equally well to the third aesthetic) as a "libido without drive, therefore without object, goal, or time – all of which remain specific attributes of the adult speaker's libido; the desiring machines of schizophrenics without signifiers" (Kristeva, 1980: 277). Here Kristeva notes (as mentioned earlier in this chapter) the projection of mythic error onto the supposed place of the pre-symbolic (something that remains inevitable in addressing the pre-symbolic through language/discourse), a fantastical projection of the adult speaker's libido yearning for a quixotic regression into *asymbolia*. For Kristeva (1980: 281), "meaning's closure can never be challenged by another *space*, but only by a different way of *speaking*: another enunciation, another 'literature'". This quote highlights Kristeva's orientation which refers to the *practice* of shattering the limits of the speaking subject. She attempts to "delineate the history of spaces (we practice epistemology)" through the exploration of what is not yet spoken within the speaker, or what may remain indelibly unsaid and unnameable within the gaps of speech, as opposed to attempting to investigate the 'origins' of human forming. She postulates an "infantile language" which "seems to be located at the ambiguous point where psychoanalysis opens up the limits of phenomenological meaning by indicating its conditions of production". Kristeva's materialist perspective ensures that the engagement with gaps, spaces, absences and so on, will function as an explosive *challenge* to the symbolic order, where *challenge* not only functions as the operative position but also ensures the disruption of any hermetic meaning. In the end, however, this is Kristeva's version (or as Butler would argue *père*-version) or approach and that does not necessarily preclude other possible epistemological approaches to spatiality and its permutations, even if they do not directly contest symbolic hegemony. Kristeva's theory offers up another interpretive alternative to be

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in the course of postulating that the semiotic contests universality, Kristeva makes theoretical moves which end up consolidating the power of the symbolic and paternal authority. Her theory depends on the stability and reproduction of the paternal law she seeks to displace. Even if the semiotic promotes the possibility for subversion, displacement or disruption, the symbolic always reasserts its hegemony. For Butler, Kristeva offers a strategy of subversion that can never be a sustained political practice. The notion that a sustained presence of the libidinal source of subversion is impossible (since it leads to psychosis) is viewed as problematic because it alternately posits and denies the semiotic as an emancipatory ideal or a language that can be consistently maintained. As Rose (1993b: 43) succinctly claims: "...if Kristeva concentrates on the signs of that fragility (troubles of phonological, syntactic and enunciating laws), she can only do so in terms of the order of language against which they break. The semiotic can never wholly displace the symbolic since it relies on that very order to give it its albeit resistant, shape". See also Felski (1989)

considered and incorporated in the exchange and dialogue of ideas, though I think, as Kristeva (1984b) identifies in “My Memories Hyperbole”, it seems to function as a prioritisation of interest and theoretical/ideological commitment (the dynamical structure of the subject or the more esoteric investigation into human forming) which in turn possesses implications for the epistemological bent, though the two possibilities are certainly not mutually exclusive. An exploration of the third aesthetic does not preclude, exclude or nullify Kristeva’s ideas on corporeal rupture. Instead, the third aesthetic focuses on another sphere or avenue, an *other* possibility. It should be stressed that the third aesthetic is not a commentary on the subject’s social practice. It cannot be recuperated as the symbolic’s revolutionary nemesis/potential/underside, and as such it is not directly concerned with how the pre-symbolic can create ruptures in the symbolic, its intrusions into and implosions of symbolic subjectivity. It indeed retreats before the thetic function, refuting anchorage or definition within symbolic enclosures. As a result, Kristeva’s exploration of the subversive and transgressive immediacy of corporeal pulsions gives way to other considerations more in line with Winnicott’s (1991: 101) “body *experiences*” (as referred to above and in extension of mere reductive body functioning) - experiences that proliferate an alchemy of between-ness. When considering the drives and the third aesthetic, the former remain important mainly insofar as they facilitate scenarios of holding, soothing and so forth, which in turn creates the ex-sistence of liminal intersubjective residues, residues of “the motility of anaclitic facilitations” (Kristeva, 1980: 284), which fuel the energetic movement of the third aesthetic. This notion takes into account the *différance* of the drives whereby *another* dimension is explored in the inter/intraplay of psyche-soma, and as such the third aesthetic focuses on other (virtual) possibilities that may be archived, though of course this does not exclude Kristeva’s theorisations on corporeal revolt, it just shifts the focus to an *other* scene or an other of an other scene.....

### **Circumfessions**

In writing about the third aesthetic, I am confronted by a similar desire (or possibly the dictates of thetic insistence, the edict of the academy) that Derrida (1993b) experiences during the writing up of his autobiographical essay “Circumfession” – the desire to confess something in excess of the symbolic system, to confess what

cannot be confessed, and hence the ensuing and invariable failure. As Derrida (1993b: 3-7) rather playfully conveys:

.....the other one, the one that has always been running after me, turning in circles around me, a circumference licking me with a flame and that I try in turn to circumvent, having never loved anything but the impossible.....from this dream in me, since always, of another language, an entirely crude language, of a half-fluid name too, there, like blood, and I hear them snigger, poor old man, doesn't look likely, not going to happen tomorrow.....<sup>30</sup>

Derrida responds to “scarcely a sentence” that emerges from “further away than (he) could ever say” – “*find the vein*” – the point where a syringe establishes “an invisible passage, always invisible, for the continuous flowing of blood, absolute, absolved in the sense that nothing seemed to come between the source and the mouth, the quite complicated apparatus of the syringe being introduced in that place only to allow the passage and to disappear as instrument”. Derrida (1993:10-12) dreams of a “pen that would be a syringe”, a suction point that would filter the inscribable and bypass all toil and violence to the “invisible inside (that) gives itself up, and you can do as you like with it”. However what one is confronted with is a certain castration which marks the economy of the proper, the limit as *circumcision*, which screens off access to a “region that is no longer that of an example”, and thwarts and cuts off “a supposedly

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<sup>30</sup> This particular citation from Derrida may strike the reader as being whimsical, romantic, sentimental, hyperbolically coy or tantalisingly playful. However, I have made use of it as I think that it highlights the imaginary or poetic overflow within philosophy-theory, the need at times to resort to the metaphoric, to the imaginary in philosophy, in order to adumbrate in some way a bind or impasse within the theoretico-conceptual system that remains to be conveyed. I also think that it is important to interrogate the discourses that would render this type of citation as sentimental naïveté. Reflecting on the historical significance of the publication of Roland Barthes's text, *A Lover's Discourse*, Kristeva (2002: 116), for example, suggests how it attempted a “soft rehabilitation of an amorous sensibility” to counteract the “robotic banalisation” of society, and in doing so it challenged a “pervasive puritanism” within the media and academia. As Barthes (2002: 177) writes: “Historical reversal: it is no longer the sexual which is indecent, it is the *sentimental* - censured in the name of what is in fact only *another morality*”. Kristeva (2002: 116-117) explains this quote from Barthes by proposing that sexuality, which was once condemned as radical and taboo, is now viewed as being very much in vogue – “sexuality is modern; it does not scandalise, it is not obscene, it has its journals, its sects, its workers”. Indeed, sexuality (at least in its more dogmatic version where everything forms part of a polysexuality or is but a sublimation of the sexual impulse) may form part of a “new clergy” which “constitutes a facet of a binary code, binary thus reductive and policelike, that contrasts an obvious self-righteousness with a no less obvious morality, because it is repressive-prescriptive-cocoonlike, and so forth”. In this way, the discourse on sexuality may thus morph into the very function of the discourses that once marginalised it, and in doing so it judges, relegates and ultimately disavows all that may fall under the umbrella term of the ‘sentimental’ or the ‘esoteric’ or the ‘romantic’.

idiomatic, unbroachable, unreadable, uncircumcised piece of writing” (Derrida, 1993b: 71; 194). Ultimately, as Oliver (1997) suggests, the text functions as a mark of circumcision, the skin cut from the body, the skin-tissue without blood. Any text remains circumscribed by the inevitability of circumcision. This notion resonates with the eloquent plea of one of J.M. Coetzee’s (1990: 125) protagonists in *The Age of Iron*, where she considers her narrative as “grow(ing) more abstract, more abstracted, the kind of letter one writes from the stars, from the farther void, disembodied, crystalline, bloodless”. Nevertheless, we continue to yearn for the recuperation of the blood shed in symbolic ritual, the warm blood of the living body that exceeds any writing – “what mixes prayers and tears with blood” (Derrida 1993b: 20) <sup>31</sup>. As Kristeva (1986: 162) writes: “Words that are always too distant, too abstract for this underground swarming of seconds, folding in unimaginable spaces. Writing them down is an ordeal of discourse, like love.....Flash on the unnameable, weavings of abstractions to be torn. Let a body venture at last out of its shelter, take chance with meaning under a veil of words. WORD FLESH”. The lost body (*corps perdu*) is the very passion of writing; it is what fuels the very process of writing which simultaneously loses the body. When writing touches the body, it simultaneously loses the sense of touching. When writing traces the body, it effaces it. This body however is not lost to some simple or concrete exteriority but instead it is “lost for all manners of metaphysical presence”. The body inscribes its presence beyond metaphysical presence. Its ‘presence’ is the “presence of the unavoidable withdrawal of writing, where it can be nothing but its own ellipsis, here or there, out of there” (Nancy, 2002: 32-33).

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<sup>31</sup> Prayers and tears, as Caputo (1997: 73) writes, are a “passion for the beyond, *au-delà*, the *tout autre*, the impossible, the unimaginable, un-foreseeable, un-believable absolute surprise, which is ab-solved from the same”.



#### 4. THE O-FUNCTION

Touched by lights, by sounds, by forms and colours, I try to preserve this gift, without appropriating it. I receive it as a guide for my becoming, an aid for advancing along my journey.

Luce Irigaray (2000: 61)

.....previous to everything that happened afterward. This is what I mean when I say I would like to swim against the stream of time: I would like to erase the consequences of certain events and restore an initial condition. But every moment of my life brings with it an accumulation of new facts, and each of these new facts brings with it its consequences; so the more I seek to return to the zero moment from which I set out, the further I move away from it.

Italo Calvino (1998: 15)

It is the very idea of a *first time* which becomes enigmatic.

Jacques Derrida (1978: 202)

...but it is a book remote in time, which barely surfaces from my memories. There is a story that for me comes before all other stories and of which all the stories I read seem to carry an echo, immediately lost.

In my readings I do nothing but seek that book read in my childhood, but what I remember of it is too little to enable me to find it again.

Italo Calvino (1998: 256)

To tell the truth he will never have had any relationship with it, even though, in secret, in an immemorial time, a past which was never present, he will, presumptively, have engendered that family.

Jacques Derrida (1987c: 188)

#### Essentially Otherwise or Recapitulation as *Glissement*

The previous chapter explored the way in which the mother-infant dynamic has the capacity to generate a pattern or aesthetic of a 'third' (time-)space which exists *infinitely between* two subjectivities (in the interval), positioned in a kinetic, rhythmic flow of energies and dissociated from any one specific, distinct entity. This spatio-temporal otherness, which I have termed the "third aesthetic", signals an alterity, an excess, which problematises its containment within representation. Indeed, the third aesthetic, with its disseminative energies, subverts the possibility for neat triadic closure through the mediation of a third term that would subordinate alterity to a symbolised, monolithic system. It is this dissemination of mediation that proliferates an excess of otherness with respect to any totality or absolute knowingness and closure. The third aesthetic preserves otherness by escaping symbolic, ontological and linguistic closure. Such alterity however should not be conceived as constituting "a pre-linguistic, self-evident identity that should be recovered through a more faithful representation" (Ziarek, 1993: 65-66). Instead, it signals itself within the totality of

experience only as a trace. It is through the space of the third aesthetic that what I have termed the “O-Function” is inaugurated in the infant’s unconscious. The O-Function is a trace of the movement of the third aesthetic, which inaugurates the possibility or potentiality for future meaning-making endeavours. Through the notion of the O-Function, and particularly its feature or process as trace, this chapter will explore what remains - the residues or remnants (*restance*) that the third aesthetic leaves because it does not lend itself to any recuperative gesture, but rather scripts itself as an imprint, an etching – “a lithography before words” (Derrida, 1978: 207).

### **The Algebraics of O**

The concept of the O-Function was inspired by Bion's musings on O, the ultimate yet ultimately inaccessible reality, a reality that is unknown, an originally, essentially unknowable reality. Bion (1970: 26) defines O as the following; “I shall use the sign O to denote that which is the ultimate reality represented by terms such as ultimate reality, absolute truth, the godhead, the infinite, the thing-in-itself” (Bion, 1970: 26). There is an ultimate reality which cannot be known but can only be ‘become’, that is, it is possible to be at one with it. We cannot know O itself but only emanations from it. What we know of O are transformations of it. O can only be known about (Symington and Symington, 1996). To contextualise O within the psychoanalytic clinical domain, as an example, O would signify the function of an ultimate reality of which everything else is but a factor or derivative. The analytic experience cannot be known in its essence (O), but only in what manifests or transpires as a derivative of this essence. Similarly, mathematical transformations – graphs, formulae, geometrical drawings – are not ‘things-in-themselves’, but rather transformations of the O of mathematics. Grotstein (2000:1) proposes that O “designates an ineffable, inscrutable, and constantly evolving domain that intimates an aesthetic completeness and coherence”. It is attainable only through the relinquishment of memory, desire, and cognition, fostering primordial chaos and fragmentation, yet paradoxically exquisite, primal harmony and serenity depending on the capacity to be ‘at-one’ with it. It is an ineffable matrix, “the container beyond the container of our existence” (Grotstein, 2000:2). O cannot be known, loved or hated; it is not “a relationship or an identification or an atonement or a reunion” (Bion, 1965: 140). In O, the thinker is not necessary. It shatters all totalities and transcends any essential act of knowing through

thinking. Moreover, it promotes what Keats (cited in Bion, 1970: 125) regards as “negative capability” - that which emerges as the capacity to hold and contain the process of uncertainty, mystery and doubt without any “irritable reaching after fact and reason”. Bion (1965: 151) cites a verse from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, which conveys the ethos of O:

“The rising world of waters dark and deep  
Won from the void and formless infinite”

What I would like to emphasise for this project, is the notion of O signifying an alternate reality, an unthought known. Its divergence from Bion is predicated on the idea that one is able to be ‘at-one’ with O, or in this instance, the third aesthetic. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the notion of being ‘at-one’ with a particular phenomenon would intimate the fullness of presence, which this thesis problematises. Instead, one is able to gesture towards presence, but not merge completely with the absoluteness of a moment because this latter configuration would negate the reality of presence as infused with traces of *différance*. This notion will be further explicated in this chapter. The concept (as non-concept) of the “O-Function” is employed, following the Bionian (1962: 2-3) tradition, whereby there is an attempt to utilise concepts “intentionally devoid of meaning” so that they may not be restricted by a “penumbra of associations”. Bion frequently conceptualizes in terms of mathematical variables, such as the “alpha-function”, “beta-elements” and so on [which Symington and Symington (1996) consider to be hypothetical entities or abstractions], so that he is able to work towards the elaboration of concepts “without being restricted” by the utilisation of a “more meaningful term”. For Bion, there is an “implicit freedom” in the usage of mathematical forms because they confer a flexibility whereby the concept is able to accrue value during the process of exploration, as opposed to any type of premature assignation of meaning. The use of mathematisation is also an attempt to mitigate the assignation of position, the “violent apposition(s)” (Cixous, 1997: 75) of naming which congeals the suppleness and fluidity of the phenomenon-in-description-through-conceptualisation. Algebraic/mathematical figures are names-without-naming, “names that are not quite ‘for real’” (Calle-Gruber, 1997: 76), which signal a spectrum of

possibilities, scenarios and movements<sup>1</sup>. In addition, there is a resistance in Bion's work towards the rendering of concepts as concrete because the concepts function as imperfect representations of an essentially unknowable reality. At the heart of all such concepts that psychoanalysis has the tendency to concretise (ego, unconscious, instinct and so forth) lies "a central abstraction unknown" (Bion, 1963: 51), which according to Symington and Symington (1996), fosters a mystery of which all conceptualisations are but inadequate representations. For Lacan (1977: 313-314), the use of mathematical letters or *mathemes* refutes the idea of psychoanalysis as a static body of knowledge. These mathemes are not "transcendent signifiers", but rather "indices of an absolute signification" designed to "allow a hundred and one different readings, a multiplicity that is admissible as long as the spoken remains caught in its algebra". Moreover, as Verhaeghe (2002) suggests, the letter does not designate an assemblage but instead *constitutes* one whereby the formalisation of mathematical letters may allude to what "invisibly holds (*retient*) bodies" (Lacan, 1998b: 93; 131). In short, Lacan proposes that "mathematisation alone reaches the real.....a real that has nothing to do with what traditional knowledge has served as a basis for".

## The Trace

The O-Function may perhaps, under-erasure, be considered as a receptacle, container, repository or matrix which inaugurates the possibility or potential for future meaning-making endeavours<sup>2</sup>. I will however focus on its significance as a trace. Spivak (1976) suggests how the trace is the mark of an absence or non-presence (not not present) of presence, where its 'structure' is always already inhabited by the track of something other. At the moment that stimulus is received, it goes either into the perceptual system or into the unconscious and in turn produces traces. These traces, however, may only be energised into consciousness long afterward – *nachträglich*, *après coup* - or they may never infiltrate consciousness as knowing entities. Derrida

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, Cixous (1997: 77) suggests that there is "a mathematics" in the scenes of our existence, and more specifically the scenes of intersubjectivity (The scenario, for example, of "I see you, I see you seeing me, I see myself see you seeing me, etc"). Cixous dreams of finding an instrument to "mathematise" this spectacular shuttle of intersubjectivity, and collect this exchange that multiplies itself, this exteriority that encircles us.

<sup>2</sup> 'Matrix' is defined by the Pocket Oxford Dictionary (1978) as a "womb; place in which thing is developed". 'Receptacle' is defined as a "containing vessel, place, or space"; while 'repository' is described as a "receptacle; recipient of secrets".

(1976) argues how the trace itself is primary and that there is no 'thing' in the unconscious. Instead there is the possibility for a particular path to be energised without necessarily knowing the source of this re-animation. Even when the track is opened up and the deferred perception of the trace is presented, the impulse in the unconscious is not exhausted. In his writings on the trace, Derrida takes into account that any experience is poly-dimensional and constituted by a multiplicity of elements. As a result, he is suggesting that one cannot absorb every element in an experience. One cannot experience something in its complete and immanent presence as an expression of immediacy and direct transmission. Accompanying any experience are fragments or traces that may not have been perceived by consciousness. Derrida is proposing that what we experience is not the absolute fullness of an experience (a saturation of what can be experienced and known), but rather derivatives or fragments of this experience filtered through certain of its traces which in turn create lacunae. This is why Derrida suggests that the trace itself is primary because one cannot experience something in its completeness or absolute immediacy, but rather one can only experience aspects or elements of an experience and it is this latter type of experience that constitutes the 'essence' of any experience as a result. In addition, the play of differences in experience prevents the possibility that "a simple element be *present* in and of itself, referring only to itself". All elements of an experience function in relation to other elements which are not simply present. This interweaving results in each element "being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system" so that every element bears the trace of *other* elements which are made of bundles of other traces. The notion of the trace takes into account that there cannot be a pure unmediated instance of oneness between self and experience. Instead, experience is mediated through traces of discontinuity which signal differentiation (a spacing interval between signifier and signified), as well as repetition through the temporization of delay and deferral, which in turn thwarts the possibility for immediacy, an immediate and unmediated transfusion of presence. The interval as spacing is an "index of an irreducible exterior, and at the same time of a *movement*, a displacement that indicates an irreducible alterity". The operation of spacing is articulated otherwise and it refers not only to the space constituted between, but also, as an operation, to the "movement of setting aside". It marks what is set aside from itself and what interrupts self-identity, homogeneity, and "every punctual assemblage of the self" (Derrida, 1981b: 106-107). For example, as de Nooy

(1998) proposes, an infant's crying indicates a mark of a relation of difference and imbalance (a discontinuous continuum) between self and environment so that the cry constitutes a response to the infant's situation and is thus deferred in relation to it. An interval appears so that the sound of crying is not an unpunctuated pure flow of sound, a live transmission of a bodily state (owing to the need to breathe and start again, at a very fundamental level), but rather a response to environmental discontinuity which in turn creates a gap, an interval of deferment, between the pure expression of hunger and a response (through crying) to a feeling of hunger. This interval divides the present in and of itself, yet it has no tangible existence since it functions as a "barely existing limit, exceeded as soon as it is posited" (Derrida, 1986: 220). If the interval transpires, then "what takes place is only the between (*entre*), the place, the spacing, which is nothing" (Derrida, 1981: 214). In short, the infant's cries are not an absolute and unmediated expression of sensation but are rather from the beginning structured by the marks of the trace. Between the expression or response of crying and its initiate, something eludes the infant, and it is here (or perhaps there) where *différance* intervenes. There is only an effect, an illusion of presence. There is no direct, immediate or uncomplicated access to experience. Experience is approached through its traces, through the (always already) becoming-trace of experience which signals that all experience is marked or divided from itself as a discrepancy.

The movement of the trace, where the relationship with otherness is marked, takes into account the multi-faceted quality of reality. As a result, the precise constitution (an absolute, simple origin or point of departure) of the trace of the O-Function in the infant's unconscious (a marking or etching by the movement of the third aesthetic), which was derived from the infinitely between of intersubjective residues, other liminal spatio-temporal possibilities that ex-sist *between*, remains complex. The O-Function is primarily an effect of the traces of the non-verbal intimacy [soothing, holding, playing, gazing, silent movement, touching and so on – "the subtle gamut of sound, touch and visual traces, older than language" (Kristeva, 1986: 177)] weaved by the mother-infant idiom. The trace partakes of the dual logic of necessity and erasure in that it "must make its necessity felt before letting itself be erased", and therefore in its necessity, in its necessary variability and proliferation, it must produce some efficacious impact in spite of its possibility for repeated otherness. The trace is

indeed “contradictory and not acceptable within the logic of identity”, marking the disappearance of origin, although one cannot even claim that the origin disappeared (that is, make claims to an originary nontrace) since origin is never constituted in the first instance “except reciprocally by a nonorigin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin” (Derrida, 1976: 61). Hence, any possibility of ‘origin’ is problematised; there is an impossibility of re-animating absolutely the manifest, empirical evidence of an originary presence – “an originary and unceasing synthesis – a synthesis constantly directed back on itself, gathered in on itself and gathering – of retentional traces and protentional openings” (Derrida, 1982: 21)<sup>3</sup>.

The generation of the third aesthetic necessarily leaves an imprint (an infra-print), a trace (in the ‘form’ of the O-Function) as an indication of a future meditation. The fabric of the trace is constituted by *différance* and therefore it cannot be neatly captured in the ideality of a unifying synthesis. Indeed, the trace may be understood as the transformation in which the horizon of presence gives way to the ‘horizon’ of *différance* (Wood, 1989). It remains an “absolute past” (Derrida, 1976: 66) that cannot be comprehended in the form of a modified presence, though, strictly speaking, the trace does not even merit the name of ‘past’ since the past has always retained an element of the present (the past colouring the present, the present colouring the past) in the metaphysical concept of temporality in general. “The radical past is rendered as the “never-to-be, never having been present (to consciousness as such)” (Harvey, 1986: 172). The idea of the trace remains incompatible with the concept of retention, “of the becoming-past of what has been present” (Derrida, 1982: 21). The trace marks a time that is evasive and unassignable within the presence of the living present, within the form of all metaphysics of presence and the phenomenology of consciousness. It cannot be neatly summed up in the simplicity of a present. It is indelibly inscribed by “the becoming-absent and the becoming-unconscious of the subject”, and registers the enigmatic relationship to the other, of an interiority to an exteriority, of an interiority always already inhabited by the possibility of an outside, an other (Derrida, 1976: 69).

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<sup>3</sup> Here I emphasise that one cannot inaugurate an absolute and single point of departure, and in this way, the notion of ‘origin’ is complexified, though of course, in accordance with Rose’s (1993) suggestion, it is almost implausible not to assign at least the status of a pseudo or quasi-origin to something once it is defined as beyond language, the symbolic, discourse and so forth.

To nominate something as a trace is not to confer upon it a name but rather a pro-name (Llewelyn, 1988). Levinas (1986: 355) suggests that if the trace possesses a signifyingness, then its signifyingness remains “an irremissible disturbance, an utterly bygone past”, where transcendence refuses immanence, where the trace cannot be transformed into something explicit that would mark the revelation of a signified absent and bring it into immanence. Moreover, the signifyingness of the trace answers to an irreversible past where no conscious memory could follow the traces of this past. It is thus an immemorial past, a past more remote than any past. The trace remains anterior to all polarities and can never be presented – made to appear or manifest in its phenomenon. It “erases itself in presenting itself, muffles itself in resonating” (Derrida, 1982: 23). For Derrida, the trace teaches one that it remains impossible to justify a point of departure absolutely. Strictly speaking, the trace should not be considered as a concept but rather as an impression, an association of impressions, an open imprecision, a relative indetermination that resists closure, the hermetics of an enclosure. It is “an insistent impression through the unstable feeling of a shifting figure, of a schema, or of an in-finite or indefinite process”. The process of the trace always remains inadequate relative to what it ought to be, to what it ought to signify. There is a disjunction in its signification and its description. It contains within itself tensions, contradictions and aporias – “an unknowable weight” (Derrida, 1996: 29). The trace is archived, imprinted (in the ‘form’ of the O-Function) in the infant’s unconscious, though this process of archiving fosters something intractable. Its ‘structure’ is *spectral* and elliptical whereby its irreducible excess signals “not in the direction of another presence, or another form of presence, but in the direction of an entirely other text” (Derrida, 1982: 65). The spectral motif proliferates a “disseminating fission” (Derrida, 1996: 84) which fosters a *non-contemporaneity of the living present with itself*. It unhinges the possibility of confluence between a living present and its full representation, and subverts the possibility of any presence as present to itself. There is thus a “disjointing, disjunction, or disproportion” (Derrida, 1994: xix) of the living present with the possibility of unqualified, pure, non-transcendent presence. Derrida argues that the value of presence itself is not essentially fundamental, but rather constituted by the very differences it seeks to appropriate or amalgamate (Wood, 1989). Effectively, the place of inscription, the archive comprised of something (which is no-thing) of the primordial maternal-infant engagement, cannot be reduced to memory as a conscious



reserve or memory as an act of recalling. It is instead a “memory without memory of a mark” (Derrida, 1996: 42), a memory without the memory of a symbolic track or tag that would render it colonisable. The trace of the O-Function shelters in itself a ‘third’ or other spatio-temporality of the maternal-infant idiom which remains radically incompatible with the principle and operation of what Derrida (1996) has cited as *consignation*. Consignation aims to coordinate elements into a system or synchrony that posits the unity of an ideal configuration.

Derrida (1994: xviii) suggests that “what happens between two, and between all the ‘two’s’ one likes.....can only *maintain itself* with some ghost”<sup>4</sup>. The spectral spatiality *between*, the there-ness of spectrality, does not correspond to an essence and it cannot be ascertained if it *is*. There is, “over there, an unnameable or almost unnameable thing” that refutes any semantic, ontological, psychoanalytic or philosophical classification (all these categories remain treacherous in the search for perhaps an-*other* ‘structure’ of presentation). This “thing” is not a thing, it is “*nothing visible*” (Derrida, 1994: 6), and it remains furtive and ungraspable in its creation of a spectral asymmetry that disrupts all specularly and speculation. The O-Function does not fall under “the ontological provenance of thing-ness”, rejecting “thingification and substantialisation” (Derrida, 1989: 16). It does not allow itself to be ‘thingified’ or ontologically clarified. The trace of the O-Function, like an elusive spectre (it is the remains of what may be called the “virtual space of spectrality”), “*engineers* (s’ingénie) a habitation without proper inhabiting” (Derrida, 1994: 11; 18). It haunts the process of the meaning-making quest without ever confining itself to the content which could never contain or delimit this spectral trace. The O-Function is the trace of what is altogether other, a haunting that remains irreducible to what it makes possible – the (ontological) meaning-making quest. A haunting permits “neither analysis nor decomposition nor dissolution” (Derrida, 1989: 62), and marks the scene with its absent presence or non-simple presence, as a secret that is neither present nor absent.

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<sup>4</sup> Later in *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida (1994: 107) reiterates this notion by proposing that “if there is some ghost, it is to be found precisely where, between the two, reference hesitates, undecidably....”.

## Cinders

Derrida relates the trace, something that radically erases itself while presenting itself, to the trope-metaphor of cinders (*cedre*). It should be cautioned however that the notion of ‘cinder’ is simultaneously a nomination for the absence of a truly proper name that is also just another name that ultimately cannot account for the still withheld essence of absolute presence. ‘Cinder’ therefore cannot function as the metaphor for the truth of being, as a metaphor for the ontologisation or essence of a certain irreducibility, the “metaphysical determination of the essence of unhidness”. Instead, as Lukacher (1991: 5; 1) suggests; “cinders name another relation, not to the truth as such, but to its possibility”. Cinder or trace, trace or cinder, proliferates a space for the in-vention, the *in-venire*, the in-coming of otherness. A cinder signifies an extreme fragility that falls to ash, that crumbles and disperses. But cinders also allude to the resilience and intractability of that which is most delicate and fragile. The luminous glow of its emanation is rendered as less of a “question of seeing the light than of feeling the heat” (Lukacher, 1991: 2). The fire withdraws, effaces itself, whilst continuing to burn in a cinder. The cinder is scorched by a ghostly secret that burns within its essence; it burns in lieu of the promise of a secret which withdraws into it. The cinder remains, persists in an attenuated clinging, though it cannot be incorporated or consumed. It is a dispersion without return, a pyromaniac dissemination, always ‘over there’, in the distant past, a lost memory of what is no longer here. As Derrida (1991: 33) suggests: “The cinder is not here, but Cinder there is”. The cinder clings as part of a something beyond - “There are cinders, perhaps, but a cinder is not. This remainder *seems* to remain of what was, and what was just now; it seems to feed or drink from the source of being-present, but it comes out of being, it uses up in advance the being on which it seems to draw. The remnant of the remainder – the cinder, almost nothing – is not a being that remains, if at least one understands here a being that subsists” (Derrida cited in Lukacher, 1991: 13).

The entire notion of ‘what remains’ is subverted from the very possibility of any accessible materiality or tangibility because what remains, what will have remained, is “that which preserves in order no longer to preserve, dooming the remnant to dissolution” (Derrida, 1991: 35). The remainder or the rest [*reste(s)*], as Derrida

(1987: 211) suggests, remains (*rester*) without example of the rest/remainder (*du reste*), which cannot be reduced. In general, what remains is frequently conceived of as something permanent, substantial and subsistent. Here however what remains does not remain in such a way. It does not correspond to the remains of a traditional semantics because it is rigorously undecidable. It cannot be thought of as a “residue of an operation (subtraction or division), a cast-off, a scrap that falls (entombed) or stays”. The trace-cinder of the O-Function cannot be removed from itself, from the preservation of its absolute secret, so that it belongs (without belonging) to the meaning-making quest as an “excluded necessary”. Making use of the non-concept (as concept) of the cinder alludes to an immediate incineration (though Derrida dislikes this word for it does not exude the tenderness and patience of the cinder, but rather an activeness, incisiveness and acuteness) where what remains is consumed by the art of the secret that cannot be flattered with commentary. What remains – the trace (of cinders) - is almost a silent monument, a remnant that must no longer remain, because the trace is a movement of that which is barred from empirical veracity and ontological closure. The trace “just barely remains” (Derrida, 1991: 43) and it preserves itself in losing itself through dispersion and dissemination. It ceases *to be* what it is in order to remain what it is - cryptically compelled. The trace as remains does not “accentuate itself here now” (Derrida, 1986: 1; 23; 42), but rather envelops or marks the scene of meaning-making without being contained therein. It does not result because if it could result it would relieve its remnance (*restance*), what is in excess. Derrida (1986: 44) concedes that from the viewpoint of the concept, this notion of a remains without remains is not easily comprehensible, even perhaps “foreseeably impossible”. As a consequence, it is a matter of the relation or nonrelation between castration and the concept, between castration and truth, because what can be known cognitively, symbolically, is cut off from such a ‘non-concept’ concept. It is indeed a “desert (concept) that must be left time to wander thirsty”.

The trace of the O-Function is “not yet what it is already” or “already what it is not yet” (Derrida, 1986: 218) because in order to be what it already is, there would have to be some revelation of that which would incorporate the full excess of its process. If one had to relate the O-Function with essence (hypothetically speaking), then what becomes essential to its essence cannot be extricated from the already-there of the not-yet, or the already-no-more of the yet. The essential ‘predicate’ of the O-Function

is of what presents or announces itself *there* as opposed to the *here-now*. It cannot find an identity or proximity to itself because it cannot be “submitted to the onto-phenomenological question of essence” (Gasche, 1986: 190). It cannot reconcile itself with itself in that its appeasement remains burdened with a beyond – something transcendental, distant, infinite. The O-Function preserves itself through losing itself. It ceases to be in an ontological sense (it is ontologically irreducible) in order to remain what it is - that is a strange anteriority, an enigmatic passage or aporetic that inaugurates the possibility of future meaning-making endeavours.

### **The Gift**

The trace of the O-Function may also be considered in terms of a *gift*. This gift however defies the enclosure of traditional semantics through its disruption of circularity, reciprocity and symmetry, which all allude to the notions of exchange, of distribution, of circulation, of return<sup>5</sup>. The gift “escapes the closed circle of checks and balances, the calculus which accounts for everything, in which every equation is balanced” (Caputo, 1997: 160). If there is *gift*, then it must not circulate or be exchanged, be exhausted by the process of exchange [Derrida (1995: 41) speaks of the “dissymmetry of the gift”, of how the impossible happens]. The gift remains foreign to all circularity or return and it finds its possibility only as an effraction in the circle of return. The gift ‘gives’ itself by erasing itself. It is not a present bound up in temporal synthesis. Instead it remains in certain excess over essence itself, always something more, something beyond, which signals that it does not give everything. Derrida (1992: 13) suggests how the very conditions of possibility of the gift (that some ‘one’ gives some ‘thing’ to some ‘one other’) designate simultaneously the very conditions of the impossibility of the gift because the conditions of possibility define or produce the annulment and destruction of the gift. The gift cannot be a gift except by not being present as a gift. Its annulment comes in perception, recognition and reception. It “interrupts the system as well as the symbol, in a partition without return”. Through restitution, reproduction, anticipatory expectation or apprehension that grasps or comprehends in advance, the process of the gift is destroyed. The gift

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<sup>5</sup> Traditionally, the notion of gift refers to some ‘one’ giving some ‘thing’ to someone other, without which ‘giving’ would be rendered meaningless. Indeed, the tautology of a gift cannot be satisfied without giving something (other) to someone (other).

remains irreducible because it cannot be received or perceived as a gift through consciousness, memory, recognition, through the law and order of the symbolic, through the economy of symbolic transcription. The gift is deconstructed by an inherent troubling of its own premises, by a logic which ‘contaminates’ the logic of gift-giving, by an other logic which has nothing to do with gift-giving or ‘giftness’ (Wolfreys, 1998). The O-Function is a *gift* of otherness, and as such it is accompanied by a radical forgetting [which is the “affirmative condition of the gift” (Derrida, 1992: 35)] that even exceeds the psychoanalytic category of forgetting, that is, forgetting in terms of a repression that may ultimately be recovered or verified by its effects or symptoms. The O-Function as trace or gift cannot give rise to something that can be reconstituted, remembered or recuperated. However, it is ironically on the basis of what transpires in the name *gift* that one could *hope* to consider forgetting because the ‘establishment’ of the gift would also be the *condition* of its forgetting. In this instance, condition signifies not merely ‘condition of possibility’, a system of premises or even causes, but more importantly “a set of traits defining a given situation in which something, or ‘that’ (‘ca’) is established (as in the expressions ‘the human condition’, the ‘social condition’, and so forth)” (Derrida, 1992: 17). For this particular thesis, it is the condition of the capacity to seek out meaningfulness that is established by the process (of the radical forgetting) of the gift of third aesthetic and its remains in the O-Function. The notion of condition should not be considered as a set of stipulations or prerequisites posed, but rather “in the sense in which forgetting would be in the *condition of the gift* and the gift in the *condition of forgetting*” (Derrida, 1992: 18). The gift as remaining (*restance*) without memory is what is at stake in this forgetting.

The gift of the O-Function alludes to something that does not belong to the economy of linear time and therefore it is not something that can be determined or circumscribed, rendered sensible or absolute. The gift cannot appear as gift - in its phenomenon, its sense and its essence – otherwise it would be engaged in a symbolic structure that would annul the gift in a ritual of circularity, in the “economic odyssey of the circle”. If anything, the gift is inscribed or infused with(in) a “circulatory *différance*” (Derrida, 1992: 40; 47) which makes it turn without end. It subverts any hermetic circularity of “exchangist rationality” and proliferates a dissemination without return. What is proper to the gift, what is properly its own, the very question

of the gift, alludes to what has been established in excess of two subjects (in this instance, the third aesthetic that the mother and infant generate). The gift of the O-Function is received from an otherness which “sees me without my seeing, holds me in his hands while remaining inaccessible” (Derrida, 1995: 40). The gift of the O-Function falls within the realm of the aporetic in that if the gift appears or if it is presently *as gift*, as what it is, then it is not, it annuls itself. The gift cannot appear as a present, as “an intentional signification or the meaning-to-say”, without annulling itself. If it were destined for recognition then it would instantaneously annul itself. “Secrecy is the last word of the gift which is the last word of the secret”. The secret entails a certain invisibility (that which is other than the visible, an encrypted non-visible) that alludes to the sonorous, the musical, the vocal, tactility and so forth. The secret of the gift is dissymmetrical and it remains incommensurable with absolute definition and knowledge. It ultimately exceeds “my seeing and knowing (*mon voir et mon savoir*) although it concerns the innermost parts of me, right down to my soul, down to the bone, as we say” (Derrida, 1995: 30; 54). The gift of the O-Function, in short, belongs to knowledge beyond (traditional) thought, to the un-phenomenalisable and impossible possible, to something (as no-thing) whose possibility is sustained by its impossibility.

### ***Désistance: Of the Future-to-Come***

The O-Function marks the *constitutive désistance* of future meaning-making potential. According to Derrida (1998b), *désistance* as a (non-)concept foregrounds the problematics of translation and indeed may be untranslatable. Moreover, *désistance* redoubles or disinstalls everything which secures stabilisation, identification, determination and positionality. One possible intimation as to what *désistance* may come to signify is proposed by Lacoue-Labarthe (1998) who considers the subject of Lacan’s mirror phase as primarily a subject in *désistance*<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> The mirror stage precipitates the “I” in “primordial form” and “situates the agency of the ego....in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual”(Lacan, 1977: 2). The mirror stage is viewed by Lacan as a formative event in the development of the subject whereby the infant begins to recognise in the mirror the image of his/her body as a totality, a total form or *Gestalt*. The mirror stage marks the child’s first recognition of a distinction between him/herself and the (m)other/mirror image (self-as-other). According to Bowie (1979), this moment of self-identification is crucial since the individual develops a permanent tendency to seek out and foster this imaginary, specular wholeness which creates a spurious unity or mirage and obscures the notion of human

Derrida (1998b: 1-2) proposes that *désistance* belongs to the ineluctable of which there are two typical experiences:

The first type: this has to happen – *il faut que cela arrive* (How are they going to translate *il faut*? Has to, is to, ought to, must, should?) – this cannot and must not be eluded. This has to begin sometime, someday, in accordance with the necessity of what will have been announced in the future tense. I, the one who says it, precede and anticipate in this way the advent of what happens to *me*, which comes upon me or to which I come. I am then like the (free) subject or the (aleatory) accident of the ineluctable. The latter does not constitute me. I am constituted without it.

Second type: what announces itself as ineluctable seems in some way to have already happened, to have happened before happening, to be always in a past, in advance of the event. Something began before me, the one who undergoes the experience. I'm late. If I insist upon remaining the subject of this experience, it would have to be as a prescribed, pre-inscribed subject, marked in advance by the imprint of the ineluctable that constitutes this subject without belonging to it, and that this subject cannot appropriate even if the imprint appears to be properly its own.

These two propositions of the ineluctable, of *désistance*, gesture towards the process of the O-Function. The infant with the aid of the mother generates the energetics of the third aesthetic which subsequently, through the 'inauguration' (though not as some absolute, original/originary point) of the O-Function in the infant's unconscious, heralds the future possibility to seek out and create meaning. The non-simple past experience [it is like "sleepwalking in the vicinity of the impossible" (Derrida, 1992: 35)] of the third aesthetic, which cannot be recuperated through some kind of teleological regression from present to past (or even *après coup*), necessarily contains within it future possibility and potentiality. It is precisely because the third

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existence as inextricably linked to lack, absence and incompleteness. The infant becomes enmeshed in a system of confused recognition/misrecognition because s/he sees an image of him/herself that is both accurate and delusory (the image prefigures a unity and mastery that the infant still lacks). The infant is thus "caught up in the lure of spatial identification". As a result, the ego possesses an illusion of autonomy which permits the infant to move from fragmentation and "insufficiency" to "anticipation" and illusory unity (Lacan, 1977: 4). The individual will continue throughout life in search of imaginary unity, synthesis, integration and wholeness but to no avail. Lacan successfully displaces the notion of the ego as the most secure and unifying component of the individual. He manages to unsettle the assumption of a fixed, core identity and the subject's capacity to know him/herself and his/her world.

aesthetic of the archaic encounter is absolutely past that the O-Function, as the remains of the third aesthetic, opens out to the future as an irreducible experience of the future, as something that can no longer be accessed as a past memory in the present but only potentially in a future-to-come. The O-Function is always a future anterior in that it is a 'pre-structure' (that could only announce itself in the future-to-come) of the possibility of meaning-making endeavours. Its very 'essence' remains indelibly elusive and undefinable, and it highlights the aporetic movement of *désistance* in that it is essentially constitutive and imperative yet "it puts off (from itself) any constitution and any essence" (Derrida, 1998b: 2). The imprint, the pre-inscription of the O-Function, remains ineluctably constitutive (inaugural) of future meaning construction while always already escaping any possibility of phenomenolisation or actualisation. It constitutes whilst deconstituting itself, it configures whilst disturbing the very possibility of something configurable, something consistent, stable or identifiable in its collectiveness.

Like the Mystic Writing-Pad, the O-Function operates palimpsestically, erasing itself whilst leaving a trace in the infant's unconscious and making way for the possibility of the future scene of meaning<sup>7</sup>. The O-Function however should not be conceptualised as an ecstasis named present, as a present that is "modifiable or modalisable in such a way that the past and the future are still presents-past and presents-to-come" (Derrida, 1992: 28). The O-Function always exceeds any presence as completely present to itself so that the past and future cannot be conceptualised in terms of simple derivations of the third aesthetic and its subsequent etching in the infant's unconscious. The experience of the third aesthetic was never present as such, in a cognitively thinkable manner. What happened will have "opened another time", an "anachrony of a time out of joint" (Derrida, 2000: 61). This time out of joint is a time that does not close in upon itself, a time that is "structurally ex-posed to an outside that prevents closure", a time that is an effect of *différance* (Caputo, 1997: 123). Consequently, the O-Function is "turned toward the future, going toward it, it also comes from it, it proceeds *from* (*provient de*) the future" (Derrida, 1994: xix). This statement alludes to the notion that the O-Function is a spectral trace that no longer belongs to the linking of modalised presents (past-present, actual-present: 'now',

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<sup>7</sup> The palimpsest is a piece of parchment or other writing material from which the writing has been erased to make way for a new text (Sheridan, 1977).



future-present). Its very spectral and trace-like movement positions it towards the future from which it comes. It turns towards the future from which it comes or proceeds because it could only potentially be determined from within the frame of a particular future that is a future-to-come (*l'à-venir*), a future not teleologically or linearly informed by a past that was once (conspicuously) present. The notion of the *future-to-come* (*l'à-venir*) is an affirmation of an irreducible experience. Derrida prefers using the 'to-come' of the *avenir* rather than the French word *futur* so as to distinguish what proceeds from the future as a non-simple past (the future-to-come) from the teleology of a past-present-future scenario – a past that once present and that now causally constructs, moulds and shapes the future. It should be noted that the proposition of affirmation (of the *avenir*) is not a positive thesis but rather the condition of all promises and hope, of all awaiting and performativity, “of all opening toward the future” (Derrida, 1996: 68). In my understanding of the future-to-come, Derrida is suggesting that if any (impossible) experience or phenomenon could manifest or arrive (come), could be recuperated or reconstituted, then, in the first instance, the framework of temporal linearity or teleological chronology would remain wholly inadequate. Like Derrida's intimation that the elaboration of *khōra* may require a third or other genre of discourse, so too would the possibility of a manifestation of a phenomenon that resists conceptualisation require an alternate model of the future – as mentioned, a future that would not be teleologically informed by a past that was once present thus creating a type of temporal synthesis. Furthermore, the representation of this future-to-come would render itself as problematic (aporetic) because it would not announce itself as some kind of declarative theorem or unified synthesis. It is not a necessarily knowable arrival and its determination does not fall under the realm and horizon of knowledge because the future-to-come remains heterogeneous “to all taking note.....to all stabilisable theorems as such” (Derrida, 1996: 72). The future-to-come cannot be a representation because “it is not my anticipation of a present which is already waiting for me, all ready, and like the imperturbable order of being, ‘as if it had already arrived’, as if temporality were a synchrony” (Levinas, 1998: 115).

The O-Function is the non-simple past as a future-to-come that “precedes us, but so as to be as much *in front of us* as *before us*” (Derrida, 1994: 17). The O-Function is a future anterior, a future that announces itself from the archaic past encounter between

mother and infant, and in this way it remains to come (in front of us) from a past (before us) that was never present as such. If the future-to-come is the provenance of the O-Function, then what would come in a future-to-come is what is beyond any recollection of a past that was once simply present. The O-Function is a trace of the remains of the unthought experience of the third aesthetic, that is to say, it is a trace of the remains of an unthought experience that is non-simply past in that it cannot be recuperated in the present as a past memory available for recollection. Therefore this non-simple past quality of the experience of the third aesthetic (and its remains in the O-Function) ensures that it (this non-concept) could only come in a future that could negotiate this past that was never simply present. The O-Function, as the remains of the third aesthetic, alludes to this non-simple (impossible) past that could only come in the future-to-come, the *avenir* and not the *futur*. The O-Function can only be thought of in a radical disjunction without any conjunction that may be restored or repaired. It alludes to a present in deferral, a “disjointure in the very presence of the present”, a non-contemporaneity of the present with itself. The present is assiduously ruptured so that it cannot fold back into immediacy or a reappropriable identity as “plenitude of a presence-to-itself, as totality of a presence effectively identical to itself”(Derrida, 1994: 99). The O-Function preserves an irreducible heterogeneity that cannot be saturated by traditional knowledge means. It comes from the future, announcing itself in the future of what comes, in a future that is linked to a non-simple past. The O-Function is thus spectral in that it is always still to come, as that which would come from a future-to-come of the non-simple past experience of the third aesthetic. In its spectral effect, it would undo the polarity between the actual (empirical) or present reality of the present and everything that can be opposed to it – non-presence, inactuality, virtuality – because, as the remains of the third aesthetic, it alludes to a non-empiricised liminal space at the heart of the actuality of the encounter between the mother and the infant which inscribes the possibility of radical alterity and heterogeneity, of *différance*, in the very event of the present, in the very presence of the present.

The notion of the presence of the present, an essential ‘now’ (*main-tenance*) alludes to the promise of something graspable and tangible. Moreover, it privileges the present in relation to the past and future, representing the past and future as alterations of the present so that otherness is rendered as teleological sameness, and

alterity is gathered into the unity of presence and the synchrony of representation. The very possibility of gathering diversity or heterogeneity into presence or presentation permits for the unravelling, nomination and signification of a “presence of what is already past or of what has not yet come about”. The O-Function, on the other hand, alludes to an “immemorial or an an-archic past” (Levinas, 1987: 100; 102), an irreducible past of the ‘experience’ of the third aesthetic that has not been simply present. It remains relentlessly other to that which allows itself to be assembled into a present/presence that is knowable, concrete and synchronous in synthesis. The O-Function is without reference to the assurance of a present because it is a past “outside of all reminiscence, re-tention, re-presentation, or reference to a remembered present” (Levinas, 1987: 112). It signals the diachrony of a past that attaches itself to an alterity that no longer falls within the province of (re-)presentation, a past without recourse to memory, an immemorial past that signified without ever having been simply present. Consequently, the O-Function’s relation to the future contrasts acutely with the synchronizable possibility of re-presentation. One cannot trace the O-Function back to a fullness of presence, to a presence that was not ruptured by *différance*, and therefore to a future predicated on a causative, discoverable past-present. The promise of a future-to-come, *avenir* as opposed to *futur*, is an alternative way of referring to what is other, to what opens onto what is other (Wood, 1989). It is a future without proper nomination. It is, as Derrida (1976: 5) suggests, a future that “can only be anticipated in the form of an absolute danger”, that is, a future that could only manifest in a radical discontinuity that deconstructs the value of sign, word and writing. It cannot be conceptualised as a future as telos, as end, as fulfilment or achievement – an exhibition of a harmonious and continuous succession or unity between past and future. Instead, it is a future that subverts teleology, and it remains *ateleological* in its displacement of the notion that the future is a projected dimension of the present, that is, a future-present. Hamacher (2001: 146) suggests that “the future ‘is’, if it is at all, what shows itself insofar as it effaces the signs it permits. It presents itself only in the retraction of its signs”. The spectrality of the O-Function may only be conjured up by the promise of another, an *other* future-to-come. However, any promise may only be given in consideration of its possible breach, under the promise and promise of a possible retraction, because the O-Function’s “structural unrealisability” necessarily incorporates the possibility of the future’s possible non-advent insofar as the promise “must be open to something that denies

itself knowledge, evidence, consciousness, and the calculability of a programme". A promise would not be a promise if it were a prognosis for a causal chain of development because it remains without any "egologically anchored certainty that should belong to epistemic calculability" (Hamacher, 2001: 169). This reservation or limitation, the possibly impossible future-to-come, is inscribed within the promise into the very opening of the future, into the very futurity of the future.

The O-Function constitutes a past that has not been simply present, and therefore does not fall under the realm or province of reconstitution, recollection or reminiscence. The O-Function (as the remains of the third aesthetic) cannot re-emerge or manifest absolutely except perhaps in a messianic promise ["the structure of the *promessianic*" (Hamacher, 2001:166)] of *another* future that would be able to hold and contain all heterogeneity, negativity, non-conceptuality, traces, *différance* and so on (though this is more than likely speculatively implausible)<sup>8</sup>. I have utilised the notion of the messianic, following Derrida, not in its theological sense (it is *atheological*), but rather as that which promises an unanticipatable, unprefigurable other, an other that does not exist. The messianic is "nothing other than a relation to the future so despoiled and indeterminate that it leaves being 'to come' (*à venir*), i.e., undetermined" (Derrida, 2001: 20-21). As such, it is precisely because this other is not prefigurable or determinable, that the messianic must of necessity refuse its promise to retain its promissability. It is a messianic that is potentially *ammessianic*, what Derrida (1994: 59) has termed the "messianic without messianism", where there is no prestablished *telos* that may be recognised, anticipated, striven for or achieved in the symbolic. It is without a horizon of expectation, something indeterminate, a horizon without determinate expectation. The "messianic without messianism" is the impossible coming of the other. It is *always* and *structurally* "to come", where the

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<sup>8</sup> As Milan Kundera (2002: 122-123) writes: "Memory cannot be understood, either, without a mathematical approach. The fundamental given is the ratio between the amount of time in the lived life and the amount of time from that life that is stored in memory. No one has ever tried to calculate this ratio, and in fact there exists no technique for doing so; yet without much risk of error I could assume that the memory retains no more than a millionth, a hundred-millionth, in short an utterly infinitesimal bit of the lived life. That fact too is part of the essence of man. If someone could retain in his memory everything he had experienced, if he could at any time call up any fragment of his past, he would be nothing like human beings: neither his loves nor his friendships nor his angers nor his capacity to forgive or avenge would resemble ours". I think that it is important to stress that it remains implausible to predict the 'form' that the future-to-come will take because, as Derrida (2001: 84) suggests, "for there to be a future as such – which means surprise, alterity – one must no longer *voir venir* (wait and see), there must not even be a horizon of anticipation, a horizon of waiting". The future-to-come means that "the other is there before me, that it comes before (*prévient*), precedes and anticipates me".

coming of the other must be left to the other since determination or predetermination would represent a coming of the same (Caputo, 2000). The notion of *avenir* presupposes a messianic time, so that “nothing coming (*venue*) could ever actually occur or come about, or have occurred or have come about, in ordinary time”. In this way, the delicacy and lightness of the “to come” is not absorbed by the grossness of the order of presence. The always already “to come” does not belong to the order of the present, it “does not maintain the *maintenant* of *temps ordinaire*”. It is always beyond (*au-delà*) the same and the possible (Caputo, 1997: 79-80). Lacan (1977: 306) proposes that if the subject “announces himself – he will have been – only in the future perfect”, thus highlighting how any epiphanic moment of complete self-illumination must necessarily be deferred to a future perfect that remains barred from the *méconnaissance* of the present. Similar to Derrida’s suggestion of *désistance*, the subject is marked in advance by the imprint of the O-Function (that which ‘inaugurates’ the possibility to seek out meaningfulness) which does not belong to the subject, even if the imprint appears to be properly his/her own. The O-Function leaves its mark on the individual without there being the possibility that s/he will ever be able to think or reflect on how s/he has been effected by it. This notion has certain resonances with Lacan’s (1977: 86) rather gnostic assertion of the subject’s constitution and experience:

I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object. What is realised in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming.

I have offered this citation in order to suggest that the endeavour to establish linkages between one occurrence, phenomenon or experience and another, remains convoluted in its obliqueness because there is some unthinkable process that contributes, without one’s cognisance or realisation, to the process of becoming. In this way, the subject “comes into being at the point of intersection between an irrecoverable past and an unattainable future; its structure is that of a ceaseless cross-stitching, in language, between what-is-no-longer-the-case and what-is-not-yet-the-case” (Bowie, 1991: 184). At best one may be able to speculate on some kind of metonymical association between an event and one of its possible displacements, though ultimately any

metaphorical symmetry, the confluence and unification of signifier and signified, remains for now still to be accomplished. The O-Function cannot return, even in a distorted or transformed state. It remains inaccessible in its 'originary' patterning of a third spatio-temporal potentiality, and it remains without the possibility for rearrangement, repetition or reconstruction. It is, in short, a trace of ineffable (of ineluctable) otherness that signals an elsewhere that is "further-than-myself in myself" (Cixous, 1997: 56), a movement from certain traces of archaic gestures of silence.

## 5. PERMUTATIONS OF LOVE: TOWARDS AN ETHICS OF RECOGNITION

And yet I still love you too well in my silence to remember the movement of my own becoming. Perpetually am I troubled, stirred, frozen, or smothered by the noise of your death..... That was the most painful hour. For you had so deeply implanted these things into me that almost nothing was left to recall me to the innocence of my life. Almost nothing to let me rediscover my own becoming beyond your sufferings. All that was left – barely – was a breath, a hint of air and blood that said: I want to live. And why should living always be misfortune? And why should I always be security for your misery? The test of your bad luck? If you care nothing for living, then death will be for you a surer place of eternal peace.

Luce Irigaray (1991a: 3-4)

As if I were dead but I do not even think of killing myself, nor do I desire to do so, it is as if it had already been done..... I stayed in the house as if I were there in her stead, I preserved her fragrance, I imagined her presence, I kept her with me.

Julia Kristeva (1989: 72; 83)

Delivering myself to her – life. Enveloped in her so thoroughly, the fear of offending her still lingers. Yet I remain in her arms, knowing that a day limits itself to a period of light, after which suddenly arrives the night.

Luce Irigaray (2000: 5)

Love remains a relation with the Other that turns into need, and this need still presupposes the total, transcendent exteriority of the other, of the beloved. But love goes beyond the beloved. This is why through the face filters the obscure light coming from beyond the face, from what *is not yet*, from a future never future enough, more remote than the possible. Love....designates a movement by which a being seeks that to which it was bound before even having taken the initiative of the search and despite the exteriority in which it finds it.

Emmanuel Levinas (1969: 254-255)

For this journey, I have listened, I have opened in myself a space to accommodate you, a clearing of silence. I have welcomed this part of you, this flower of your body, born from your breath and heart, nourished by your sun, which has sprung from you and has inclined towards me. I have wanted to savour and protect this, before wanting more. I have wanted to stop a bit. To love. Not to suffocate the breath. To allow the breath to go and to return, hotter or colder, more animated or more serene: moving air or shining cloud. I have wanted to feel you in me, not as an object, a newborn, or even as an emotion, but as life. As a living soul?

Luce Irigaray (2000: 60)

### **The Poetics of Thirdness: On Spatial Rhythmicity**

The notion of a ‘third’ (time-space, aesthetic) alludes to archaic preverbal patterning that is often experienced through silence, sound, breath, kinesis, posture, energy and so on. It is a rhythm, an echo, a “creation of a dance” as Benjamin (2004: 16 -18) puts it, that precedes representation through symbolic language. It is not a thing that can be held onto [it is a “memory lapse” (Cixous, 1999: 145) that cannot be contained] or reduced to a model of action-reaction. To the question of “Who created this third element, you or I?”, the paradoxical answer is “both and neither”. It is an intersubjective space, something like a dance that is distinct from the dancers yet co-

created by them. It is, as Hélène Cixous (1999: 34; 70; 24; 150) writes in *The Third Body*, “that which is projected outside me and covers over me, this body foreign to my body that rises from my body and shrouds it”. This ‘third’ *between-us* is “a place where there is no law”, where there is “all this Nothing of Everything, this possibility of the impossible that happened”; the scenario of once “I did know it, it did have me in it, over there. Not here”. The rhythm of the third is the “unique and unknown body” (Cixous, 1999: 153) of the mother-infant silence, where “something comes to pass which does not belong as one’s own to the one or to the other”. This something remains indeterminate, “an impossible to say”, something that is no-thing, something nomadic that moves beyond the body as it is part of it. It is the “mysterious legacy of an encounter” (Irigaray, 2002: 153; 22-23) that cannot be appropriated, corresponding neither solely to an internal realm nor to a simply external thing. As Cixous (1991: 53-54) writes:

...I make love, love makes me, a *Third Body (Troisième Corps)* comes to us, a third sense of sight, and our other ears – between our two bodies our third body surges forth, and flies up to see the summit of things, and at the summit rises and soars toward the highest things; dives, swims in our waters, descends, explores the depths of the bodies, discovers and consecrates every organ, comes to know the minute and the invisible - but in order for the third body to be written, the exterior must enter and the interior must open out.

The spatiality of the third forms part of the in-between, the liminal, that which passes through one and the other by offering the gift of alterity that produces rather than reduces difference/*différance* and gestures towards the limitless (Bray, 2004). In this chapter, I would like to consider how the configuration of the “dead mother”, as noted by the French psychoanalyst André Green (1997), impacts on this third spatio-temporal potentiality or what I have termed the “third aesthetic”. It should be stressed that this chapter is not a comprehensive or exhaustive (if that were possible!) (re-) reading of the dead mother constellation, but instead it is concerned with how a mother out of tune with her infant, obstructs the passage and flow of the energetics of this ‘third’. It will investigate how the mother’s recognition of the infant’s otherness or alterity, and a certain quality of (silent) love that she imparts to the infant, remain critical in generating and sustaining the momentum of the third aesthetic. In the



experience of a dead mother, a sense of decay and moribundity blocks the mobility and rhythmic currency of the third aesthetic. The metonymics of fluidity are supplanted by a funereal mechanics of solidification and paralysis which in turn leads to the inauguration of a –O-Function in the infant’s unconscious. The –O-Function is the testament to an exquisite corpse-like and desolate universe of cadaverisation, entombment and anguished conscription. It signals the avalanche of “stone-felt cold” (Kristeva, 1989: 110), the austerity of a macabre dance, the horror of a living tomb, a death-ridden shroud of emptiness - consignment to the nihilism of an ex-sistential vacuum.

### **Frozen Love: The Empire of the Dead Mother**

The constellation of the dead mother alludes to mourning which does not pertain to the psychical repercussions of the actual death of the mother, but rather to that “of an imago which has been constituted in the child’s mind, following maternal depression”. This in turn renders a vital, animated object (the mother) into a distant, reticent, toneless figure, profoundly influencing the cathexeses of patients who have experienced such a psychical position, as well as altering the destiny of their object-libidinal and narcissistic future, their capacity to love and work. The dead mother is a mother who is physically alive and present, yet psychically absent and dead in the eyes of her infant. Green considers the dead mother configuration in light of two ineluctable experiences that remain formative in shaping the organisation of the individual’s psyche - *object-loss*, where a new relation to reality is introduced so that the reality principle takes precedence over the pleasure principle which it also protects; and the *depressive position* which was initially formulated by Melanie Klein. Green is also concerned with the recourse to metaphor which “holds good for every essential element of psychoanalytic theory”, and he refers to the problems relating to the dead mother “as to a metaphor independent of the bereavement of a real object”. Moreover, the metaphor of the breast, for example, is symbolic in that the erogenous pleasure derived from sucking the nipple also has the puissance to concentrate within itself other components that constitute the mother (her smell, skin, demeanour, gaze and so on). In this way, “the metonymical object has become metaphor to the object” whereby associative factors or elements remain inextricably bound up with the metaphor of the object (Green, 1997: 142; 147-148).

The dead mother complex is revealed in the transferential relationship of the analytic process, with problems of impotence and immobilisation evident – an incapacity to withdraw from conflictual situations, to love and to nurture one's talents, and a sense of profound dissatisfaction. A *transference depression* (an expression that Green coins to distinguish it from transference neurosis, whereby classic neurotic symptoms are only of secondary value and do not furnish the key to the conflict in this instance) indicates a repetition of an infantile depression which does not concern the loss of a real object in that real separation with the object through some form of abandonment is not in question here. Instead, "the essential characteristic of this depression is that it takes place in the presence of the object, which is itself absorbed by a bereavement" (Green, 1997: 149). For some reason, the mother is depressed (the aetiology may be attributed to a variety of precipitating factors, though among the principle causes of this kind of maternal depression, one frequently finds the loss of a significant other), and this leads to a lessening of interest in her infant. There is thus a radical and brutal transformation of the maternal imago and an abrupt truncation of an authentic vitality that might have been previously present in the infant. The infant experiences the sudden transformation of its psychical life as catastrophic, and after unsuccessful attempts to repair the mother (being at the centre of the maternal universe, the infant interprets this deception as the consequence of its drives towards the object), the ego deploys a series of defences. The primary and most critical defence is a unique movement with two aspects – the decathexis of the maternal object and the unconscious identification with the dead mother. The decathexis (principally affective though also representative) is accomplished without enmity so as not to lend a more damaging quality to the mother's image. This results in the constitution of a hole in the texture and fabric of object-relations with the mother. The identification entails a reactive symmetry or complementarity in an attempt to establish a reunion with the mother which aims at generating a continuity with the object (which the infant no longer possesses) by becoming the object itself rather than merely like it. This mirror-identification, which functions as the condition of the renouncement of the object yet simultaneously its conservation in a cannibalistic manner, is unconscious from the start (and hence is fundamentally alienating in characteristic), as opposed to the decathexis which is rendered unconscious later on because the withdrawal is retaliatory. The subject, under the sway of the repetition compulsion, will thus

actively employ the decaethesis of an object when other significant object-relations threaten to disappoint, though s/he will remain totally unconscious of the identification with the dead mother, “with whom he reunites henceforth in recathecting the traces of the trauma” (Green, 1997: 151).

Green (1997: 151-153) proposes that another significant ramification of the dead mother complex is a *loss of meaning*. The ‘construction’ of the breast of which “pleasure is the cause, the aim and guarantor” has collapsed suddenly without reason, and the entire situation, manifesting as a result of a loss of meaning, leads to further defences. One such defence “structures the early development of the fantasmatic and the intellectual capacities of the ego” whereby there is the development of a frantic need to play which does not manifest in the freedom of playing, but rather under the compulsion to imagine. Similarly, intellectual development is inscribed in a compulsion to think<sup>1</sup>. Both of these defences, as idealised sublimations, attempt to “mask the hole left by the decaethesis”, to master a traumatic situation. However, they invariably reveal a certain incapacity to “play a stabilising role in the psychical economy” because the subject, for example, remains vulnerable in his/her love life where “a wound will awaken a psychical pain and one will witness the resurrection of the dead mother” who dissolves all the subject’s sublimatory acquisitions which are not lost but remain momentarily blocked. The dead mother holds the subject prisoner so that the incarceration overwhelms the possibility to develop “a deeper personal involvement which implies concern for the other”. All that is left is a “feeling of a captivity which dispossesses the ego of itself and alienates it to an unrepresentable figure”. The subject’s objects remain constantly at the limit of the ego, with the dead mother occupying the centre.

Behind or underneath the dead mother’s lack of maternal capacity, the shadow of her absence remains “unreachable without echo”. The dead mother takes away the major portion of the love with which she had been cathected before her bereavement - her

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<sup>1</sup> These two defences (as compensation for lack and emptiness and as an attempt to remedy this deficiency) are interesting in light of Winnicott’s and Lacan’s writings on play and jouissance deficiency respectively. Winnicott (1991: 47) regards play as critical in generating potential space, an essential “intermediate playground”, between mother and infant. For Lacan (1998b: 54-55), the quest for knowledge through intellectualisation is as a result of the lack of an other (*en plus, encore*) jouissance, the jouissance that ex-sists, the jouissance of the unthought-known (as discussed in chapter 2) (see also Fink, 2002: 34-36).

gaze, the timbre of her voice, her smell, the memory of her caress. She remains buried alive, with the tomb itself disappearing and leaving a gaping hole that makes solitude terrifying so that the subject runs “the risk of being sunk in it, body and possessions”. The object is encapsulated and its trace is lost through decaethexis, transforming positive identification into negative identification, that is, identification with the hole left by the decaethexis. Green (1997: 156-158) considers the object to be in hibernation, “conserved by the cold”, so that the decaethexis creates a “love frozen” where the subject’s inability to love others (“arrested in their capacity to love”) is as a result of his/her love being “mortgaged to the dead mother”. Subjects under the spell of the dead mother can thus only aspire to autonomy in that sharing with others is impossible given that they remain a “prisoner to her economy of survival”. They continuously “complain of being cold even in the heat. They are cold below the surface of the skin, in their bones; they feel chilled by a funereal shiver, wrapped in their shroud”. Moreover, their need for love is never completely satiated – either it is completely impossible or it is inhibited. The dead mother remains indefatigable, refusing to “die a second death”. Just as the analyst perceives an end to the dead mother, a trauma occurs in the transference or in daily life which confers the maternal imago with a renewed vitality. She is a “thousand-headed hydra whom one believes one has beheaded with each blow; whereas in fact only one of its heads has been struck off”.

Behind the dead mother complex, the blank mourning for the mother, “one catches a glimpse of the mad passion of which she is” whereby the subject’s psychical structure is overwhelming geared towards a fundamental fantasy of nourishing the dead mother and maintaining her “perpetually embalmed”. The subject spends his/her life “nourishing his/her dead, as though s/he alone has charge of it. Keeper of the tomb, sole possessor of the key of the vault...”<sup>2</sup>. When the analyst succeeds in touching upon a critical element of this nuclear complex, the subjects feels him/herself to be empty and blank as though “deprived of a stop-gap object, and a guard against madness”. Contact with the mother has essentially been lost though she is “secretly

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<sup>2</sup> Even if analysis succeeds in restoring a level of vitality to the subject, s/he will express ambivalence concerning the desire to resuscitate the dead mother because rather paradoxically the subject can take care of her and attempt to awaken and cure the dead mother in her affliction. She may be dead and unavailable to the subject but at least she is present. On the other hand, if the dead mother awakens, the subject risks losing her again for she may abandon him/her to continue her life. The subject is thus caught between two losses – presence in death, or absence in life.

maintained in the depths of the psyche” so that “all attempts of replacement by substitute objects are destined to fail”. Interestingly, in considering approaches of technique, Green suggests that the classic attitude of silence carries the danger of repeating the relation to the dead mother. Instead, he prefers to make use of the setting as a transitional space where the analyst is rendered as “an ever-living object...who is interested, awakened by his analysand, giving proof of his vitality by the associative links he communicates to him...”. The analyst needs to remain alert to what the analysand narrates without lapsing into intrusive interpretation. In short, the dead mother configuration draws the subject’s ego “towards a deathly, deserted universe”, which in turn results in narcissistic depletion (expressed phenomenologically through a sense of emptiness) and the burying of a part of the ego in “the maternal necropolis”. The challenge lies in facilitating the death of this dead mother so that another may be loved. However, this “death must be slow and gentle so that the memory of her love does not perish” but instead may nourish the love that she will generously offer the other who takes her place (Green, 1997: 162-170).

### **The Failure of Recognition**

I would like to propose that in the dead mother configuration, the mother, who is so completely absorbed by her bereavement, fails to recognise the otherness of the infant, the infant as *another*, and as a consequence the infant is engulfed and overwhelmed by an imperiousness and imposition of sameness – that which haunts, monopolises and occupies the mother’s psyche. While the relationship between a mother and infant can never be entirely on equal terms in that the infant depends on the mother for his/her survival, there still seems to be an ethical necessity for the mother to recognise the alterity of the infant, the freedom of the infant’s becoming, that “the other is and will remain a mystery for me”, even if reciprocity is not necessarily a possibility. As Irigaray (2000: 110; 106) writes: “Since the other is – is already, perhaps will be, has been, has in himself a seed of the to be in so far as he exists – I must respect him as the other which he is”. In an attempt to explicate the process of recognition, Irigaray (1996: 104-105) suggests that recognition is inextricably connected to an irreducibility, a certain inaccessibility, whereby one individual may not be substituted for another – “Recognising you means or implies respecting you as other, accepting that I draw myself to a halt before you as before

something insurmountable, a mystery, a freedom that will never be mine, a subjectivity that will never be mine, a mine that will never be mine". Recognition negates the endeavour to master or colonise the becoming of the other so that between two, there ex-sists a transcendence (through *différance*) that continues to "nourish our energy, its movement, its generation, and its creation". This movement of energy in turn prevents paralysis and all forms of totality and totalisation, a unity through totalisation and synthesis, so that "neither you nor I are the whole nor the same", and consequently "difference cannot be reduced to *one* hierarchy, *one* genealogy, *one* history". For Irigaray, a difference that is irreducible curbs the capitalisation of mere power and authority over another and transforms relations of appropriation and fusion into intersubjective exchanges that operate against subjugation and consumption. It is this difference that ensures the generation of the "expanse of the third" (Irigaray, 2002a: 9). While recognising the other facilitates a sense of differentiation, it also paradoxically creates a sense of attunement, a "rhythmicity of affect", whereby something like a rhythmic pattern is co-created by two individuals who surrender to it<sup>3</sup>. This creation permits and presumes separateness, an intermediate in-between space which no longer identifiably emanates from one individual or the other, but rather mediates between them and effects the flow of energy between (Benjamin, 2002: 46). In recognition, the individual (the mother) experiences the other (the infant) as a subject who can be "felt with", but who has a separate centre of feeling and perception (Benjamin, 1998; 2004).

The dead mother configuration signals a failure "to attain horizontality in transcendence" (or at least some kind of horizontality given that the relationship between the mother and her infant is never entirely equal owing to the infant's dependence) which would engender respect for the mystery of the other (Irigaray, 1996: 116). The mother reduces the infant to her existence and her experience, which in turn paralyses the freedom of the infant's intentionality and becoming, and alienates the infant in a reality of sameness. The dead mother controls and dominates the infant so that the possibility and freedom for the infant's development ceases to

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<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Frosh and Baraitser (2003) suggest that it is the mother's appreciation and recognition of the infant's separateness from her that paradoxically indicates just how much the mother is in contact with the infant. Recognition alludes to a certain handling of the trope of similarity/difference whereby the possibility of allowing difference is permitted (so that the self does not disappear into the other) yet there is also an appreciation of similarity that does not risk absorption or colonisation of the self into the other. Recognition is gesture, a "reaching out", that also lets the other become.

exist as the infant remains in submission to her. The dead mother fails to contribute to a third space by holding in tension her subjectivity/desire/awareness and the needs of the infant. For Benjamin (2004: 13), this ability to maintain internal awareness, to “sustain the tension of difference between my needs and yours while still being attuned to you”, remains analogous to the ability to protect the child’s future development. The position of the dead mother leads to a failure to “encourage something unexpected to emerge, some becoming, some growth, some new dawn, perhaps.....(a) way for the not-yet-coded, for silence, for a space for existence, initiative, free intentionality, and support for your becoming”. The mother fails to offer (as guidance) her infant what Irigaray (1996: 117-118) refers to as “a silence” in which the infant’s future “may emerge and lay its foundation”. This silence is not hostile or restrictive, but rather it is an “openness that nothing or no one occupies, or preoccupies – no language, no world, no God”. It is offered up with no a priori or pre-established truth and “constitutes an overture to the other who is not and never will be mine” - a “still virgin space-time” for the infant’s “appearance and its expressions”. The silence offers “the possibility of existing, of expressing your intention, your intentionality, without you calling out for it and even without asking, without overcoming, without annulling, without killing”. It alludes to “one *with* the other in the serenity and the occasion of *being with*, respecting difference”, and it ensures that “what grows preserves its future” (Irigaray, 2000: 1). In the instance of the dead mother, the infant remains entrapped within the horizon of sameness with the *you* of the infant forced into the sameness of the *me* of the mother. Difference is subjected to sameness in that the mother imposes on her infant the authority of that which holds her captive, and the enveloping between the mother and her infant therefore manifests in closure - an enclosure that proliferates a state of bondage that annihilates creative possibilities, the “creative virtualities that would inscribe themselves in this silence” (Irigaray, 1993: 180).

The “soft palpitation” of silence, the tenderness of its rhythmic repose, plays at the limits of the individual – it lacks contours and definite limits, “still outside, but already within” – and alludes to what is “seemingly nothing, if not the happiness of being with her, while remaining myself” – “the living matrix for a future”. This silence suggests that “between us is something which will never be mine or yours”. It alludes to “a nothingness in common” which permits the constitution and free play of

a mobile energy<sup>4</sup>. In the scene of the dead mother, however, the “moisture which protects silence” between the mother and Her infant is rendered as devitalised so that a heaviness annihilates the lightness between them and moves towards an “immobility and inertia of being, which is found in the very horizon of death”, where death is the “absolute mistress”. Between mother and infant there is deadness, numbness and an exhaustion of sensation. The horizontality of intersubjectivity is replaced by a vertical transcendence (that which holds both the mother and her infant as prisoners of sameness) which in turn robs them of a “third dimension beginning from which we approach each other as different others” (Irigaray, 2000: 3-4; 52; 13). The mother fails to leave to the infant the possibility for his/her becoming through the colonisation of the “silence of a between-two” that fuels the process of movement which is “assured by the difference between subjects”. She fails to contribute to an “open space between the one and the other”, to a “path from the one to the other and to the sharing of a still free energy and space”, which would safeguard “difference and its productive play”. Therefore the scene of the mother-infant encounter is “closed by what is proper to only one” so that the infant is appropriated by a sameness, expropriated and seized by sameness, subjected to the assertion of the same (Irigaray, 2002a: 99; 153; 134). There is a complete submission to the inexorable force of the dead mother so that experience is not created or discovered, but rather suffered, and the infant’s own feelings are denied and supplanted by the mother’s reality (Benjamin, 2002). The infant is truly a prisoner to the dead mother’s economy of survival.

The dead mother configuration signals the invasion of a third term (that which Levinas identifies as a transcendental signifier, referred to in chapter 3), which subsequently neutralises the alterity of the third aesthetic, and renders its disseminative, metonymic movement into a metaphoric sepulchre. Indeed, the intersubjective currency of the third aesthetic is imposed upon by a Third internal to one, the intrapsychic Third of the dead mother’s bereavement, which in turn steers the infant into “the reality and fiction of death’s being”, into a “poetics’ of survival, an inverted life, coiled around imaginary and real disintegration to the extent of embodying death *as if* it were real”. This tomb of the Third co-opts and subsumes both mother and infant into a paralysis of psyche and body, an “irremediable

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<sup>4</sup> Further on in the text, Irigaray (2000: 64) writes: “Silence, therefore, is nothing. It is not even the substantialisation of itself”.



dissociation of astral numbness". The intrusions of the dead mother's Third brings death through devitalisation and monopolisation of the infant's jouissance of becoming and forces the infant into the cloisters of an "imaginary solitude", a "near-aesthetic harmonisation" of death's "fictitious fullness" (Kristeva, 1989: 73). The third aesthetic between mother and infant remains petrified and paralysed resulting in a congealment and blocking of the fluidity of psychic and bodily gestures. The mother and infant are confined within "solid walls" of death that keeps them from "spreading to infinity". This modality of death propagates a mechanics/mechanisation of solidification whereby the precedence of the Third punctuates and prescribes the potentiality of the third aesthetic so that death is projected onto, injected into, the interval, the threshold of liquidity. The "paralytic undersides" of the economy of the Third supplants or absorbs the potential fluidity, viscosity and diffusion of the third aesthetic into a solidified closed circuit of death (Irigaray, 1985: 106; 111).

The Third that subordinates the dead mother and the infant to an economy of mesmerism and immobilisation, "its prerogatives, its domination, its solipsism", remains dedicated to reproducing a death-like sameness in the intersubjective space *between* so that both the mother and Her infant remain imprisoned – prisoners of "enclosed spaces where we cannot keep on moving, living, as ourselves" (Irigaray, 1985: 207; 212). The unceasing flow of the third aesthetic, its metonymic currents resisting congealment and solidification, its suppleness, gives way to a hardness *between-us*, a trenchancy and rigidity, the density of dead bodies entombed crypt-like and "restrained by an aching psychic wrapping, anaesthetised, as if 'dead'" (Kristeva, 1989: 82). As a result, the dead mother's infant comes to live for the sake of death, experiencing an "emptiness as living dead" (Kristeva, 1989: 82), the "leaden strap" (Kristeva, 1986: 185) of death that seals in a hermetic veil of numbness, hollowing out, immobilisation, pulverisation and disintegration. The infant remains absolutely and implacably impotent in the face of this death-bearing all-mightiness, "the death-bearing she-Gehenna" (Kristeva, 1989: 28). The potentiality of the third aesthetic is replaced by an imposing Third closed off to "the outer-inner music" so that all that is left is a wasteland barred and broken, a landscape where "love loses its breath" – the deathly deserted universe of the maternal necropolis (Cixous, 1991: 54). The "ceaseless transfusion of life" gives way to decay, to that which is death infused, "only death lies on this path". There is a transcription of the flow-between in

accordance with the enclosure of a (degenerative) triad – the mother, Her infant and the Third. The liquidity of the liminal is strangled by this “captive atmosphere” which blocks the circuit of “airy, mobile” mediation, curbs the residues of metonymic excess and thwarts the transmission of the gift of ex-sistence (Irigaray, 1993b: 33; 46; 50; 45). Indeed, it is a –O-Function that is inaugurated in the infant’s unconscious which derives from the paralysis of this archaic scene of blocked movements and arrangements of sameness.

The –O-Function speaks of “states of artificial weightiness, of swept-out dryness, of absence against a backdrop of dizziness, of emptiness cut out into black lightning”. It speaks of absolute impotence and implacable helplessness, “cadaverisation and artifice”, where both mother and infant are engulfed in the crypt of a motionless and morbid stupor – the monstrous anguish of living corpses, the exorbitant intensity of a stultifying and devitalising sequestration (Kristeva, 1989: 72-73). The Third of the dead mother functions as the statutory/statuary/proprietary *between-us*, and signals the dead mother’s failure to recognise that the infant has a separate and distinct psychic life. For Modell (1999: 77-78), this failure is devastating in that recognising the uniqueness of the infant’s inner life is equivalent to recognising that s/he is psychically alive. It is as if the dead mother fails to acknowledge the infant’s humanity, and this, as Modell suggests, “is a short step to think that if their mother does not recognise their psychic aliveness, then their mother wishes that they did not exist, that they in fact should be dead”. The infant may thus feel that the dead mother is withholding permission to exist, and if one does not have the right to exist then one does not have the right to seek out meaningfulness, “to have desires, to want anything for oneself”. As Sekoff (1999: 115) writes: “Within her tight embrace the entombed child finds solace, a shelter that offers the certainties of death over the vagaries of life. This is her magical bequest: relief from the anxieties of freedom through submission to a powerful other”. The –O-Function is a testament to the terrifying beauty of the “negative sublime” (Sekoff, 1999: 114), the graveyard or funeral vault of a subject subordinated by both reverence and dread for the dead mother. No life or consolation is possible beyond the boundary of the dead mother’s embrace which ensures that there will be no unauthorised border-crossings. The dead mother held captive by the Third is constricting, compressing and entrapping, a “centrifuge object whose gravity won’t let anything escape” (Sekoff, 1999: 121). The infant-adult is thus left with a

sense of “panic and emptiness”, a fear of falling into an abyss of oblivion (Forster, 2000: 46). S/he remains buried alive and subsumed by a burden of sorrow tailored out of the dead mother’s legacy of dereliction and entombment. The delicacy of the existence of the third aesthetic is eclipsed by the puissance and valency of the existence of the dead mother and her Third. The –O-Function is thus a testament to the future falling back upon the burden of the past, to a future falling back upon a past “to fuse with it and delineate a fate” in which “every adventure would revert into the adventure of a fate”. The –O-Function is the inescapable “crushing responsibility of existence that veers into fate” (Levinas, 1969: 272; 282).

### **The Ethics of Love: Of *Herethics* and Angels**

For Irigaray (2000: 62-63), the capacity “to love each other between us” requires “the protection of a space, a place of silence”, the arrangement of a reserve of silence. Silence forms the very basis of “love between us”, not however because it “rests at the level of nature, of the drives, of instinct, but because it maintains itself in difference, a difference that cannot be expressed”. This silence cannot “be overcome either in words or in representations”, but rather must be “protected, cultivated, generated”. It is critically “at least *three*”, “a two irreducible to one”, so that “a third is created, a third generated by the two but which does not belong to either”. This third as silence or silent third is “a work of love.....a labour of love”, which promotes the circulation of energy and “sometimes brings rebirth and therefore allows for becoming”. It is a certain quality of love as (silent) mediator or intermediary, the existence of that which functions *between*, which facilitates “the encounter and the transmutation or transvaluation between the two”. As Irigaray (1993: 21; 111; 201) writes: “Everything is always in movement, in a state of becoming. And the mediator of all this is, among other things, or exemplarily, *love*. Never fulfilled, always becoming”. To love the other in this sense requires the attainment of “an intuition of the infinite” (not an intuition with a goal that marks out, but rather an intuition that “inscribes itself in an already insistent field”) without binding the other in accordance with sameness, which would ensure that death becomes the dimension of the infinite. This love of the other remains irreducible to any overwhelming consumption or consummation, to an appropriation of the freedom of the other. It stops before the inappropriable, leaving a *horizontal transcendence between* to be so that a “culture of

energy” (Irigaray, 1996: 138) proliferates. Love comes to the assistance of the frailty of the other in that a “regime of tenderness” manifests itself at the limits of being and non-being as “a soft warmth where being dissipates into radiance”. The extreme fragility of this love (of cinders) lies at the limits of an “exorbitant presence” which ensures that “the essentially hidden throws itself towards the light, without becoming signification. Not nothingness – but what is not yet”. This “unreality at the threshold of the real” does not offer itself as a possibility to be grasped. It does not exhaust the essence of its non-essence. It appears without appearing as a “weight of non-signifyingness (non-significance)”, as a “movement unto the invisible” - “as though it *were not yet*.....which *is not*”. It withdraws into a future “beyond every possible promise to anticipation”. It cannot be grasped or touched in that “the secret it forces does not inform it as an experience”, and in this way, “it does not denote all that I can grasp – my possibilities”. Indeed, this love “issues in no concept” whereby its movement consists in going beyond the possible. It comes from the future, “from a future situated beyond the future”, from a *not yet* more remote than a future – a spatio-temporal *not-yet* that does not enter into the logical essence of the possible. The encounter with this certain love, however, is necessary so that “the future of the child (can) come to pass from beyond the possible, beyond projects” (Levinas, 1969: 256-268). The mother’s relation with the infant establishes the relationship with this *not yet* future.

The silence of love or love of silence (silent love) is the primary gesture of what Irigaray (1996: 109-110) terms as “*I love to you*”. The ‘to’ in the expression confounds any inertia that paralyzes movement and creates a scenario of subjugation and consumption-consummation. It prevents a relation of transitivity, “bereft of the other’s irreducibility and potential reciprocity”. The ‘to’ is a sign of *mediation between* which works against prescriptiveness and the possibility for subjection “to these truths, to this order”. It obviates the risk of annihilating the alterity of the other through reducing and transforming him/her into my property-object, into my proprietorial terrain, into “what is mine, into mine, meaning what is already a part of my field of existential or material properties”. The ‘to’ acts as a barrier against the cessation of the freedom of becoming through submission to another, and “safeguards a place of transcendence between us, a place of respect.....a place of possible alliance” – the irreducibility of a mystery between us (Irigaray, 2000: 19). As

Deutscher (2002: 80) writes: “The linguistically mediating ‘to’ is the symbolic emblem of the necessary mediation between self and other, of the nonreduction of the other to my self-capture”. Recognition of the infant’s immediate difference permits love to flourish (Frosh and Baraitser, 2003). An ethics of love between a mother and infant would require that which “unites us and leaves a space for us between us”, a provision of a space that “brings us together and distances us, of the distance that enables us to become, of the spacing necessary for coming together, of the transubstantiation of energy.....” (Irigaray, 1996: 148-149). It would require irreducibility *between-us* that operates against the constraints of fusional sameness, which would intervene *between-us* by inscribing death and immobility. An irreducibility would ensure and safeguard “the two and the between, the us and the between-us” (Irigaray, 2000: 16) so that horizontal transcendence cannot be overcome. In the instance of the dead mother, a vertical transcendence of submissive and possessive sameness forces the infant to obey the same exigencies and necessities as the mother in that the infant (and later the infant in the adult) remains mortgaged to the dead mother in “cannibalistic solitude”. The otherness of the infant in its becoming is thus radically and overwhelmingly delimited and imposed upon so that the infant remains in captivity and is later unable to commit to intimate involvement that entails a concern for the other. Modell (1999: 79) writes that patients who have experienced dead mothers, “evidence great difficulties in ‘being with the other’”. This infant-adult thus strolls amongst others, when leaving his/her “graveyard bed”, like “an extraterrestrial, the inaccessible citizen of the magnificent land of Death, of which no one could ever deprive him/her” (Kristeva, 1989: 71; 74). The otherness of the infant is eclipsed by a deathly identification with the sameness of the dead mother.

The dead mother’s wholehearted preoccupation with her loss fails to inculcate in her a sense of wonder and astonishment for the infant, a wonder that “keeps me from taking and assimilating directly to myself”, so that the infant “becomes no more than the result of the alchemy” of the mother’s loss. This sense of wonder is the “motivating force behind mobility in all its dimensions” – there is a need of wonder to move, for the “sap to circulate”, for an interval between self and other to be created, and for an excess to proliferate, an excess that resists assimilation or reduction to sameness. Wonder is the encounter of the “third dimension.....an intermediary..... neither the one nor the other”, which remains “faithful to becoming, to its virginity, its power of

impulsion, without letting go the support of bodily inscription” (Irigaray, 1993: 72-82). It alludes to “something extra which remains foreign to simple objective reduction, a something extra which is left to the other”, where the mother’s perception of her infant is accompanied by a respect for the infant as a subject with the possibility for becoming. In this way, the mother is able to see, touch and listen to her infant, knowing that what she perceives is not hers. The infant is sensed by the mother, yet this infant remains other, never reduced to an object. There is always an “extra cloud of invisibility”, something invisible in the gestures between two, whereby perception never amounts to an entirety, an absoluteness. As Kristeva (1986: 162) writes: “From one to the other, eternally, broken up` visions, metaphors of the invisible”. In the case of the dead mother, this difference (as invisibility) between is annulled through the horizon of sameness so that the relationship between two disappears and with that not only all possibility of intersubjective dialogue, but also an authentic interiority that would celebrate the freedom of the infant’s becoming (Irigaray, 2000: 40; 46).

In her experimental essay, “Stabat Mater”, Kristeva (1986: 182; 178-179; 183) suggests how the child’s arrival extracts the mother “out of her oneness and gives her the possibility – but not the certainty – of reaching out to the other, the ethical”. From the very beginning, there is “this other abyss that opens up between the body and what had been its inside: there is the abyss between the mother and her child”, the “abyss between what was mine and is henceforth but irreparably alien”. Once the umbilical cord has been severed, the infant becomes “an inaccessible other” – “And this, as early as the first gestures, cries, steps, long before *its* personality has become my opponent. The child, whether *he* or *she* is irremediably an other”<sup>5</sup>. The possibility to reach out, to gesture towards the other as an ethics of love, would entail a respect for a connection that celebrates the “overflowing laughter....., softly buoyed by the waves” that the “dialectics of the trinity and its supplements would be unable to subsume”. It should be stressed that I am in no way suggesting that the dead mother does not love her infant. Instead, I am exploring a certain quality of the mother’s love for her infant that may lend itself as the basis of an ethics of love, an ethics through love, or what

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<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere, Kristeva (1986: 206) writes: “The arrival of the child.....leads the mother into the labyrinths of an experience that, without the child, she would rarely encounter: love for an other. Not for herself, nor for an identical being, and still less for another person with whom ‘I’ fuse (love or sexual passion)”.

Kristeva (1986: 185) coins with the neologism “*herethics*”, which in turn may promote the potentiality of a third aesthetic<sup>6</sup>. This heretical ethics of love, as Edelstein (1993) proposes, is exemplified by a mother who deals with the other through love. Moreover, it is a relational practice and process where one acknowledges (recognises) the otherness of the other, the other as other, or, as Elizabeth Grosz (1989: xvii) puts it, there is a “response to the recognition of the primacy of alterity over identity”<sup>7</sup>. For Kristeva (1986: 297), a mother is precisely someone who can reach out to the other through an ethicality of love – “maternity is a bridge between singularity and ethics” – an ethics of love enhanced “not by constraint but by a logic, that is always a poly-logic, of love” (Kristeva, 1987c: 116). This ethics that is a poly-logic of love is an ethics of difference, an ethics-in-process (Oliver, 1993a). The mother may thus function as a prototype or metaphor for someone who gestures towards the other and facilitates an open space of love (Edelstein, 1992), which in turn ensures that she cannot “crush everything the other (the child) has that is specifically irreducible.....smothering any different individuality” (Kristeva, 1986: 185). This ethics of love would transfer “a certain gift that presumes a subjectification to the other” which works against “the risk of complete submission, a renunciation of the same for the other, and total enslavement” (Kristeva, 1996: 62). It ensures the “ethical necessity” of “giving the child to himself.....leav(ing) the child to his own generation” (Irigaray, 1991b: 181).

Kristeva (1986: 185) writes that “herethics is undeath, love (*a-mort* and *amour*)”. While McAfee (2004: 85) acknowledges that Kristeva’s suggestion of this new kind of ethicality is “tantalising but brief”, there may be some interesting possibilities for its development in the very fleeting references that Irigaray makes on the idea of

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<sup>6</sup> *Herethics* (*hérethique*) is constituted by joining the word heretical (*hérétique*) with ethics (*éthique*). Grosz (1989) suggests that ethics need not imply the institution of a moral or normative code or a series of abstract regulative principles. Instead, it is principally concerned with relations between self and other, the working out or negotiation with an other. Ethics (of love) in this sense should not be regarded as “being the same as morality” (Kristeva, 1986: 185), or “the kind of ‘ethics’ that consists in obedience to laws” (Kristeva, 1984: 110). For Kristeva, “the location of ethical practice should no longer lie in the reformulation and attempted perfection of rules and laws” (Ainley, 1990: 55). Ethics is necessary insofar as the maternal debt needs to be considered (The maternal considered in relation to the broad heterogeneity discussed in Chapter 3) (Grosz, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> This notion resonates with what Levinas (1969: 251) proposes in *Totality and Infinity*: “...the relation between me and the other commences in the *inequality* of terms, transcendent to one another, where alterity does not determine the other in a formal sense, as where the alterity of B with respect to A results simply from the identity of B, distinct from the identity of A. Here the alterity of the other does not result from its identity, but constitutes it: the other is the Other”.

*angels*. Angels, according to Irigaray, are yet to be made manifest or seen on the level of time and space, traversing distinct categories and forms. They are, as Barnard (2002: 183) suggests, “a form of undead or ‘not not being’” as a “nonsignifying corporeal mediation” between mother and infant. In considering angels, one needs to “rethink and rebuild the whole scene of representation” because angels are “guardians of free passage” and can never be “captured, domesticated” (Irigaray, 1993b: 42). They are go-betweens, creating passages between the visible and invisible (Chanter, 1995). These angels are never immobile and “circulate as mediators of that which has not yet happened, of what is still going to happen, of what is on the horizon”, endlessly reopening all enclosures of universes and transgressing limits. They destroy the “monstrous elements” that may hamper the possibility of a new ethicality of love, and function as “messengers of ethics.....without it being possible to say anything more than the gesture that represents them”. They remain “irreducible to philosophy, theology and morality”. Gesture seems to be their ‘nature’, “movement, posture, the coming-and-going between two”, and they are “imperious in their grace even as they remain imperceptible” (Irigaray, 1993: 15-16). They offer a “shape of welcome” without assimilating, reducing or devouring, and inhabit a strange world of silence – the interval, the residue of the *between-two* – a “wonder-full excess” (Oliver, 1993a: 172)<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, they are not useful except insofar as “that which designates a *place*, the very place of uselessness”. I think that this suggests that they do not measure up to a utilitarianism designed to reduce in terms of consumptive exchange or consummation, but instead open up a place (as gift) as interval in time-space<sup>9</sup>. Angels tell of another dimensionality, another incarnation, another threshold, “of an opening onto something beyond”, of an opening on to nothing, which gives access to the mucous and promotes a celebration as opposed to a disguised form of a master-slave relationship. The mucous is “where the borders of the body are wed in an embrace that transcends all limits – without, however, risking engulfment, thanks to the fecundity of the porous”. It is part of “that experience which is inexpressible yet forms the supple grounding of life”, which “in its touching, in its properties, would hinder the transcendence of a God foreign to the flesh, of a God of immutable and stable truth” (Irigaray, 1993: 17-19; 110). This threshold of (angelic) mucosity alludes

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<sup>8</sup> Lacan (1998b: 8) points out that the word ‘strange’ in French can be broken down – *étrange* – Être-ange – which refers to “angel-being” or “to be an angel”.

<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, Lacan (1998b: 21) suggests that he does not believe that angels “bear the slightest message, and it is in that respect that they are truly signifying”. Angels do not signify *any-thing*.



to a sensible transcendence, as opposed to an abstracted, synthetic transcendence, where the “porous nature of the body” gestures through the intimacy of the mucous and creates a “passage or a bridge between what is most earthly and what is most celestial” (Irigaray, 1991c: 190)<sup>10</sup>. This gesture however is “so subtle that one needs great perseverance to keep it from falling into oblivion, intermittency, deterioration, illness, or death”: The mucous is the space where the mother and her infant give each other life or death, regeneration or degeneration. It is held in reserve within the silence of an energy, “a growth and flourishing still to come.....an overture to a future that is still and always open”. It alludes to the aporetics of a “strange advent”, what remains unthought or not-yet thought, the “space for the projection of possible futures” (Grosz, 1989: 162), a becoming without telos, a movement linked to the ethics of love - to *herethics* (Irigaray, 1993: 17-19). *Herethics* as undeath and love is buoyed up by the laughter of the angels as intermediaries of love *between*, as mediating elements of the nontriangular, as facilitators of love that is “the vehicle which permits the passage between, the passage to and fro.....Instead of an abyss, or an enclosure which defines an inside and an outside, there should be a threshold” (Whitford, 1991: 164)<sup>11</sup>. *Herethics* is what offers up the possibility to “give(s) birth to a third, a mediator between”, a relational scenario where “we are at least three, each

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<sup>10</sup> The idea of a *sensible transcendental* takes into account that that any transcendence removed from the medium of physicality (the body, its skin and orifices, breath, movement, kinesis, posture etc), corporeal mediation (mediation by, of, and in the body), leads to paralysis and immobilisation. It refers to the unthought and unthinkable, which brings together what has been traditionally split – transcendence and immanence, body and spirit, material and ideal (Whitford, 1991) The sensible transcendental is in a sense nothing if not paradoxical (Chanter, 1995). It “comes into being through us, of which *we would be* the mediators and bridges” (Irigaray, 1993: 129). It is *between-us* as process and becoming, as a possibility for a creative response to the other. It is a “vital intermediary.....a perpetual journey, a perpetual transvaluation, a permanent becoming” (Irigaray, 1993: 27). Deutscher (2002: 103) regards the sensible transcendental as “my intimate relation to the infinite” or “in intimacy with infinity”.

<sup>11</sup> This laughter of the angels seems reminiscent of what Milan Kundera (1996: 186) rather playfully writes: “Things deprived suddenly of their supposed meaning, of the place assigned to them in the so-called order of things....make us laugh”. Cixous (1997: 22) suggests how laughter implies that “we escape or we have escaped death”. Laughter opens up a passage towards a joyful and exuberant affirmation of life overcoming the power of that which is death-bound, the spectre of death (Bray, 2004). It is “knowledge of a condition of possibility which gives nothing to know”. This laughter does not laugh *at* anything. It laughs at nothing, for nothing. It signifies nothing even though it is itself the “lightening of meaning”. It is a “strange serenity”, where “in this serenity knowledge lightens itself of the weight of knowledge, and meaning knows itself – or senses itself – as that extreme lightness which characterises the ‘exit from the identical’” (Nancy, 2002: 23-24). This laughter, as Derrida (1992d: 294-295) writes, is a laughter “of a gift without debt, light affirmation”, which is haunted by “a completely different music” - a music that makes space for the “coming of the other”.

of which is irreducible to any of the others: you, me and our work” (Irigaray, 1991b: 180-181).

In this chapter, I have attempted to explore the ways in which a psychically dead mother effects the quality of the generation of the third aesthetic and the subsequent remains of this third spatio-temporality in the infant’s unconscious, and in doing so I have endeavoured to elaborate further on the two non-concepts of the ‘third aesthetic’ and the ‘O-Function’. The dead mother fails to recognise the infant as *another* individual with the possibility for becoming and thus alienates the infant in a horizon of sameness. The intersubjective movement between mother and infant is profoundly impacted upon by the intrapsychic Third of the dead mother’s bereavement so that this Third traps them in a coil of paralysis and deadness that blocks the flow of angelic mucosity and tenderness, which forms the basis of a *herethics* of/through (silent) love, and this in turn inaugurates a –O-Function in the infant’s unconscious. The –O-Function is a testament to a legacy of entombment, to a reduced existence that the mother imparts to Her infant so that the future of the infant’s meaning-making experience is overwhelmed and burdened by this funereal past.

## 6. THE RUSTLE OF LANGUAGE: THE SCENE OF WRITING OTHERWISE

I ask of writing what I ask of desire: that it have no relation to the logic which puts desire on the side of possession, of acquisition, or even of that consumption-consummation which, when pushed to its limits with such exaltation, links (false) consciousness with death.

Hélène Cixous (1994: 27)

But I fail to find any such thing, so great is the gap between the words which come to me from the culture and this strange being (can it be no more than a matter of sounds?) which I fleetingly recall at my ear... Whereby we may understand what *description* is: it strives to render what is strictly mortal in the object by feigning (illusion by reversal) to suppose it, to desire it *living*: “as if alive” means “apparently dead”. The adjective is the instrument of this illusion; whatever it says, by its descriptive quality alone, the adjective is funereal.

Roland Barthes (1977: 68)

This is how I write: as if the secret that is in me were before me.

Hélène Cixous (1997: 67)

Even going to the depths of what he says, of what is said with his saying, man does not rejoin what gives itself this way in silence.

Luce Irigaray (1999: 134)

We judge new work by a template of the past from which it has already escaped.

Jeanette Winterson (1996: 38)

Language is my human endeavour. I have fatefully to go seeking and fatefully I return with empty hands. But – I return with the unsayable. The unsayable can be given to me only through the failure of my language. Only when the construct falters do I reach what it could not accomplish.

Clarice Lispector (1988: 170)

We are scientific because we lack subtlety.

Roland Barthes (1975: 61)

### Thinking–Writing the Unthinkable: The Cixouscience of Writing<sup>1</sup> or Writing the Imaginary of the Invisible

What is still provisionally called “writing”, as Derrida (1976: 4) proposes, is the wandering of a “way of thinking that is faithful and attentive to the ineluctable world of the future which proclaims itself at present, beyond the closure of knowledge”. Writing, as a possible guide of the future anterior, is what goes beyond the extension of symbolic (phonetic-alphabetic, the language of words, logocentrism) language. It is what transcends the discursive totality of the symbolic horizon as a system of signified truth (recognised in its dignity). As a result, writing signals a certain exteriority that goes beyond the confines of the privileging of logos, beyond the

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<sup>1</sup> The neologism “cixouscience” is used by Eric Prenowitz (1997b: 248) to describe the “exquisite extravagance” at the heart of Hélène Cixous’s writing, the “carefree poetics of caring and freeing” that Cixous’s writing embodies, especially and even exceptionally. Cixous is a poet-thinker, a thinking-writer-poet, who inhabits the precinct or mantle of what Derrida (1976: 26) has termed the “thinker of writing” (as opposed to the philosopher of the book).

parameters of a 'literal' meaning attributed to it whereby the signifier would signify a finite verity, "eternally thought and spoken in the proximity of a present logos". We however, as beings determined by the order of the symbolic, have no guarantee of access to this beyond and indeed, at least for now, rely on language of the symbolic in order to conceive intelligibly. All that is available to/for us at this point in time is to interrogate the systematic (theocratic) solidarity of concepts and gestures of thought that we may rather fallaciously believe to be innocently separated. This would call for an unsettling of the heritage to which concepts belong (totality, truth, evidence, essence, verisimilitude, empiricism, logic, meaning, presence, being, logos), though of course there is always the risk, the danger of "falling back within what is being deconstructed". The oblique and perilous movement of deconstruction is an attempt to mark the conditions and the limits of the efficacy of concepts, while also attempting to designate or allude to the crevice through which the yet unnameable glimmers beyond symbolic closure. In this way, deconstruction draws attention to the formidable difference in writing, to *différance writing*, which cannot be reduced to a form of presence nor recognised as the object of a science. The advent of writing in *différance* signals the advent of the play of the signifier on the fringes which in turn effaces "the limit starting from which one had thought to regulate the circulation of signs, drawing along with it all the reassuring signifieds". *Différance writing* disrupts the ideal synthesis of significations of metaphysical truth, of "reason thought within the lineage of logos", of all determined endeavours to reappropriate presence and irreducible difference within the horizon of absolute knowledge (of logos) or the metaphysics of the proper (Derrida, 1976: 15; 14; 7; 10).

*Différance writing* indicates a certain spacing as writing, a horizontality of spacing, which opens up writing to the exorbitance of its other, to a writing "without the line", between the lines through volumes. Beginning to write without the line, to write differently, as Derrida (1976: 86-87) suggests, implies beginning to read differently, to take into account a different organisation of time-space, and also to think differently because "what is thought today cannot be written according to the line". Thinking about spatial pluri-dimensionality and delinearised temporality (for writing) requires leaving the continuous line behind for "a blank.....a musical petition" (Cixous, 2002: 188). It requires a type of thinking that, as Hélène Cixous (1988: 142) proposes, gestures towards a "thinking in poetic overflowing", a thinking that does

not proceed in a restrictive manner, a poetic thinking that “may summon us with a larger appeal, and hence greater allure, upon a way of thought that tracks in thought what is most thought-provoking” (Heidegger, 1993b: 377). For Cixous (2002: 187; 194), the poet is not only someone who writes (makes) poems, but also one who considers what is outside the logos – “poets before poetry” who consider the limitless realms of language including silence, the body and so on<sup>2</sup>. One of the mysteries of writing, of language, is that what is written underneath the ground, underneath the surface level (while we write or weave something on the surface) is an elsewhere “where language goes on weaving kinds of effects of meaning, of music, and so forth which we don’t know of”. This elsewhere (of writing), this ‘poem’, designates something that refuses appellation, a wordless, nameless “starry wandering about which we sense, without ever seeing it, the presence of an order other than our own” (Cixous, 1998: 5). What I have (tentatively, cautiously, under erasure) named [(re)called] the ‘third aesthetic’ (and its remains in the ‘O-Function’) alludes to an other energetic movement of time-space that indicates a world which is a world in itself, something that is “not of this world, our own, the visible” (Cixous, 1998: 5), *another* world, a world that is a world that is other, or perhaps even the un-wor(l)d or non-wor(l)d within the world. The endeavour to name and describe the third aesthetic is effectively an attempt to think the unthinkable, the unthought<sup>3</sup>, which for Cixous (1993: 38) is precisely what thinking is – “thinking is trying to think the unthinkable” – just as “writing is writing what you cannot know before you have written: its is preknowing and not knowing, blindly, with words”. To think the unthinkable, a seeming contradiction in terms, requires a “thinking in preparation” (Cixous, 1989: 38), the “thinking of tolerance, the thinking that does not sever, the thinking capable of concavity, of turning in on itself to make room for difference” (Cixous, 1997: 83). For Cixous (1991: 161), this approach to thinking does not reject the uncertainties of

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<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere, Cixous (1991: 114) writes about the poet who “must have thoroughly rubbed and exhausted one’s eyes in order to get rid of the thousands of scales we start with from making up our eyes” – “I call ‘poet’ any writing being who sets out on this path, in quest of what I call the second innocence, the one that comes after knowing, the one that no longer knows, the one that knows how not to know”.

<sup>3</sup> The notion of the unthought (bearing in mind Bollas) may take on numerous variations and meaning possibilities. It may signal what has not (yet) been thought (and thus what is still to be thought), or perhaps what cannot be thought. The ‘un’ may also signal the unconscious of thought. For Blanchot (1992: 56), the “not yet” of thought indicates “the failure of the present in regard to what there would be to think”. In all these instances of the unthought or “not yet” thought, there is a movement away from thought in service of a Cartesian instrumentality to thought that calls into question, to a thinking that is questioning as opposed to mere calculation.

who and where; it is a thinking where one does not necessarily know, where one learns “*knowing how not to know*” which is not equated with not knowing but rather with knowing how to avoid getting closed in by the hegemony and edifice of the logos. It is truly a thinking that is an “apprenticeship of humility” (Cixous, 1997: 83), where “thought has textual space” (Calle-Gruber, 1997b: 144) and thinking raises questions about the limits of knowledge.

Derrida (1976: 93) following Heidegger suggests that “thinking is what we already know we have not yet begun”<sup>4</sup>. Indeed, Heidegger (1993b: 369-370) writes that we should be “ready to learn thinking” with the proviso that such learning is invariably accompanied by the admission that “we are not yet capable of thinking” because “in order to be capable of thinking, we need to learn it”. We are still not yet capable of thinking because in the case of the unthought or the not-yet thought which refuses arrival, for example, thinking turns itself away and withdraws from us. As a result, in order to approach or gesture towards possible ways of thinking the unthought, we need to “learn only if we always unlearn at the same time” – “we can learn thinking only if we radically unlearn what thinking has been traditionally”. For Heidegger, (1993b: 374; 377-378), what withdraws and refuses arrival, that which cannot or has not yet been transposed into the language that we speak, “may even concern and claim man more essentially than anything present that strikes and touches him – touches him in the surely mysterious way of escaping him by its withdrawal”. The way to learning thinking is a long and arduous journey where “we dare take only a few steps” which in turn takes us to “places that we must explore to reach the point where only the leap will help further”. The leap takes us abruptly to a place where everything is other and different, “so different that it strikes us as strange”. The abruptness signals a chasm’s edge where “what the leap takes us to will confound us”. Thinking is invariably confounding – “all the more in proportion as we keep clear of prejudice”. To keep clear of prejudice, “we must be ready and willing to listen” since readiness “allows us to surmount the boundaries in which all customary views are confined, and to reach a more open terrain”. This more open terrain leads to

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<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere, Derrida (1981b: 44) suggests that what is called ‘thought’ should be placed in inverted commas because it is the “illusory autonomy of a discourse or a consciousness whose hypostasis is to be deconstructed”. ‘Thought’ is the effect of a *différance* of forces and it therefore calls into question the “deep-laid metaphysical prejudice whereby the values of truth and reason are equated with a privileged epistemic access to thoughts ‘in the mind’ of those presumed or authorised to know” (Norris, 2004: xix)

a thinking that remains unassuming because “its task is only of a preparatory, not of a founding character” (Heidegger, 1993c: 436). It is not a thinking that espouses through writing an absolute knowledge or ultimate evidence. Instead, it is a thinking that goes beyond mere calculation to deepen meditation, a thinking that moves from a thinking that merely represents or explains to a “thinking that responds and recalls” (Heidegger, 1971: 181). It is a thinking that “cannot be thought without thinking the retention of difference”, without thinking difference in remains/reserve (Derrida, 1976: 46).

Thinking the poetics of the unthought, reminiscent of Bion (1962) in his essay “A Theory of Thinking”<sup>5</sup>, requires another economy of thinking that remains responsive to the horizon of the unthought which continually withdraws. This other approach to thinking, as Bray (2004: 46-47) suggests, opens up a space that is not restricted by the logic of exchange, but is rather “fecund, poetic, maternal” in which the gift of the other as unthought operates through the currents of metonymical movement, creating “pools of significant silence which nourish thought”. For Kristeva (1986b), thought in exile from itself, in excess of itself (alluding to what is not-yet thought, to the music of silence), thought as dissidence, as difference, attempts to conjure up, to intimate towards, the impossible possibility of the unnameable, the unrepresentable. It is a way of surviving in the face of the *dead father*, of refusing to give in to the law of death, of refusing to bind oneself to A Meaning guaranteed by the logos of the dead father. Unthought-thought is “paradoxical thought that has no name but resides at the border of an art of living and a mode of writing”. It thinks both with and beyond language in the sense that it thinks (rather uneasily through language) what cannot necessarily be captured by the dictates of magisterial logocentrism. It alludes to the “distant horizon to which thought gains access when it tries to think of itself at the borders” (Kristeva, 2002: 115; 260). The challenge of thinking-writing the unthought of the third aesthetic poses the problem of thinking-writing the process of fluid experience that is in large part secret and that refuses to yield to the division and reduction of symbolic language. It ideally requires, as Kristeva (2002: 252) suggests, a “state of writing, outside the rough draft: a sort of timelessness (since the rough draft, when its hour

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<sup>5</sup> In this essay, Bion (1962) regards thinking as dependent on the development of thoughts. Thinking is an apparatus called into existence to cope with thoughts.

tolls, will settle me into a temporality of production)<sup>6</sup>. This state of writing is accompanied by (musical) notes – a pre-rough draft of fleeting traces that will have taken place in a future-to-come prior to the authority of logocentric knowledge. It is in a sense “before books, inside of writing” where the eventual unfolding of words will be held out in the other’s direction (Cixous, 1989: 46). It is an attempt to allude to a “reality prior to my language (which) exists as an unthinkable thought” (Lispector, 1988: 169) - an unthinkable thought that seems authorless and that “frees itself from the slavery of the word” (Lispector, 1989: 76). Here, the “silence is such, that thought no longer thinks” (Lispector, 1992: 85), and “thinking is not what we think” (Cixous, 1998: 35).

Cixous (cited in MacGillivray, 1994: xi) proposes that the act of writing itself concerns writing the unwritable, the unthinkable, the “almost impossible to write”. To write is to enter into a difficult relationship with language, but this is not without its pleasure because as Barthes (1975: 6) suggests, writing can be “the science of the various blisses of language, its Kama Sutra” whereby language is redistributed according to other mobile and dilatable/dilatory edges, a teeming flux always ready to assume different contours. The pleasure of writing is an attempt to shift discourse and “to give it the shock of a question” that refuses to take shelter in a centred system of a philosophy of meaning. Barthes regards this shock of a question as pleasure, though he draws the reader’s attention to the “two policemen ready to jump on you” for linking the question of writing to pleasure – “the political policeman and the psychoanalytical policeman: futility and/or guilt, pleasure is either idle or vain, a class notion or an illusion” (Barthes, 1975: 64; 47). Writing through language can be the colliding with prosodic rhythms which “unsettles the reader’s historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, (and) brings to a crisis his relation with language”. It can be the “relish for language...an element of the art of living”, as opposed to a mere “instrument of decor (phraseology)” (Barthes, 1975: 14; 38). Continuing on from this frame between the lines, I would like in this chapter to imagine what type of *approach* to writing, at least

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<sup>6</sup> Kristeva (2002: 253) regards the rough draft as an “artisanal stage”, the intermediary passage or interval from experience to text where the choice of words and construction of phrasing begins to take form.



in theory given that I am writing about writing<sup>7</sup>, would be needed to think-write-consider-negotiate the impossible possibility of the non-concept. I would like to attempt to speculate (speculate being the operative word since I am speculating on writing that forms part of the domain of the unexpected future-to-come) on a possible orientation to writing needed to explore and delineate the non-concept. The chapter will thus necessarily be more experimental and utopian in its aspirations, and as a result there is the possibility that it may end up privileging a certain type of ‘good’ writing. The affirmation of an almost ideal(istic), utopian speculative, a fantastical imagining of textual aspiration, alludes to an endeavour to consider an alphabet (primarily conceptually for now given our dependence on symbolic language) that may gesture towards the non-concept and facilitate a more productive negotiation of its intricacies. For Barthes (1977), the text is ultimately a utopia in that its semantic function attempts to make language signify insofar as it is declared impossible. The text hastens towards “a dreamed-of language whose freshness, by a kind of ideal anticipation, might portray the perfection of some new Adamic world where language would no longer be alienated” (Barthes, 1968: 88). It should be stressed that this chapter is primarily a conceptual or ideas-based exploration of an approach to writing the non-concept. Nevertheless, the ideas themselves (for this writing) will demand a shift in register and representation (form) in order to approximate some of the complexity of what they are trying to gauge. Beginning with Derrida’s musings on psychical or dream writing, and moving through Cixous’s work on the *poethics* of writing and Barthes on the voluptuousness of textuality, I would like to explore how these writers have endeavoured to evoke writing’s imaginary (im)possibilities through an approach that Cixous (1999b: 211) has identified as “philosophicopoetical meditations”, where one allows oneself to speak of writing in a more idealistic fashion, to let oneself “be carried off by the poetic word” though there is always the obligation or qualification that “my steed or my barge and my poetic body never do forget the philosophical rigour” (Cixous, 1984: 152). Finally, I will attempt to recapitulate (or possibly capitulate to) the central themes, that is to say the central aporias, of the research project.

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<sup>7</sup> Writing about writing would be what Barthes (1977: 66) considers as “language to the second degree” whereby there is an attempt to reveal in any discourse the disposition or interplay of its degrees. This disposition is ultimately infinite.

## A Lithography Before Words

In his essay, “Freud and the Scene of Writing”, Derrida (1978: 199-200) suggests that there are elements in psychoanalysis that can only be uneasily contained within logocentric enclosures, and it is for this reason that during decisive moments of his itinerary, Freud resorts to metaphorical models that are not borrowed from spoken language, verbal forms or even phonetic writing, but rather from a script that is not subject to the spoken word and that does not transcribe living, full speech as present to itself. Moreover, it is this type of scriptural gesture that “opens up a new kind of question about metaphor, writing, and spacing in general”. Derrida refers specifically to Freud’s creation of a mystic writing pad whereby the structure of the psychical apparatus is represented by a writing machine, by “a text whose essence is irreducibly graphic”. Derrida is not concerned with whether this *metaphor* of the writing machine is a good one, but rather, more critically, with questions that pertain to what psychical writing may come to mean, what the psyche must be if it is to be represented by a text, and what type of relationship must there be between psyche, writing and spacing in order for such a metaphoric transition to be possible. The mystic writing pad (the *Wunderblock*, the *bloc magique*) proceeds towards a configuration of traces which, for Derrida, “can no longer be represented except by the structure and functioning of writing” that refuses any appropriation into a simple presence. It alludes to the problems of the psychic apparatus in its structure and to the problems of the psychic text in its fabric. Writing signifies a structure which is always already inhabited by the trace<sup>8</sup>, and it is therefore rendered as a broader concept when compared to the empirical concept of writing which denotes a system of notations on material substance (Spivak, 1976). Nonetheless, writing in its normal sense, as Johnson (1993) points out, remains a model for this other ‘writing’ which is its condition. This *other* type of writing, which Derrida (1978: 207-209) links to topographical, temporal and

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<sup>8</sup> The notion of writing as being haunted by the trace signals, as Blanchot (1992: 17) suggests, the “search for what was never written in the present, but in a past to come”. For Kristeva (2000: 194) following Barthes, writing does not offer itself to the immediate and therefore needs to be interpreted *through* the immediate, next to the appearance of signs and in addition to what is named. It is the “inexhaustible aspect of meaning” accessible only through infinite interpretation that alludes to the locus of meaning without necessarily naming it. Writing suggests, in short, translinguistic meanings (traces) that are never verbalised in the categories of (symbolic) language. It is, as Norris (1991) suggests, an endless dissemination or displacement of meaning that goes beyond the reach of stable, self-authenticating knowledge, and it proliferates a shadow which falls between intent and meaning, utterance and understanding.

formal regression in dreams, is a path which leads us back into a landscape of writing – “not a writing which simply transcribes, a stony echo of muted words, but a lithography before words: metaphonetic, nonlinguistic, alogical”. It is a writing that displaces or disseminates into a “web of silent script”, a “forest of script”, and thus problematises a certain kind of cryptography that makes use of a decoding method in which each sign can be translated into another sign which has a known, discrete and specific meaning. This other writing as psychical writing “puts words on stage without becoming subservient to them”. It remains irreducible to speech and includes, like hieroglyphics, pictographic, ideogrammatic and phonetic elements<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, it cannot be read in terms of a code, even though it works with a mass of elements that have been codified in the course of an individual or collective history. It inscribes an irreducible “idiomatic residue” in its operations, lexicon and syntax. Psychical writing, which prefigures the meaning of writing in general, alludes to a kind of ‘primary’ writing where the difference between the signifier and the signified is never radical. While it is “made to bear the burden of interpretation”, it eludes an exhaustive or absolutely infallible code of deciphering, of translation, which would permit the substitution or transformation of signifiers while retaining the same originary signified. If there is the (impossible) possibility for psychical writing, then it must produce the space and materiality of the signifier itself. Perhaps the attempt to reinscribe or reinstate materiality and spatiality may manifest itself as poetry<sup>10</sup>, revolutionary poetic language as Kristeva (1984) would suggest<sup>11</sup>; however there is the need to take into account that such an endeavour may merely translate into yet another metaphor about the metaphor of psychical (other) writing.

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<sup>9</sup> Johnson (1993) points out that the hieroglyph should not be regarded as a dead symbol waiting decipherment. Instead it should be seen from the point of view of its production whereby it is the figure of a process of writing rather than a static script, and this process is effectively invisible.

<sup>10</sup> For Cixous (1994b: lvi), poetry procures for us a beyond of language – “that which the poem makes us hear, its own music plus the echo of that music”. The poem signals not only a certain interiority, its message or content-meaning, but also “this beach, this bank, this shore, between its music and silence. Poems are surrounded by silence”.

<sup>11</sup> As a reminder, Kristeva (2002: 106) suggests how the “germination of meaning before signification” can be found in the “vibration of poetry and in the pleasure of style, the ultimate index of feeling-thinking subjectivity”. Here Kristeva refers to the rhythmic and melodic semiotic modality of language, a pre-language prior to the child’s acquisition of language. This semiotic modality, distinct from a symbolic modality with its signs and syntax, makes itself manifest in the vocalisations, rhythm and alliteration that the adult savours in poetic language. It is a “state of language”, a “precondition” and “a sort of atmosphere or tonality”.

The horizontal impossibility of translating without loss the spatiality and materiality of the signifier, the idiom of the scene of writing, finds its basis in the vertical impossibility of the psychic apparatus that refers to the transition of unconscious thoughts through the preconscious towards consciousness. For Derrida (1978: 211), there is a certain danger in the metaphoric concept of translation or transcription in that it “presupposes a text which would be already there, immobile: the serene presence of a statue, of a written stone or archive whose signified content might be harmlessly transported into the milieu of a different language, that of the preconscious or the conscious”. In attempting to understand how unconscious thought makes its way through into consciousness, Freud (1991c: 710) suggests that one should not view it as “the forming of a second thought situated in a new place, like a transcription which continues to exist alongside the original; and the notion of forcing a way through into consciousness must be kept carefully free from any idea of a change of locality”. In this way, Freud attempts to address the conventional spatial or topographical representation of the psychic apparatus by accounting for its energetics whereby the movement from the unconscious to consciousness does not imply a simple change of location, nor that the unconscious thought and its conscious ‘translation’ subsist in differing locations (Johnson, 1993). The conscious text is not a transcription because “there is no text *present elsewhere* as an unconscious one to be transposed or transported”. There is no unconscious truth that may be subject to rediscovery by virtue of having been written elsewhere because the unconscious text is not conceivable in terms of an originary form of presence, but rather is already a weave of traces, “a text nowhere present”. Therefore the transition to consciousness is not a transcription duplicating an unconscious writing as a derivative or repetitive writing (Derrida, 1978: 211). A formation present in the unconscious does not imply a definitive spatial or temporal delimitation (Johnson, 1993). The transition to consciousness, or what accedes to consciousness, in its very secondariness, remains originary and irreducible, and it is this transition, as Derrida (1978: 212-213) suggests, that is useful in considering the “possibility of a writing advanced as conscious and as acting in the world (the visible exterior of the graphism)” in terms of a space of psychical writing, of nontranscriptive writing that refutes the immobilisation and congealment of energy within a “naïve metaphoric of place”. Some kind of simple metaphor of location cannot account for the components of energy in the functioning of the psychical apparatus. The impossible possibility of

psychical writing, by necessity, must be accompanied by a radical rethinking of the spatiality or topology of this writing because the writing of psychical otherness is “not a displacement of meanings within the limpidity of an immobile, pregiven space” and cannot be understood in terms of a simple, homogenous structure. The energetics of this other writing cannot be coded without ceasing to be diaphanous; however this does not limit meaning but rather produces it and allows it to proliferate. Writing, as the spacing out of meaning, does not obey the linearity of logical time, the time of consciousness or preconsciousness, and thus the border between this psychical writing and “the space of the stage (*scène*) of dreams” remains uncertain. It is a writing that alludes to the very “strangeness of the logico-temporal relations in dreams”, operating as a scene and not a tableau, a painting of signifiers that includes within itself spacing as difference (Derrida, 1978: 217), a *virtualising* of space which signals its “detachment from purely empirical observation or determination” (Johnson, 1993: 85)<sup>12</sup>.

The scene of psychical writing assembles the diversity of the modes and functions of signs in dreams so that “every sign – verbal or otherwise – may be used at different levels, in configurations and functions which are never prescribed by its ‘essencē’, but emerge from a play of differences” (Derrida, 1978: 22). Freud (2001b: 177), for example, specifies that it seems “more appropriate to compare dreams with a system of writing than with language” whereby the interpretation of a dream is “analogous to the decipherment of an ancient pictographic script such as Egyptian hieroglyphics”, and the “ambiguity of various elements of dreams finds a parallel in these ancient systems of writing”. Seeking out a space for writing otherwise entails finding a different writing space that is not some kind of “pure exterior without relation to itself”. Like the mystic writing pad, it is a writing that signifies “a depth without bottom, an infinite allusion”. It implicates infinite depth within meaning whereby writing is accounted for as a trace that indicates not only the “horizontal discontinuity of a chain of signs”, but also the “interruption and restoration of contact between the various depths of psychical levels” – the remarkably heterogeneous spatio-temporal fabric of the movement of psychical permutations. It is a writing that signals neither

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<sup>12</sup> This notion is especially interesting in light of Cixous’s (1997: 27) suggestion that the dream does not cheat with metaphor - “In the dream there is a production which is necessary because it is dictated not by a wish or a consciousness of writing but by the drama that is played out behind thought”.

the continuity of a line nor the homogeneity of a volume, but instead it functions as a differentiated depth, as spacing in *différance* (Derrida, 1978: 222-224). Its maintenance, its present/ce (*maintenant*), is not simple in that it is written only as we read-write and it cannot be exhausted by one discursive structure alone. “That which, in Freud’s discourse,” as Derrida writes (1978: 228), “opens itself to the theme of writing results in ‘psychoanalysis being not simply psychology – nor simply psychoanalysis’”. The scene of psychical writing, caught up in a metonymy perpetually at work, indicates a beyond and beneath of closure, what is spoken without being said, what is thought without being thought. It is written and simultaneously erased, “designating itself while indicating intraworldly relations”. It is, in short, “a writing without ink” (Derrida, 1978: 229) that signals what is “beyond the *seen* of writing”, beyond what is seen of writing in a naïve and empirical conception of it as present and open to decipherment. What remains pivotal is not the static scene of writing, but rather its dynamic *mise en scène* (Johnson, 1993: 91).

### **The Poethics of Writing: From (Closed) Work to (Open Work as) Text**

All that falls under the umbrella-term ‘concept’, all that is subjugated and easily transmitted and picked up implies a certain stoppage, a loss and caging of an object or phenomenon that is “always in the process of seething, of emitting, of transmitting itself”<sup>13</sup>. A phenomenon in and of itself is in reality, as Cixous (1997: 4) points out, a “small virtual volcano”, whereas the attempt at description or conceptualisation of this phenomenon invariably leads to a certain discontinuity or cut. This is not to anathematise conceptualisation, which remains at times indispensable in advancing understanding, but rather to highlight its prosthetic status and its caging tendencies (Cixous speaks of it as a “dangerous aid”). There is however the possibility of opening up conceptualisation to writing that “chooses the interval space, the between, the in-between, the *entredoux*<sup>14</sup>, and that works in the place of otherness” (Calle-Gruber, 1997: 8). This writing is a staging of otherness which launches us into a

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<sup>13</sup> Elsewhere, Cixous (1999b: 211) describes the phenomenon as the “tempest before the immobilisation, the capture, the concept. Where there is already the murmur of words but not yet proper-name-words. In the time when God is only yet a forename of God”. The phenomenon is the “still-boiling” space-time “before the cooled fall-out of the narrative when we feel and it is not yet called such-and-such, this, him or her”.

<sup>14</sup> ‘*Entredoux*’ which translates literally as ‘*betweentwo*’ or perhaps ‘*entertwo*’ designates an in-between of space-time between two things, points or events (Prenowitz, 1997: 113).

space-time whose coordinates may seem strange in that they “un-recount, un-know, un-arrive” (Cixous, 1997: 11). For Cixous (1997: 48), writing is always already in the modality of the ‘if’ or the ‘perhaps’ in that it is an extraordinary attempt to “x-ray-photo-eco-graph” the space-time of an encounter between two people and “to keep the record of these invisible events” – “If one could conserve the radiation of this encounter in a transparent sphere, and then listen to what is produced in addition to the exchange identifiable in the dialogue – this is what writing tries to do”. Writing is an attempt to “hear the rumour of a great number of messages that are expressed in other ways” – glances, tensions of the body, continuities and discontinuities. The scene of writing or rather its art as theatre is about endeavouring to make this invisible vast material, what is expressed otherwise, appear “at sentence-corners, with silences, with mute words; all that will not have been pronounced but will have been expressed with means other than speech – and that can be taken up in the web of writing”. This web is situated in the “musical and silent environment of the text” (Cixous, 1997: 67-68) which produces effects in/through writing where phenomena start to self-signify “beyond the simple moment of vibration”, and reverberate through echoes of the body and foreign memories. It is a writing that is a “resonance chamber made of (the) silences” (Calle-Gruber, 1997: 69), a writing under the sign of “*poethics*” which opens up (gives to itself/gives itself to) a more broad spectrum of possibility that gestures towards the “quick of life under the immurements” (Cixous, 1997: 82). *Poethics* as writing is writing by the other for the text, a giving of the word, a giving before the word as in a dream where the dream of giving “carries between the two and beyond the two” to an in-between between the two. It allows the gift of the dream to breathe in writing, striding/striving towards the dream, advancing on the dream, giving oneself up to it, in advance, while bearing in mind the ineluctability of the interpretation-interruption of the dream – a certain separation that tightens and compresses the dream (Derrida, 1997: 120).

The *poethics* of writing initiates a “searching for the names of the shadows between words” (Cixous cited in Calle-Gruber, 1997b: 153), and it is thus an approach of “pushing back forgetfulness, of never letting oneself be surprised by the abyss. Of never becoming resigned or consoled”. It is a writing that is never entirely or absolutely read and it refutes the possibility of a conclusion because it always already remains to be studied, sought, invented. It gives one the “slow time” to approach the

*betweenus* which is needed to open and leave space for the other, for what can only be written “in parentheses, as a subtitle”, for the impossible that “can’t be justified before a philosophical tribunal, can’t pass the bar of monological discourses or mass-mediated imaginations”. It is what works against our time of the “flat thought-screen, of newspaper-thinking” (Cixous, 1991: 3; 62; 146; 62), evoking a writing within writing, a dream-writing that returns to writing “that link, that growth, that orientation” that alludes to “the stream, the slender silent stream with its singing arms, the blood flow in the veins between bodies, the wordless dialogue from blood to blood.....the magic flux full of silent words from.....the other shore” (Cixous, 1998: 3). The *poethics* of writing is an attempt to reformulate existing structures through an inclusion of otherness that refuses to appropriate or annihilate difference and instead brings into existence “alternate forms of relation, perception and expression” (Sellers, 1994: xxix), and the possibility for an “alternative economy of writing and representation” (Shiach, 1991: 39; 68). It exceeds the logic of the binary, proffering an “elsewhere” that inscribes “beyond genres and oppositions, where the real is not definable by an opposite..... where, in the plureal, the other place to come announces itself”. This other place in *plureal* is what alludes to the threshold of the infinite, though as Cixous points out, it is still too early in history to succeed in getting there as it remains to be invented on the basis of transformations of thought structures that govern Occidental society- “This change is not definable now, within our discourse. But it announces itself, outside everything: opposition, aggression, enslavement” (Cixous, 1994: 28-33). It is what cannot be appropriated and captured “under the Empire of the Selfsame” since it ineluctably admits that there is a passageway into alterity where an in-between, a space between, inscribes the “paradoxical logic of an economy without reserve” which exceeds sameness through difference/ *différance*, and makes another way of knowing circulate. The *poethics* of writing, in its search for the *plureal*, affirms that “there will be some elsewhere where the other will no longer be condemned to death”. It affirms where desire makes a certain fiction, a certain virtuality, exist, and it taps into the “uncontrollable resources” of writing which “deals with the no-deal, relates to what gives no return”. The something (as no-thing) elsewhere can be alluded to with “some love....that imposes its necessity as a value without letting itself be intimidated by cultural blackmail, the sacrosanction of social structures” (Cixous, 1986b: 79; 86; 97).



The *poethics* of writing is a writing that “makes love other”. It is permeated with/by signs of love. Cixous speaks about the “other-love” as “writing’s first name”, where it “dares the other” and, through difference, it refuses to be “shut up inside the paradox of the gift-that-takes or in the illusion of onely uniting”<sup>15</sup>. It is a writing through the exchange of other-love, a gesture of (m)other love, a “desire-that-gives.....in moving, open, transitional space”. It “betweens.....where one is always infinitely more than one” (Cixous, 1986b: 99-100). It is a writing that comes “with an angel’s footsteps”, like “humid silent music.....going up and down with ancient angels’ footsteps along the ladder of writing”, where the feet morph into blood and unfreeze the “glacial air blowing around the words”. It is a *poethics* as writing that alludes to the “gardens of Encounters, silent at the opening of memory, before all oblivion-memory” where “all is hieroglyph” in this “immensity of the infinite”. It pertains to “all (that) writes, about two thousand years before books” where in-between there is “only this river” (Cixous, 1989: 10; 62; 48; 70; 68). To admit to this writing is, as Cixous (1981: 254) suggests, to work “(in) the in-between, inspecting the process of the same and of the other.....the ensemble of the one and the other, not fixed in sequences of struggle and expulsion or some other form of death but infinitely dynamised by an incessant process of exchange from one subject to another...a multiple and inexhaustible course with millions of encounters and transformations of the same into the other and into the in-between”. It is a writing that carries rather than contains and is able to stand and tolerate (as opposed to arrest) the other’s freedom so that the other is approached with a loving fidelity (attention) that lets it come into writing without capture, mastery and appropriation. This loving fidelity opens up thought by keeping alive the wonderful gift of the other in its perpetual strangeness through an exploration and working through of the ethical potentials of the in-between or the liminal.

To consider the impossible possibility of a *poethics* of writing is to consider a radical reconceptualisation of the frame of a work which segues into a “spiritual glory” of a fabric of words. It is an interweaving of tissue that subverts the notion of a written object whose meaning is “univocal, and definitive, determined by the correctness of

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<sup>15</sup> Lie (1999: 8) describes this type of writing as a “flooding forth, a gift without any demand of a return, a real gift which will not create dependence, but freedom”. It is a writing that is “both process and gift, process as gift (without return)” (Manners, 1999: 156).

the signs which carry it". The frame of the text (as a work) can no longer be considered as a sealed unit whose closure arrests meaning and "prevents it from trembling or becoming double, or wandering". It is not what "closes the work, chains it to its letter, rivets it to its signified", but rather a fragment of language that calls into question the status and usage of its language which cannot be considered as a mere instrument or 'as purely transparent. Effectively, the *poethics* of writing would necessitate a shift from a work as a computable, finished object to a work as text which "can exist only through a language other than itself" (Barthes, 1981: 32-33; 40). Indeed, Barthes (1989: 57-60) suggests that while the work is held in the hand, the text is held in/through language. The text signals a mutation, an epistemological shift from the work as a "fragment of substance" (the format of the book and its position/portion in space through socio-historical determinations) to that which is in production and does not stop (at a library shelf, for example)<sup>16</sup>. Its constitutive moment is one of *traversal*, functioning, in activity, behind the limit of the *doxa*, as always *paradoxical*<sup>17</sup>. The text refuses to close upon a signified, and instead "practices the infinite postponement of the signified" where its field is dilatory, that of the play of the signifier's *infinitude*, which is caught up by serial movements of dislocations and variations – the currents of metonymy. The irreducible plurality of the text depends on the passage and traversal of dissemination (and not on an interpretation, however liberal and polysemic), on "the stereographic plurality of the signifiers which weave it (etymologically, the text is a fabric)", as opposed to a mere "ambiguity of its contents". It is what alludes to the multiple and irreducible, issuing from heterogeneous space-time dimensions whereby the "combinative operation" of encounters that are "half identifiable" and "issue from known codes" are rendered in difference/*différance*. Text can only be text in its difference as an echo of a vast stereophonic texture. In considering the readability of Clarice Lispector's text, *The Stream of Life*, Hélène Cixous (1989b: ix), for example, suggests that "one may have to find other modes, other ways of approaching it: one can sing it. One is in another world". Indeed, she speaks of "writing with one's ears" (1997: 64), writing with "the

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<sup>16</sup> Derrida (1976: 18) would suggest that the work as book, which stops at the library shelf, refers to a totality profoundly alien to the sense of writing. It is thus the "encyclopaedic protection of theology and logocentrism" against the disruption of writing and difference.

<sup>17</sup> Barthes (1989: 58) considers *doxa* to be public opinion powerfully aided by mass communications and defined by its "energy of exclusion, its *ensorship*". It attempts to resist the plurality, the invasion of meaning which confers upon existence an infinite intelligibility which cannot be easily arrested or determined.

heart of our ears”, writing with “ears of meditation” (1989: 66; 18), whereby the rhythmic remains of musicality in writing signals an architect(x)ture of the mystery of difference in what is given to be read. The text of/in writing keeps the “closest-possible” to the “more than that” whereby the economy of the text, its woven construction, “makes heard” the “prolongations of meaning”, the vibrations and resonance of silence (Cixous, 1997: 65).

The textuality of a text alludes to the playing of language, on the order of meaning, like a musical instrument (Cixous, 1997). It is productivity, the “very theatre of a production” in that, even when written, “it does not stop working, maintaining a process of production”. The text works language by deconstructing the “language of communication, representation, or expression (where the individual or collective subject may have the illusion that he is imitating something or expressing himself)”. It alludes to “another language, voluminous, having neither bottom nor surface”. Its space is the mobile play of signifiers that pluralises “the monological, legal status of signification” by transforming the level of the product of signification into the production of an other logic of *signifiance*. *Signifiance* is not a work which demonstrates the mastery of language, but rather a “radical work” which leaves nothing intact and signals a “without-endness”. It invokes the notion of “an infinite labour (of the signifier upon itself)” so that it refutes the notion of a finished structure and promotes a massive overflowing. *Signifiance* is the “text at work”, the “glow, the unpredictable flash of the infinites of language”, which is “either overflowed or overlaid by a plurality of logics other than mere predicative logic”. Its signifying work, its signifying overflow, “closely resemble(s) the dream-work” whereby what the dream-work and the text-work have in common is their “labour outside exchange, inaccessible to calculation” (Barthes 1981: 36-41). *Signifiance* subverts the constraints of the traditional ideology of meaning – verisimilitude, readability, expressivity – by puncturing or perforating its discourse without rendering it meaningless. It is an overcoming, an undoing that “communicates to its reader a strange condition: at once excluded and at peace”, and it opens out (between) to a “passage from another language, like the exercise of a different physiology”<sup>18</sup>. The

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<sup>18</sup> Barthes (1977: 50; 58; 66-67) even writes about a “third language.....language upon language” which scatters signifieds to infinity, to “no last word”. In this way, any language – as word, proposition or idea – that assumes a set and solid state, any language that is *stereotyped* (in Greek, *stereos* means

text in *signifiance*, its edges and seams, remains unpredictable and “irregular (in the pattern of its veins)” (Barthes, 1975: 29-30; 37). It espouses “floating meanings”, “volumes of meaning, not lines of meaning” (Barthes, 2004: 27), which proliferate metaphors (in profusion) without reducing them to a final signified, to a final and absolute secret to be revealed. There is an (ideal) attempt to access “a meaning bathed in light, as in a dream” where what is perceived is the excess of a situation, the more-than-that. (Barthes, 1977: 80).

The text in *signifiance* is an attempt to hear the “thrill of meaning” that corresponds to an elsewhere that collapses into in-significance and remains fluid and “shuddering with a faint ebullition”. It is punctuated by an “enormous and perpetual rustling” which animates the possibility of meanings that never assume the “definitive form of a sign grimly weighted by its signified”. The solidity of meaning gives way to the endeavour to listen to what one is excluded from, to what is complex and ineffable, to what floats without being pigeonholed, to the “signifier taking up the place of every signified”. The writing of the work as text is a writing in perpetual production and unconditional dispersion where the words flung upon the page can no longer halt. There is a working against what flattens, banalises and codifies through the medium or ambience of horizontality that alludes to the exorbitant play of the signifier in metonymy (Barthes, 1977: 97-98; 129). The *signifiance* of text is what threads its way through the “rigidness of concepts”, enchanting in a mode of writing sensitive to silence and the impossibility or profusion of meaning, the abyss of a dissemination of meaning (Kristeva, 2000: 187). Writing is what is always already inhabited by the trace and it is thus rooted in something beyond symbolic language. It “develops like a seed, not like a line” and “holds the threat of a secret”, a secret (pre-symbolic) elsewhere foreign to symbolic language, where the “weight of a gaze conveying an intention is no longer linguistic”. It is “ceaselessly fascinated by zones of infra- or ultra-language” that intimate something (as no-thing) translinguistic and pre-

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*solid*, and Barthes regards the stereotype as the emplacement of discourse where the body is missing), is abandoned. As mentioned, Barthes is concerned with revealing “that of the degrees of language”, the interplay of degrees, whereby there is an attempt to expose in any statement “the disposition of its degrees”. This disposition is infinite and it opens up a certain abyss in each word - “the madness of language”. Barthes views this opening up to the abyss as necessary “to break down the infatuation of our statements, the arrogance of our science”.

symbolic, pre-figurable and pre-objectal (Barthes, 1968: 20)<sup>19</sup>. Writing is an *other* dimension of meaning that emanates through language from the regions of meaning before signification. It is an *other* scene that “dissolves apparent meaning and apprehends writing as negativity: an endless refraction and reformulation of the system of language” (Kristeva, 2000: 214). It is an attempt to gesture towards a “language” in quotation marks that is not a language of signs, but rather of “true foreignness, more foreign than any already established idiom”. In this way, as Kristeva (2002: 249; 259) suggests, there is an attempt to think-write meaning not as a structure but rather as a process which takes into consideration not only signs and their syntactic and logical concatenations, but also what pertains to “things having to do with the transverbal” – rhythms, melodies, scansion – a certain presyntactic, semiotic musicality. Given of course the limitations of the symbolic condition, this semiosis is not independent of language but rather, for the subject of the symbolic, an effect in or through language – what “interferes with language and, under its domination, articulates other arrangements of meaning, which are not significations, but rhythmic, melodic articulations”.

The rigour of the process of writing through meaning becomes indistinguishable from its productivity, its *signifiance*, its “performative fecundity”. This rigour intimates suppleness, as opposed to a rigidity, which makes the text *yield* (to) a dissemination of meaning, a flow of hybridisation, which suggests a metonymic operation where the uncoded beyond belongs to the framed space of the text (as a haunting) without belonging to it. This spectral power of the “subtle beyond” is not entirely subjugated to a concept that espouses a distinct and predicative determination. The “concept of a ghost is as scarcely graspable in its self (*en personne*) as the ghost of a concept”. For Derrida (2001b: 40), spectrality, the concept of ghosts, the ghosts of a concept, implies the concept of the other in the same, a relationship of haunting that may perhaps be constitutive of every ‘logic’. In this way, the text is comprised of traces and remains of writing marked by a spectral logic (of living/haunting on). The text is

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<sup>19</sup> This notion is particularly interesting in light of Blanchot’s (1982: 33) suggestion that writing is entering into “the affirmation of the solitude in which fascination threatens”. Indeed, to write is to let “fascination rule language”, to “stay in touch, through language, in language, with the absolute milieu where the thing becomes image again, where the image, instead of alluding to some particular feature, becomes an allusion to the featureless, and instead of form drawn upon absence, becomes the formless presence of this absence, the opaque, empty opening onto that which is when there is no more world, when there is no world yet”.

not a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in the margins of a book, but rather a “differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces”. The text overruns any assignable limits by making them more complex through dividing and multiplying strokes and lines, as opposed to submerging the limits in an undifferentiated homogeneity (Derrida, 1979: 84). The text thus calls into question the way one thinks about limits, margins, frames, boundaries and borderlines, and inscribes ghostliness in the very structure of signification (Royle, 2003b). It takes meaning by tangents, in overflow, and thus always already does and says more, so that it is not a finished product, but rather process itself - traces traced in the ash of “a scene of writing that has since gone up in flames” (MacGillivray, 1998: x). The text of writing is a tapestry that weaves itself in a horizontal manner so that what is given to the text is the chance to take its time to make sense, and “sometimes to send meaning quite far off in an afterthought” (Cixous, 1989c: 15). If the text always says something more than it intends to say, then it is necessary to consider that the text will say more than the author wants to express or believes s/he expresses (Cixous, 1988). Indeed, the text in writing is not necessarily what is proper to authorial/authoritative intentionality because the text “gives itself where by definition there is no property – but rather expropriation, dispossession without end” (Calle-Gruber, 1997b: 140). The author-writer can never be in full control of the medium or meaning of his/her text because the language that the writer writes with cannot be dominated absolutely (Derrida, 1976). “It is language which speaks, not the author”. Barthes (1989: 50; 61) suggests that while the work is caught up in a process of filiation in that the author is reputed to be the father of his/her work (respect for the manuscript and the author’s declared intentions, the postulated legality of the author’s relation to his/her work – “author’s rights”)<sup>20</sup>, the text can be read without the Father’s inscription, without the Father’s guarantee. The metaphor of the work as an image of an organism that grows by vital expansion and development can be replaced by the metaphor of the text as an expansive network of combinative (metonymic) operations that proliferate an overdetermined plurality. It is not that the author cannot return to his/her text, but if s/he does so, then his/her inscription should not be privileged or paternal but rather indicate a certain ludic quality, an entering into the play of the signifiers. The process of the text functions

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<sup>20</sup> Barthes (1989: 52) writes that that the author is supposed to have “the same relation of antecedence with his work that a father sustains with his child”.

transgressively by dispersing the empire of the author as the centre, limit and guarantor of truth and a priori meaning<sup>21</sup>. It is not comprised of a line of words reflecting a single 'theological' meaning (the message of the Author-God), but instead it is a "multi-dimensional space in which are married and contested several writings" - writings which assiduously posit meanings in order to evaporate them. Writing refuses to confer upon the text an ultimate meaning, and in this way it can be said to be countertheological or "properly revolutionary" because "to refuse to halt meaning is finally to refuse God and his hypostases, reason, science, the law". The subversion of the site of the Author's empire leads to the opening up of the traces of writing (Barthes, 1989: 53-54).

### **The Lover's Discourse: Writing in the Thrall of the Impossible**

The discernment of writing involves the realisation of a "nonsymmetrical division" which designates on the one hand the closure of the book as a theological encyclopaedia, and on the other the opening of the text in the fabric of its traces without return. For Derrida (1978), the question of writing, the beyond of the book, can only be opened up if the book is opened out to an expenditure without reserve, to a wandering without return. The text always already indicates something other, an elsewhere, which dispossesses the author of his/her narrative continuity and intentionality (Barthes, 1977). The demand of writing is such that there is excess even with respect to what the author can understand of what s/he writes because writing insists that play and indetermination be left to signify "hospitality for what is to come (*l'avenir*)" (Derrida, 2001: 31). The text is an appeal of the future, an "opening towards the non-determinability of the future", which overflows, through writing, any kind of ontological determination as present to itself. If the text is an "irruption of a future", an ethic of hospitality which allows for an opening of the other-to-come, then it is necessary to consider that it cannot be consumed immediately because a "certain zone of disacquaintance, of not-understanding, is also a reserve and an excessive chance – a chance for excess to have a future, and consequently to engender new contexts". There is the possibility for a textual scenario where "one does not know

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<sup>21</sup> Derrida (1976: 68) has suggested that "writing can never be thought under the category of the subject" even though it is endowed and modified by consciousness and the unconscious. It is always "other than the subject" in that the subject does not necessarily have full control over the movement of writing in *différance*.

what it means yet, one will have to start again, to return, to go on” (Derrida, 2001: 20; 30-31). This indicates, as Cixous (1989c: 1) suggests, a writing that is a question of unknown truths, where truth is not necessarily equated with knowledge and consciousness, but rather it is a question of writing that makes its way in the darkness, into a realm where one does not know, where one cannot know or ascertain for sure, where one presages and seeks to translate or transpose into words what has been “written in fevers, in heartbeats, in luminous songs”. To write as a question of writing, a “question that bears the writing that bears the question”, is to no longer allow oneself an unshakeable relation with the being of order, certainty and “any form of taking root”. It is to introduce the thought of the limit, the impossible-to-think (of the not-yet thought), the “never and always accomplished crossing of the limit”, a certain overstepping or rupturing, into the scene of writing (Blanchot, 1992: 2; 27). Writing about the third aesthetic, for example, can never be entirely accomplished in the present in that the attempt to write about the third aesthetic is an attempt to write about what ex-sists and thus about what has not taken place in the order of the symbolic as such. Writing takes place precisely as place that transgresses every ‘taking place’ so that to write, as Blanchot (1992: 55-56) proposes, is not to have written, but rather “to have always already written as that which will always write itself anew”. Here Blanchot refers to the ineluctable transcendent play of traces which inscribe themselves within writing, through *différance*, and in spite of what has been written. In this way, writing “carries away, tears away, through the plural dispersion of its practice, every horizon as well as every foundation”. The desired intention to write is subverted by the movement of the always already of the play of the traces of writing so that “whoever writes is exiled from writing, which is the country – his own – where he is not prophet” (Blanchot, 1995: 63). A text (of writing) indicates the “disappropriation of the author” whereby the writing is more powerful than the writer, and the writer cannot be aware of “all the effects in signifying” (Cixous, 2002: 186).

The always already of writing inscribes within what is written the not-yet of thought, the movement of *différance*. For Blanchot (1995: 41-43), to write, to form where no form holds sway, is “to welcome the passive pressure which is not yet what we call thought”. The not-yet of thought is in a sense “thought’s patience” which delicately waits at the outer edges where “truth no longer constitutes the principle to which it



must finally submit". The nontrue (which is not falsehood) draws knowledge out of the system of the symbolic into a time-space of drifting "where knowledge, without passing into un-knowledge, no longer depends upon itself", upon a precedence of imposed conditions that results or produces results. In this way, the domination of truth, the dictates of the symbolic which wields and organises, gives way to *another* space where "knowledge is no longer a knowledge of truth", but instead "a knowledge that burns thought, like knowledge of infinite patience"<sup>22</sup>. If anything, the impossible possibility of writing the third aesthetic and its remains in what I have termed the O-Function, pushes knowledge to the far limits of a fragility of cinders where at any moment understanding may cease or disappear, implode in upon itself, or perhaps at best there may be some precarious, tentative understanding without the possibility for reproduction. However, this latter position, which may seem foreign to us because we do not have the means of knowing any further, is also love according to Cixous (1997: 17) because "it is to find one has arrived at the point where the immense foreign territory of the other will begin". There is a respect for this infinite foreignness, a "loving not knowing. Loving: not knowing" - a loving that relinquishes the desire to master and colonise through the bombast of knowledge. To consider the third aesthetic is to consider "what breathes between two people" (in this instance the mother and the infant). The difficulty lies in the fact that the third aesthetic is not a third term that rounds off into a triplicity or that espouses a trinitarian horizon. It is not "a block between two blocks" (Cixous, 1997: 53), but rather an exchange of intimacy arising from "within my unknowing (and not without my knowing)" (Calle-Gruber, 1997: 86). It is what goes from one to the other, that which passes through one and the other, unseen and ungraspable, as only appearance can be seen not difference - "the visible does not make the difference" (Cixous, 1997: 53). Difference is made in the liminal space between-us, in the ethics of the in-between.

The third aesthetic, a "myriad of differential qualities" (Cixous, 1997: 53), is the infinitesimal and infinite space of proximity of the embrace of the between-two, which in turn offers the gift of alterity that produces rather than reduces difference. In its description, the third aesthetic takes into account *another* spatio-temporality that ex-sists between the mother and the infant. As Lispector (1988: 90) puts it:

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<sup>22</sup> Derrida (2001c: 84) also speaks of this other (another) knowledge, "a knowledge without truth and without revelation", where truth still seems to wait without its unveiling.

Between two musical notes there exists another note, between two facts there exists another fact, between two grains of sand, no matter how close together they are, there exists an interval of space, there exists a sensing between sensing – in the interstices of primordial matter there is the mysterious, fiery line that is the world's breathing, and the world's continual breathing is what we hear and call silence.

The third aesthetic is what is facilitated by the mother's "in-finity of empathy" with the other, with the infant in his/her responsiveness, which in turn "veils them in softness, in folds, in spaciousness". It is what gestures in silence to the other where the "most profound intimacy becomes a protective veil" (Irigaray, 1993: 186; 196; 191). It is what "dwells in the inappropriation of a silence" (Irigaray, 1999: 141). The challenge in attempting to explicate the third aesthetic and its remains in the O-Function lies in the attempt to translate this "luminosity (which) smiles in the air", this silence, this intimacy, which becomes a 'veil' or perhaps that which lies beneath or behind or before the protective veil. As Lispector (1989: 71; 43) proffers with the following contemplation-question: "It's so hard to speak and say things that cannot be said. It's so silent. How do you translate the silence of the real encounter between the two of us?". For Derrida (2001c: 24-25), to let oneself be caught up in the "veil", to take on the word "veil", to be able to touch or see "that" which one calls "veil", is to leave "nothing intact, safe and sound, neither in your culture, nor in your memory, nor in your language". This dream of touching the infinity of the 'veil' is a desire to seek out and maintain a relevant discourse that would touch-say what the veil shrouds properly, "even if it no longer gives anything to be seen". However, the impossible endeavour of unveiling the veil, at least for now, turns out to be an un-veiling that still remains in the movement of veiling whereby the unveiling as veiling proliferates yet another veil (shroud-metaphor) over and above the 'veil'. What withdraws, as Heidegger (1993b: 382) suggests, "may remain as veiled as ever".

Blanchot (1995: 87) writes that "*there remains the unnamed in the name of which we keep still*". This quote draws the reader's attention to the aporetics of naming a certain exterior that remains unqualifiable and unnameable within symbolic discourse. As a result, there is the need to remain assiduously reflexive of the problem in making use of language to describe that which escapes its parameters. I think that Blanchot (1995:

92) captures this dilemma of domesticating the strange and familiarising the foreign (through nomination and from a position of symbolic authority) in the following quotation:

One may well be suspicious of a language and of thinking which must have recourse, in different forms, to negative qualifications in order to introduce questions heretofore held in reserve. We investigate un-power, but do we not do so from the vantage point of power? We speak of the impossible, but do we not always say it is the outer limit, or the articulation, of possibility? We surrender to the unconscious, but without succeeding in separating it from consciousness except negatively. We carry on about atheism, which has always been a privileged way of talking about God.

If it were possible to escape the oppressiveness, the subordination of the binary (hidden with respect to manifest, latent with respect to the disclosed, absence with respect to presence), then it would be necessary to reconsider or re-evaluate the notion of truth which could no longer be the “primary trait of all that presents itself”, but rather a “secondary privation” of a withdrawal or retreat or “silent secret” which is not destined for disclosure (Blanchot, 1995: 92). We still hanker after the determination of a name-concept that would confer upon the thing or phenomenon its proper meaning, the determination of its indetermination. As Hélène Cixous (2004: 5)”, in her inimitable style, puts it: “I don’t know the proper names – I want them. I want their armorial bodies, I would like to be able to catch their varnished shells”. In reality however there is the likelihood that that which attempts to determine indetermination, the determinants that put indetermination into play (or indeterminants which thus determine), draw the saying-writing of a certain exteriority further away from what wants to be said-written (Blanchot, 1995). “Everything I don’t know is in ‘X’”, writes Lispector (1989: 65); “it would take a different sensibility to comprehend ‘X’”. It would also take another ‘third term’ which does not yield to the synthesis of a binary dialectic. And it would also take the failure of my language, or perhaps a language which overflows discursive limits.

A/The name cannot name the “punctual simplicity” of a concept nor can it escape the risk of metaphysical reappropriation/renomination which invariably, ineluctably,

ensues. It is important to take into account how the striving for new names and concepts may reintroduce the very shortcomings or pitfalls that one has attempted to avoid (Derrida, 1981b: 71). Ultimately, as Derrida (2001: 67; 63) suggests, the proper name is “that which, in the language, is not part of the language, and is thus untranslatable”. The proper name means that “there has to be a ‘has to’ by which I am disarmed before the other”. There has to be a respect for the very ‘thing’ that remains untranslatable in the name, a certain “weakness before the ‘there has to be the other’” which passes through the existence (as what ex-sists) of proper names. This weakness however may transform itself into the greatest strength in that there is a certain ethical gesture of hospitality, a certain disarming quality in our relation to the other where we expose ourselves to what we cannot appropriate – “the ‘has to’ is always the recognition of what is stronger than I”. In attempting to facilitate a thesis in accordance with this ‘has to be the other’, with the other as the anterior future (*l’avenir avant*), with the other as the (messianic) advance on the future (*avenir*), I have had to concede, like Derrida (1983: 42) in his opening presentation of his thesis defence, that this research project has called for a different mode of writing that transforms the “staging and the particular discursive procedures, which, historically determined as they very much are, dominate university discourse, in particular the type of text that is called the ‘thesis’”<sup>23</sup>. The writing of this project cannot necessarily conform to the format required traditionally for a thesis, for the “epoch of a thesis”, for the logic of thetic (re)presentation, for the “value of the thesis, of positional logic and its history, and of the limits of its rights, its authority and its legitimacy”. Instead it has required “a kind of radical patience, a sort of patience concerning every assumption of what is going on in any act of ‘fencing in’” (Royle, 2003b: 4). This patience for the “incalculable and unprogrammable, the un-fence-in-able” (Royle, 2003b: 5), this endurance with.....non-concepts like the ‘third aesthetic’ and the ‘O-Function’, has in turn demanded the ‘has to’ of a change in perception and conception of space-time which “assumes and entails an evolution or a transformation of forms, of the relations of *matter* and *form* and of the interval *between*” (Irigaray, 1993: 7). It has required a way that “give(s) up appropriating only a content of discourse in order

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<sup>23</sup> In *The Other Heading*, Derrida (1992e: 39) speaks about the new censorship of a cultural discourse (a centralising authority of academic insistence) which promotes the master word of ‘transparency’ and claims to speak in the name of good, common sense. It thus tends to discredit anything that complicates this model by marginalising and relegating to the sidelines that work which does not easily comply or cannot accommodate itself to a programme of norms and standardisation, to an accredited model or grid of intelligibility, to “channels of immediate and efficient communication”.

integrate it among knowledge already gained” (Irigaray, 2002a: x). This research project has called for other ways of thinking about the not-yet of the spectrality of the future, about that which points from the future, about that which “remains obscure and enigmatic, still to be disclosed....still *before* us” (Derrida, 1984: 113), about the “other who comes, who comes to strike dumb the order of knowledge” (Derrida, 2001c: 31), about that which pushes the very limits of logic to a place where it vacillates. What pushes logic to the limits, even if it does not exist, even if it is no longer or not yet, “give(s) us to rethink” (Derrida, 1994: 176), to radically reconsider, truth, knowledge, representation, and an authority of meaning in full fulfilment and determination of itself. To (the) end (or merely a venture from the beginning, that which can only be but a beginning), I (will) make use of the provocative, declarative musings of Hélène Cixous (1991: 98) in response to a certain (historically determined, as Derrida suggests) model of the academy that effectively amounts to a censorship or dismissal of all that does not conform to its centralising insistence on norms, standardisation, compliance and accreditation:

But perhaps what is most difficult and most necessary is really to forget the judges who make us stupidly answer their stupid summons, make us justify the nonjustifiable, speak of silence, crush music under the millstone of words, lie by swearing to tell only their truth, plead guilty to a lack of absence and a lack of weakness, make excuses for every thought.....After our oppressive and inflexible era, I would like to live in a time in which the tongue would not be bound, castrated, intimidated.

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