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CIXOUS VA BETWEEN LACAN AND DERRIDA

It is with great pleasure that I introduce this wonderful cluster of essays on the work of Hélène Cixous in its connection with psychoanalysis. The authors who accepted our ambitious invitation to meditate on the fruitful interaction have examined the entirety of Cixous's abundant corpus, but evince a predilection for her groundbreaking *Portrait of Dora*, the play that Jacques Lacan saw and praised warmly in March 1976, as Fernanda Negrete reminds us here. Written at the same time as the manifesto that launched the concept of *écriture féminine*, an essay written in 1974 and published in 1975 that since then has been anthologized endlessly, "The Laugh of the Medusa", *Portrait of Dora* stages a personal drama leading the heroine, the young hysteric, to deliver a slap in Freud's face.

Ventriloquizing through the famous young hysterical patient, Cixous subverts Freud's complacency and mastery, expanding the hints at a self-critique scattered in the footnotes of *A Case of Hysteria (Dora)*. Close to the end of a book published in 1905 discussing a case that was never completed, rather aborted some four years before, Freud confides: "I failed to guess in good time that her [Dora's] homosexual (gynaecophile) love for Frau K. was the strongest unconscious current in the life of her mind, and to tell her so. [...]. Before I had recognized the importance of the homosexual current in psychoneurotics, I often came to a dead end or found myself utterly bewildered in the treatment of such case." Seen in retrospect half a century later, it is undeniable that the work of Cixous has been successful in bringing a needed corrective to psychoanalysis, which explains both its durable appeal and its absorption in today's psychoanalytic doxa.

I can offer my personal testimony. I had contacted Cixous in 1969 to ask her to supervise an MA thesis on parody in *Finnegans Wake* that I completed in 1971. At the time, I was a student in Hamburg, Germany. And when the viva took place in Paris, we used three languages, French, English and German, in all of which Cixous was fluent, far more fluent than I was. The next year, back at my alma mater the Ecole Normale Supérieure of rue d'Ulm, I served as a mediator when Cixous was invited to teach one of the authors whose texts were on the reading list of the *agrégation*. This is how she came in the Spring of 1972 to deliver astonishing classes on Milton's *Comus*. For the small group of *normaliens* students studying for this demanding competitive examination, it was indisputable that her approach was

fundamentally psychoanalytic. Cixous asked us to read Freud's essay on the taboo of virginity, she quoted the excellent book by her close friend Angus Fletcher on allegory as a symbolic mode, but a literary one channeling the Freudian drives. Of course, she extensively referred to Fletcher's excellent work on Milton's *Comus*. I owe to this class my lasting love for Milton's early poetry.

After the agrégation, I went on to write a dissertation, also supervised by Cixous, on a crazy topic linking James Joyce, Ezra Pound and Hermann Broch; during the defense, she noted that they shared a central "O" through which I had threaded my dialectics. It seemed natural to me that she would be receptive to working with a corpus that was partly Germanophone; when I later supervised dissertations myself, I discovered how territorial other French professors could be. I had defended the dissertation in 1980 thanks to her repeated advice: "Write, write, write!" Having written the thousand pages required at the time, my speed allowed me to be made a full professor in 1981 when turning thirty-two. For a while, this granted me a lot of free time, and I used it to teach both at the university of Dijon, where I was located, and in Paris VIII Vincennes relocated in Saint-Denis. And once in a while I would go to hear Cixous's bi-monthly seminars; they lasted six hours, chock-full with amazing insights, exciting guests and bold new ideas. I also witnessed how she drew more and more scholars from all over the world.

Mentioning Paris VIII, one should remember that this was the first French university to have a Department of Psychoanalysis. Paris VIII, that notorious "experimental" university founded in the wake of May 1968 by Cixous, was called "Vincennes" for its location. "Vincennes" had a department of psychoanalytic studies, which was unheard of at the time in France. It was in the hands of Lacanians, Jacques-Alain and Judith Miller. It was in this context that Lacan gave a memorable lecture on politics to a crowd of unruly students on December 3, 1969. Lacan had been encouraged to be creative by a close friend of his, Héléne Cixous, when he was asked to write an essay on literature—punningly entitled "litureterre." The same issue of *Littérature* devoted to "literature and psychoanalysis" (number 3) contained a fragment from Cixous's *Portrait du Soleil*, a prose text already tackling the story of Freud's Dora.

In the same issue, Bernard Mérigot, one of the editors, asks: "Must psychoanalysis be taught in universities?" I note that the editors of the review were not all disciples of Lacan. Jean Bellemin-Noël, a member of the editorial committee, who worked on the links between psychoanalysis and literature, kept his distance. Another contributor was André Green who was by then a major disputant of Lacan's. Green took Lacan to task for being too linguistic: for Green, Lacan had forgotten the body, reducing its affects to signifiers in the name of structural linguistics.

We can turn to Paul Earlie's *Derrida and the Legacy of Psychoanalysis* to survey the debate between Lacan and Derrida, a controversy in which Cixous, along with a whole generation of scholars, was caught up. In the late sixties, one could be both "Derridean" and "Lacanian." Philippe Sollers, Julia Kristeva and Jacques-Alain

Miller were on both sides; then a split appeared in the mid seventies, after which one had to choose one's camp. I managed to sit on the fence by using a simple device: I would be a Derridean with the Lacanians and a Lacanian with the Derrideans. In fact, this entailed minimal intellectual contortions. The requirement to toe party-lines appeared more insistent in France, but I had moved to the US, where boundaries were murkier, if not porous.

The controversy seemed to allegorize a clash between philosophy and psychoanalysis; it hinged around the crucial concept of the "letter", a term that can be taken literally to point to writing and even literature, or else refer more strictly to those written messages we send out and that circulate on their own. This double meaning comes to the fore in Lacan's reading of the *The Purloined Letter*, the introductory essay that opens *Ecrits*. In his celebrated analysis, "Seminar on The Purloined Letter", Lacan imposed a structuralist grid on Poe's story that mapped out a pattern of displacements: by a series of permutations, each actor in the story stands for a distinct subject position. The subjects are subjects of unconscious desire determined by the Unconscious or discourse of the Other. They all follow the same sequence of actions. The structure achieves its effects by pushing along pure signifiers, in this case a letter that has been opened and read, then stolen and hidden, but whose contents are not disclosed; the letter allegorizes the itinerary of a signifier whose very signified remains inaccessible and irrelevant. What counted for Lacan were the places the characters occupied and the way they were caught up in a repetition automatism; the consequence was that the letter always reached its destination in the end.

In his polemics against Lacan's alleged Hegelian idealism, Derrida rejected such an economy, arguing that Lacan pretended to find at the end what he had hidden in plain sight, a phallus disguised as a letter. Lacan's reading of Poe, moreover, would only provide a modernized version of an interpretation of Poe's stories presented in a less sophisticated manner by Marie Bonaparte. The proximity that Derrida discovered was ironic given the scorn Lacan had poured on Bonaparte's heavy-handed psychobiography in his own Poe seminar.

It is important to note that Derrida's "*Le facteur de la vérité*" was published in *Poétique*, the review founded by Cixous and Tzvetan Todorov. The essay was reprinted in *The Post Card*, a book that engages in a systematic critique of psychoanalysis. The attack on Lacanian theory followed from a program sketched by Derrida in 1972 in *Positions*, a series of interviews in which Lacan was criticized for his glib use of Hegelian categories; his half-baked philosophical readings betrayed an undeclared idealism contradicting the way Lacan foregrounded the materiality of the signifier.

In 1975, Derrida added new reproaches. Lacan was accused of simplifying Poe's text, missing literary nuances, glossing over the intertextual plays elaborated in the Dupin stories. The objection was that Lacan had translated the absent content of the letter into a Freudian truth, a truth identical to the truth of psychoanalysis; it would reveal the phallus that had been hidden in the empty signifier of the letter.

The letter would merely appear as a sign of castration—that old and tired song of Freudian psychoanalysis.

The most scathing critique came when Derrida refuted Lacan's assertion that "a letter always reaches its destination." As he noted, letters can always get lost, stolen, burned or destroyed. Derrida rejected an all too ideal predestination. He played with letters in *The Postcard*, a tricky text in which he multiplied performatives, or "perver-formatives" using the mode of love letters. "Envois" is made up of fragments that remain from an amorous correspondence he had decided to destroy.

Of course, Cixous had moved to Derrida's camp, as is well-known. However, the fact that Lacan kept mentioning her "fondly" in 1976 testifies that he bore her no grudge, even when she made fun of Freud's fumbling treatment of Dora. Cixous also stayed close to psychoanalytic interrogations of writing, femininity and desire, as several of the contributors here show. Even though she has remained a faithful friend of the lamented philosopher, today, twenty years after his passing, she can recognize that their positions are not identical. In a breathtaking essay that concludes a huge compendium entitled, *Where is French philosophy going?*, Cixous quotes a "furious passage" from Derrida's *Circumfession* in which he takes Proust to task for having written the famous sentence: "A work in which there are theories is like an object on which one has left the price tag." Derrida is scathing here, railing against a "vulgar" rejection of theory that would betray Proust's snobbism, his adherence to an outmoded "Franco-Britannic decorum." Cixous explains that she felt "petrified" when she read the attack, Derrida's strictures debunking one of her favorite writers. In the rest of her spirited essay, she gives Proust his due, interjecting first that "theory" as deployed by Proust does not have the same meaning as Derrida's objection, then defending the whole writing process leading to "Time Regained", a space of writing in which "literature begins" because we do not know who is writing. Reclaiming a space for literature, she concludes that it is literature that thinks in its own manner and not under the modalities of philosophical discourse. Kleist, Montaigne and Kafka relay Proust. Rejecting the idea that there would be a specifically "French" way of thinking, Cixous asks us to follow her to her "island" or onto the moon.... Thus the gentle rebuttal facing Derrida's violent explosion is not made, obviously, in the name of psychoanalysis, but in the name of a literature without borders, a literature that rejects all signs of national identity. Instead of asking "where does French philosophy go?" (*Où va...?*), Cixous reduces the question to a minimalist prompt—just "Go!" (*Val!*), in which I hear an echo of her injunction: "Write!" Hence, let us follow her and accept her invitation, as the authors gathered here have done.

Jean-Michel Rabaté



As with Jean-Michel Rabaté, it is my pleasure to introduce these responses to our provocation to ‘helencixous’ with us in this special issue of *S Journal*. This neologism, a childhood invention of Jean-Michel Rabaté’s daughter, verb-alises something of the infrangible power of Hélène Cixous’s writings. Collected in this volume are responses from Cixous’s pre-eminent former students, translators, co-thinkers and readers. To ‘helencixous’, as the writers in this dossier demonstrate, means meticulously listening for the insistent voice and body of woman in the other scene of language and in Cixous’s works.

Opening the special issue with her essay, “Woman As More”, Juliet Flower MacCannell distinguishes Cixous’s actual position on sexual difference from the common misreadings based on essentialism and biologism. At a time when sex and gender are poised to re-become objects of a widespread reactionary agenda, Cixous’s fundamental insight, MacCannell explains, is to understand masculine and feminine as “orientations” toward language and its logic. The translator of Cixous’s ten-act play, *The Terrible but Unfinished Story of Norodom Sihanouk, King of Cambodia*, MacCannell describes Cixous’s strategy in terms of a poetic intervention that actuates the internal feminine energy and power of language, making it the site of conflict. MacCannell explains that “Cixous is committed to the struggle within language as such; to wresting the subject free from language by means of language itself.” In MacCannell’s assessment, Cixous remains a dedicated fighter for the unending “more” of woman.

For Mairéad Hanrahan, this feminine “more” inappears as a trace of something that has no trace, the scar of a wound whose source in the real is profoundly uncertain. In “*Manhattan*, or Literature as Eye-Patch”, Hanrahan recounts how Cixous’s difficulty of telling what really “happened” revolves around the *part* played by the resurfacing of the writer’s past. If it is the detail that causes the past to surge up in Cixous’s tragic memoir, it does so in an impossible way. The chance detail “simultaneously reveals and hides, buries and unburies”, Hanrahan explains, creating a topological distortion in space and time. A non-intentional agency, the letter is the carrier of and courier for a concatenating array of displacements, both within and without the tales making up Cixous’s literary corpus.

Out of these labyrinthine, interconnecting threads in Cixous’s work, Laurent Milesi focuses on a singular project, an unwritten and unwritable “thisbookIdontwrite” which, in not being written, “is everywhere and nowhere”. Both first cause and summation, this unwritten book haunts the rest of Cixous’s writings as an absence and an always missed encounter. Like a book in a dream, this unwritten book “hesitates”, as Milesi puts it in his “Helene Cixous’s Missed Encounter with the Real”, between the Imaginary and the Real, leaking from one order into the other like the dream of the burning child in Freud. Resonant with but not reducible to Lacan’s notion of the Real, Cixous’s “true dreaming” of the BookIdonotwrite figures

as an infinitely productive “blind spot” in a scene of writing out of which the “I” is constitutively evacuated.

Dreams also figure prominently in Bryan Counter’s exploration of Proustian themes in Cixous, and particularly in her books *Philippines* and *Reirements* where representation leads us not towards but away from sense. In “Reading, Dreaming, Writing in Proust and Cixous”, Counter closely analyses passages where he finds Cixous’s writing coming vertiginously close to a dream state in writing. Dream-writing conjures up telepathic logics, where facts are passively “sensed”, Counter proposes, “with an immanent value that resists the kind of interpretation we normally like to undertake.” What this calls for is another principle of reading: as a *treatment* through which dreams breathe through us.

As if mysteriously summoned by this dreaming-reading-breathing work, Fernanda Negrete invites us to attend to dance as a “conceptual presence” in Cixous. Negrete’s essay, “Cixous’s and Lacan’s Dances”, traces the body as an exuberant dissident player in the signifiatory regime, its gestures breaking into and cutting up dominant modes of address. Traversed by circularity, repetition and non-linearity, the practice of psychoanalysis itself, Negrete proposes, is a field of dance “where movement undoes the illusion of a consolidated, unified whole [...] as well as rewriting unprecedented lines, or taking unforeseeable steps.” In Negrete’s estimation, *Portrait of Dora* emerges primarily as a gesture, which, like Roni Horn’s photographs and Nancy Spero’s leaping, darting women, are among several of Cixous’s works of “portraiture” whose premise draws on dance’s episodic curving movements in a whole scale “flooding” of the linearity of the book.

Closing out the special topic, Cindy Zeiher reflects on what endures in Cixous’s enigmatic phrase, “écriture féminine”. Like Negrete, Zeiher turns to *Portrait of Dora* and, in particular, to Dora’s famous slap, as her entryway to an extended meditation on play and playing, writing and politics. Citing Cixous’s intriguing suggestion, “I am what Dora would have been if women’s history had begun”, Zeiher sees Cixous’s personification of Dora as activating the full resources of hysteria as a specifically political platform in order to speak of “what writing will do”.

In the non-thematic sections of this volume, we find Julian Browne’s self-dialogic, writerly analysis of the “un-forgetting” haunting family self-representation initiated by his reading of Lacan’s *Seminar XIII*. In the figure of the Infanta located at the heart of the familial (self-)portrait of Velasquez’s *Las Meninas*, Browne locates a “pas de sujet”, an “unladylike” absence. Nothingness also preinhabits politics and sexual difference in the final contribution to this volume. In this increasingly germane discussion of Richard Wright’s *Native Son*, and James Baldwin’s reinscription of Wright in *Notes of a Native Son*, Mikko Tuhkanen focuses on moments of political awakening where the characteristic self-isolation of the modern individual is suddenly electrified with what Lacan calls the *tuché*, which Tuhkanen glosses as a moment “when the real disorients the structure”. If such awakenings to an experience of “bound togetherness” carry the threat of incipient fascism, Tuhkanen dis-

covers in Lacan's Antigone something the totalitarian fantasy will constitutively never grasp: an inassimilable singularity.

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Sigi Jöttkandt

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JULIET FLOWER MACCANNELL

W O M A N A S M O R E

I want to write almost nothing. That is, I want to write what seems to mean almost nothing in our normal lives, but to me is the essence of life. I want to write what is almost impossible to write, I want to write at the extremity of writing Writing must overwrite itself.—

Hélène Cixous, "The Two Countries of Writing"

A single thread binds Hélène Cixous's work in the many domains to which she has devoted her great talents—criticism, poetry, novels and plays: her recognition and exploration of *sexual difference* in language and literature. She has insisted unyieldingly on *woman, woman* encore, *woman as "more"*— a stance that has been condemned as "idealist" and "essentialist."¹ Yet long before the current critical chorus, Cixous constructed multiple concrete linguistic and literary arguments against today's deploying the "neutral" third person, "the they" in lieu of "he" or "she" as labels. For Cixous, this would be an evasion, an effort to overlook, or deny the crucial importance of that *more*, that crucial *difference*. Her intention is to block the rigid and false categorizations that arise with sexual *opposition*, which is in no way the same as sexual *difference*.

In doing so Cixous baffles today's, like yesterday's, critical categories by making non-negotiable the recognition of sexual difference and *woman* in theory and, most importantly, in literary practice. To illustrate her vision of difference through her artistry we must compare Cixous with no less a figure than Shakespeare, who also demonstrated a comparably fluid sense of both sexes and how, in the "country of literature", they can occupy the same body at the same time.² Cixous has described herself as "a woman made of women",³ but she has also described her artistic process as a playwright by noting that she *can* and indeed *must* identify herself with "man" in order to write:

I write as a woman ... I can use my body to inscribe the body of a woman. But I can't do that for a man [in prose].... There are plenty of men in my plays. But that is because the theater is not the scene of sexual pleasure ... in the theater it's the heart that sings. And the human heart has no sex.

Sexually, I cannot identify with a male character. Yet the heart feels the same way in man's breast as in a woman's.

"*Yet the heart feels the same way in man's breast as in a woman's.*" Aspiring, as Rousseau once did, to be a historian of the human heart,⁴ Cixous has given us a dazzling array of portrayals of human souls revealed entirely by their speech, their ways with language. See, for example the figure of Pol Pot/Saloth Sâr in her 1984 ten act play, *L'Histoire Terrible Mais Inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, Roi du Cambodge*.⁵ As I wrote in the introduction to my English translation of this play,

Cixous brings the full range of sympathy into play without a trace of sentimentality, she does not simply put *herself* "in the other's place", but instead writes *as* each character. Like Hazlitt's and Borges' Shakespeare, she aims at the absolute dispossession of the self. Not ego-centered by definition, then, this self is free to explore the intersubjective relation as such—between sexes, races and classes and even between the living and the dead.

Her steady gaze into the black heart of this particular male character is enabled by using Pol Pot's own words, method à la psychoanalysis, to unmask the deep pathology driving his murderous politics. Speaking of his pure hatred for Sihanouk and the monarchy, Saloth Sâr says,

Indecent monarchy, I hate your effeminate countenance
 Your foolish moods, your whorish profusion,
 I shall tear off your silken gowns
 And I shall unveil to the stunned world
 Our next Cambodia, virgin, virile, incorruptible.
 [...]
 We will see looming before them—
 Invincible Cambodia descending from the mountains
 To hound them all beyond our borders
 In a magnificent slaughter.
 Oh! I cannot wait, I cannot wait,
 O, that my furious heart might pour out freely
 Its torrent of bitterness.
 I'll burn everything in my way.
 Arrogant Vietnamese, you who for centuries have used our sacred land as
 a scullery,
 I'll burn you to a cinder.

And you, Cambodians, my brothers, you who are made
 Out of my country's mud,
 I'll be your potter, I'll smash you to bits,
 I'll return you to primal matter
 And then I'll mold from this clay a new Khmer people. (15-16)

He sees his world through the lens of a masculinity at war with the feminine. Highlighting his declarations of desire for a return to a pure Kampuchea by purging colonialism from his mother country Cixous slowly reveals how uncontrollably he is driven to make all his countrymen conform to his own ideal (male) ego. The artificial group he tried to substitute for actual Cambodian culture and society, ruled by the Khmer Rouge, was one with the classical group psychology analyzed by Freud as originally motivated by envy of others' enjoyments. Its strict rule was that "everyone must have the same and be the same", and its lethal result, horribly, was the unjustified massacre of thousands of Cambodians who did not fit Pol Pot's image of an ideal "pure Cambodian." If for example, someone wore eyeglasses, or were too tall or too short they had to be killed.

Cixous's theory often has a militant tone, but it is the tone of someone who takes language as the most serious means of combat: her *Sorties* of 1975 means "exits" / the "ways out", but also the excursive raids made by a garrison to lift a siege. Like her fellow *émigrée* to France, Julia Kristeva, Cixous designates the "way out" of the impasses of contemporary culture and politics as existing in the nether side of language. But Cixous sees *human beings* as entirely made of language (Lacan's *parlêtre/par lettres*), so that the raids made by the underside of language are consubstantial with 'the body' of woman or of man. For Cixous, both body and woman are linguistic-effects, but that very fact is what makes them capable of subverting the language that oppresses them.

Cixous's stance on sexual difference has crucial philosophical, analytic and literary grounding that has nothing to do with "biologism", "essentialism" or anti-equalitarianism. It does have a great deal to do with her understanding of language, its relation to the unconscious, to drive and to the body. It is as if she takes Lacan's 1975 dictum in *Le Sinthome* that "drive is the echo in the body of speech" as her foundation.⁶ She shares the Freudian and Lacanian understanding of how libidinal passion vibrates in us, unconsciously, and of the real effects those unchecked drives can have on our social and political actions. She shows how we either give in to them or learn to respond creatively to defend ourselves against them.⁷ For Cixous, woman is something "more" than her subjection to the phallic signifier.⁸

Cixous is also firmly in accord with the anti-Hegelian strain in 20th century French thought, a position common to her fellow theorist of difference, Jacques Derrida not to mention Jacques Lacan. In standing firm for the recognition of sexual difference, Cixous intends to strike a blow against the *metaphysics of opposition*, a realm

in which any difference will inevitably become binary polarities where one will always yield to the dominion of the other, à la Hegel. (Or alternatively fuse with the opposite in a new synthesis [sublation] that honors neither side of the original couple.) The case of sex is egregious in this respect: the domination of feminine by masculine in Western culture is long-standing. In her life and work Cixous can thus be said to exemplify the comprehensiveness, scope and uniqueness that she believes “woman” as the revenge of the repressed can bring to bear on those cultural domains traditionally foreclosed to her. But only as “woman”, not as an imitation man or an anti-man.

Her artistic way of resisting Hegel’s overbearing metaphysical oppositions is to penetrate one side by the other, and to take the most abstract metaphysical concepts and imbue them with familiar objects—especially sex and feminine *jouissance* (*Newly Born Woman*, 1975: *Sorties*). Her prose is very different from that of Julia Kristeva, whose work is equally informed by linguistic and philosophical theory, but whose prosaic style could never be mistaken for Cixous’s poetically condensed formulations.

While the anti-Hegelian stance was, of course, also adopted by the leading male philosophers and critical theorists of Cixous’s Parisian circle, it was Cixous, through the very language that fosters metaphysical skewing, who devised new strategies for “righting” the system. She engaged in correcting the imbalance, and providing for what had been silenced, engulfed, or incorporated by its opposite to have its “say.” That is why her first major theoretical statements take a poetic, hysterical form: as poetry is repressed by prose, a hysteric’s sexual ambivalence is repressed by the prevailing order of binary sexual oppositions.

With Lacan, Cixous sees human “life” as an effect of a signifier that excises *jouissance* from reason and from a social life that is ruled by the (phallic) Laws (of language). From Lacan and from Freud both, Cixous learned to appreciate the degree to which language *is* the essence of human life, and that when woman’s speech (or anyone else’s speech, for that matter) is radically impeded, cut off by cultural limits, that life becomes the object of unleashed, irrational forces of repression as well as the return of the anguishing presence Lacan termed *jouissance*.⁹ In the place of a *vouloir-dire* (literally, a “meaning”, but also etymologically, “a wanting-to-say”), the repressed subject produces only stifled gestures, awkward jerks inconsonant with untroubled verbal expression—the sort of calm verbal expression that grants masculine speakers social rewards and assures them their superior social place and psychological balance.

Those in command of the word can hide behind it—behind the mask that speech provides. Recall Stendhal’s dictum that “words were made to hide men’s thoughts.” The hysteric’s unbidden gesture is, by contrast, all-too-visible—to the point that it becomes a “writing” that can never stop writing itself, even and especially when all avenues of speech are cut off to it. Cixous’s aim, in “The Laugh of the Medusa”, and in *Sorties*, is to read the *writing* in hysteria, to read its proto-écriture *féminine*.

But more than that, the hysteric's stance, which makes salient that her truth is what cannot open out onto speech, is a platform from which to challenge what is hidden behind the seemingly orderly discourse that is male dominated. For Cixous, "woman" is more or less the emblem of a power, an energy in language that has been prematurely stifled by a culture of the (phallic) signifier. The hallmark of her own critical prose is its singular power to compress grand philosophical, political, and psychoanalytic theories into tellingly pithy, epigrammatic formulations that communicate explosively their critical stance as much through their handling of the signifier—language, sound, rhythm, style as through systematic exposition—and at times, bitter irony. For example, for her critiques of Freud in *La Jeune née* and in *Le rire de la Méduse* Cixous consciously adopts a "hysterical" *persona* and tone that become no small part of the criticism she launches.

It is important to acknowledge and return to Cixous's double insistence on *woman* and on *sexual difference*. It is a stance that distinguishes her markedly from Judith Butler who, like Cixous, is allied with Derridean deconstruction, but whose fundamental orientation remains Hegelian. Butler contests the "Hegelian" binary opposition between masculine and feminine (in which one must succumb to the other); but her technique is to "subvert" gender repressions by undermining and loosening the cultural codings of gender, thereby detaching gender not just from any biological link, but also from any linguistic tie to its subject. And in so disconnecting gender from language, from the signifier, Butler's stance ends by vitiating gender altogether. After Butler, and for many of her followers, sexual difference no longer exists because she has destroyed the entire concept of gender. There is nothing behind or beyond the gender masquerade.

Cixous's approach sounds superficially similar to Butler's, but it is really quite different. Cixous is committed to the struggle *within language as such*; to *wresting the subject free from language by means of language itself*. Cixous's argument with the feminist position of egalitarianism is that it is premature and may too quickly override what of woman still needs to be explored and deployed. What may *woman* yield for the arsenal needed to combat language's insistent categorizations, or what the great Kenneth Burke once called the "postal address" version of semantic meanings, the giving "a name and address to everything in the universe." Cixous does not work at the level of a shifting surface *personae*, or masks, à la Butler. She instead works her way through language and its laws to have something new rise to the surface: and for Cixous, it is the moment of surfacing that counts. Liberation must be constantly re-secured through intimate linguistic struggle that takes the full measure of its opponent's force and dominance. And that opponent is, first and foremost, the unconscious drives and their libidinal power that must be confronted and challenged again and again and again.

By using psychoanalytic thought creatively, Cixous has placed herself more in the Derridean deconstructive camp than in the scientific rigor of Freudian-Lacanian thought, to which she (and Derrida) also remain indebted. The critical distinction to be drawn between Cixous's adherence to the principle of sexual difference and

that of Lacan is that for Lacan, at least in his early work, sexual difference as such is *the* response of the subject to the effect of the signifier. For Lacan, the sexualized response to the traumatic alienation of the subject by the signifier dates from the subject's very first encounter with the signifier, with language, with the phallus coming to the rescue by organizing the disarray the signifier introduces into the subject. This encounter structures the logic of the psyche and thus of sex for each subject.

Also for Cixous, "masculine" and "feminine" are orientations toward language and its logic and nothing more—orientations that affect the body and soul alike and are the source of sexual energy—but which can be directed toward creative ends. And as such, it might well be that Cixous, as Lacan's assistant, allowed him to correct his own position on how language constitutes woman beyond the phallus and her presumed "envy" of it. In his famous diagram from *Encore*, he draws a second directional arrow in his feminine linguistic logic toward a big Other that is barred, restrained, not of the ilk of the unbarred Other found in the deep logic of the masculine side. He visually real-izes woman as not entirely determined by the phallic signifier.¹⁰ The body of *woman* is not-all under the dominion of the phallic signifier and as such she can be—and is—an amazing resource for renewing culture—woman as *more*.¹¹

What did "sexual difference" mean for Cixous's artistry? At the level of art, sexual difference is neither a given, nor an eternal opposition, but a fundamental principle of insight. In her essay, "The Two Countries of Writing", Cixous says: "I'm mostly composed of 'women'—quite by chance. I have no trace of my grandfathers except as being wiped out of life. And neither of my grandmothers had traces of grandfathers So I am mostly peopled with 'women.' And it's probably made me write the way I write. I might have been composed of 'men'; and I would have written differently. But then, what are 'men' or 'women' composed of?" (Cixous, "Two Countries", p. 197) She *artfully* produces her characters as linguistic effects.

If there are two different logical positions that can be taken *within language* (language is that which defines human being as such) and if these go by the name of masculine and feminine, and if their two perspectives neither fully overlap, nor diverge completely, Cixous in this last quote shows them to be holding a common, vacuous center—the phallic signifier—that they each appropriate or resist in different ways. She then makes it her work to *specify* two distinctive ways of apprehending and reflecting certain universal human predicaments in her art, where she makes full use of the energy derived from this original principle of cleavage, *sexuation*, in much the same way that Hazlitt said Shakespeare did: she works her way toward the emptying out of its cultural remainders, the restrictions produced by the metaphysics of oppositional thinking to free her to inhabit the *other* sex.

But what has "sexual difference" meant, in a non-artistic context, in practical, concrete terms to Cixous? In the various institutions in which she labored?

When Cixous founded the first program of doctoral studies in *Études Féminines* in France at Paris VIII (Vincennes) in 1974, she had been Chair of the English Department at the University of Paris at Nanterre since 1967. Even as head of the new program she continued to direct English doctoral studies: she was, after all, an internationally acclaimed Joyce scholar, and, at age 40, the youngest holder of the *doctorat d'état* in France, having published her major thesis on Joyce (*The Exile of James Joyce*) and written a minor thesis on Robinson Jeffers. Within the university system, the emphasis on women in *Études féminines* was most radical politically. Cixous has, however, claimed that, at the time, she would have greatly preferred to title the new doctoral program “Studies in Sexual Difference.”¹² If she was not simply after the “study of women”, what did Cixous have in mind in pursuing the politics of feminine studies, the practices of feminine writing, and the strategies of feminine reading?¹³

Cixous' commitment to the problematic of difference is most deeply attributable to her absolute commitment to *literary* language. It is a commitment that has clearly shaped her institutional practices. She insisted on hiring mainly leading creative writers at Vincennes: Michel Butor, Julio Cortazar and “poetic” literary critics like Jean-Pierre Richard and Tzvetan Todorov to teach there. It has also deeply informed her theories of feminine writing (*écriture féminine*) and shaped her literary criticism into a uniquely poetic prose. It is crucial to note that her procedure as critic, writer, and reader is to force sexual difference to the surface of writing—be it theoretical, dramatic, political, poetic in nature—so that the writing at last comes to mirror the schism of language, the internal limit that each “sex” poses to the other within the “same” language. The goal is not to achieve a Hegelian *sublation*; it is, rather, to accomplish its aesthetic *sublimation*: by “emptying the subject” of sex, its capacity for enjoyment is unlocked, but only—and this seems to be crucial for understanding Cixous—at the literary level. She does not seem inclined to bring the program into everyday life except where life itself has attained poetic insight.

Cixous depicts her own her particular “coming to language” as shaping her poetic as well as her critical practice. Her earliest discussion of her artistic process (*La Venue à l'Écriture*, 1977) links it to the fact that, as a child in her peculiar circumstances, she found herself opened to the heteroglossic light that different tongues shed upon each other. For her a language exists beyond languages, something like Benjamin's *reine Sprache*, that is “universal” to human being, but it is a *concrete* universal that she calls different “countries” in language: the country of poetry, the country of theater. This “universal” face is always particularized by reference to her own familial biography: she looks to her father (and his premature death when she was eleven) as crucial for bending her toward poetry in her earliest reflections; but by her 1994 book, *Photos de racines (Rootprints)*, Cixous also begins to track part of the history of her own poetic language to her maternal language, German, with its particular resonances and rhythms.

The theme of exile in language often informs her theory of poetry. It has drawn her to write about poets like Osip Mandelstam (whom she pairs, unexpectedly, with

Nelson Mandela on the basis of the common part-signifier in their names; *Manne* 1988), Anna Akhmatova and Tasso, playwrights like Kleist and Shakespeare, and novelists like Kafka and Joyce, whose language bears the indelible mark of an internal exile. At the same time, Cixous conscientiously admits that her critical predilection for such authors is rooted in her own sense of the linguistic exile she felt as a child of Jewish parents (one of Spanish descent whose family had lived in Morocco, the other an Austro-Hungarian, who emigrated from *Mittel Europa* in 1933) in French and Arab speaking Algeria.

It is thus entirely legitimate, in Cixous' critical theory, to tie literary language to the biography and elective theoretical alliances and affective political allegiances of its author.

Notes

1. She came into conflict with an early French feminism that had adopted a militant stance regarding the sexes as absolutely equal and interchangeable (e.g., Monique Wittig). In Anglo-American feminist and critical circles Cixous was quickly labeled an "idealist", "uneasy about the power of words to hold out against the power of opposition"; her unique way of moving back and forth among "text, performance, unconscious, and biography" (Schiach, p. 33).
2. Although both of her French forefathers, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Stendhal, also sought to describe the experience of having two souls in a single body; and for Stendhal, that "other" soul of his is feminine. See *La vie d'Henry Brulard* and my chapter, "Becoming and Unbecoming a Man" in *The Hysteric's Guide to the Future Female Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999). One might also recall that Simone de Beauvoir praised Stendhal for having portrayed, uniquely, "*des femmes vraies*" ["real women"].
3. Cixous, "The Two Countries of Writing", in Juliet Flower MacCannell, ed. *The Other Perspective in Gender and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press 1990), p. 203.
4. Cixous says, "I want to tell the epic of the heart", ("The Two Countries", p. 201).
5. *The Terrible but Unfinished Story of Norodom Sihanouk, King of Cambodia*, trans. Juliet Flower MacCannell, Judith Pike and Lollie Groth (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), p. ix.
6. *Seminar XXIII*, lesson of 18 November 1975 (London: Polity Press. 2016), p. 9 [Orig. *Ornicar?* 1975, p. 4]
7. See my chapter, "The Echo of the Signifier in the Body: How Drive Works (Or Not) Today", for *The Science of the Signifier: Analyzing the Cultural Unconscious*, eds. Lilian Munk-Rösing and Ida Nissen (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), pp. 27-45.
8. She differs entirely from Kristeva's "revolution in poetic language" which attributes to a choric reserve the "semiotic" rhythms that disrupt surface discourse but never fully overthrow it, Cixous is determined to have the feminine re-write and re-invent that "surface"
9. Some of the biographical record may clarify Cixous's relation to the thought of Lacan. Lacan was interested in James Joyce, about whom he would eventually write in his seminar on *Le Sinthome, Seminar XXIII*. Because of her great knowledge of Joyce, Cixous's

thesis director, Jean-Jacques Mayoux, introduced her to Lacan, and she and Lacan worked together for two years, from 1963-65. Her long-time partner Antoinette Fouque, a political activist in the *Mouvement des femmes* and co-founder of the publishing house, Éditions des femmes, was analyzed by Lacan, creating another tie between Cixous's sensibilities and the French Freudian, Jacques Lacan.

10. See my argument on this in "The Open Ego: Joyce, Woolf, and 'Mad' Subject", in M. Steinkoler and P. Gherovici, eds. *Lacan and Madness: Madness, Yes You Can't* (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 205-218.

11. See my discussion in "The Open Ego", *op. cit.*, pp. 209 -210.

12. Mireille Calle-Gruber, p. 211.

13. Morag Schiach, p. 38ff.

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MAIRÉAD HANRAHAN

MANHATTAN,
OR LITERATURE AS EYE-PATCH

As its sub-title announces, Cixous's *Manhattan: Lettres de la préhistoire* [*Manhattan: Letters from prehistory*] is profoundly concerned with the traces that survive of an early experience of which, paradoxically, no traces apparently survive. The narrator herself explicitly foregrounds the importance—"tant langagier [...] tant littéral que métaphorique que psychanalytique" [as much a matter of language [...] as much literal as metaphoric as psychoanalytical]—of the theme of the scar as the vestige of a traumatic event: "trauma, trace d'une blessure, tissu fibreux visible ou invisible qui remplace réellement ou allégoriquement une perte de substance qui donc n'est pas perdue mais suppléée, bourrelet mnésique" [trauma, trace of a wound, the visible or invisible fibrous tissue replacing really or allegorically a loss of substance that therefore is not lost but supplemented, a protrusion of memory].¹ Indeed, she goes so far as to theorise that "la Littérature tout entière est cicatricielle. Elle célèbre la plaie et redit la lésion" [Literature in its entirety is a scar tissue. It celebrates the wound and retells the injury] (*Manhattan*, 189). The scar is as much a key motif in the diegesis as it is in her discourse, insofar as the one indelible memory of the event whose significance for the narrator *Manhattan* as a whole explores, her love affair in 1964 (thus her prehistory in the sense that at that point in time she had not yet ever published anything) in New York with a young man named Gregor, concerns a scar on his chest: "je n'ai jamais oublié et n'oublierai jamais la cicatrice sur la poitrine" [I have never forgotten and will never forget the scar on his chest] (*Manhattan*, p. 38). However, just as Proust's narrator wonders, had Gilberte Swann not had such black eyes, if maybe he would not have been so "plus particulièrement amoureux, en elle, de ses yeux bleus" [much particularly in love, in her, with her blue eyes], so too this one unforgettable memory is profoundly unreliable. The quotation continues: "je n'ai jamais oublié et n'oublierai jamais la cicatrice sur la poitrine que pourtant je n'ai jamais vue mais que j'ai bien cru voir crue. Cruvoir" [I have never forgotten and will never forget the scar on his chest that I nonetheless never saw but believed I saw raw]² (*Manhattan*, p. 38). Literature, apparently, involves revisiting an apparent wound in the place of a real but forever unknowable one.

Nonetheless, *Manhattan* is partly rather than primarily about this substitutive property of literature. In his analysis of the text as a reflection on the creation of a Cixous archive by the Bibliothèque nationale at the time she was writing the book, Jacques Derrida proposes that the challenge posed by Cixous's work to the library that will henceforward aspire to contain it lies not in its pointing to a hidden secret but in its "structure bifide qui peut garder en réserve indécidable cela même qu'elle avoue, montre, manifeste, exhibe, expose à n'en plus finir" [forked structure that can undecidably keep in reserve the very thing it endlessly confesses, shows, manifests, exhibits, exposes].³ At issue is not a manifestly false replacement that serves to highlight the impossibility of ever accessing the truth. For Derrida, Cixous's radical achievement lies in the extent to which her text makes it impossible to decide between the true and the false. Building on his insight, I seek in what follows to explore the implications of—in my view—the most remarkable aspect of *Manhattan*: its exploration not of screen or false memories but of the part (not just role, but a specifically partial role) that the resurfacing of the past plays not only in Cixous becoming Cixous, but in the creation of any literary oeuvre.

Manhattan's second chapter introduces the event that appears to have catalysed the writing of the book: the sudden resurfacing in the narrator's memory, on April 6 2001, of the eye-patch that Gregor had worn when she met him in New York on January 1 1965 following an operation. On the same page as the much-quoted sentence where she sums up "l'histoire que devrait raconter Le Récit" [the (hi) story that the Narrative should tell] first in two words: "*folie littérature*" [madness literature] and then "plus exactement" [more precisely]—and untranslatably, given the homophony in French between the *fo-* that begins the word for mad and *faux*, false—in a single one: "folittérature" [falliterature], she states: "J'avais *totalemtent oublié* le détail *ungeheuer* du *cache-oeil*" [I had *totally forgotten* the *ungeheuer* detail of the *eye-patch*] (*Manhattan*, p. 38).

What does it mean to be "totally forgotten"? The paradox is unmistakable: a detail that one remembers having totally forgotten cannot, logically speaking, be totally forgotten. Has she rather then *partially* forgotten the detail? I shall return shortly to the relationship between detail and totality; first let us note that the narrator not only immediately contrasts this detail with the above-mentioned chest scar that she claims never to have forgotten, but then elaborates, in a page-long sentence broken up into six paragraphs, on the difference between the various kinds of details:

J'y noterai les surgissements totalement inattendus de détails totalement oubliés. Détails dramatiques à l'époque mais emportés par le temps, jamais réapparus, et sans suite dans mon histoire,

contrairement à d'autres comme le détail dit de « l'écureuil à demi enfoui » dont on peut suivre la trace et moi aussi à travers presque tous mes textes, soit sous forme d'une réinscription directe, soit sous forme d'allégorie, ou de

métaphore, contrairement aux détails ineffacés et depuis intériorisés, fétichisés, pas du tout idolâtrés mais récurrents, familiers, inséparables

ces détails qui ne sont pas entrés dans mes livres mais dans l'oubli le plus inerte, qui n'ont pas donné lieu à des rêves, n'ont pas eu de descendance repérable,

ont, pourtant, [...]

ont, pourtant, [...]

ont, pourtant, j'en reçois la preuve des années plus tard, arpenté mon existence, mon histoire, à mon insu.

[I shall note there the totally unexpected resurfacings of totally forgotten details. Details that were dramatic when they happened but carried away by time, never reappeared, with no follow-up in my (hi)story,

in contrast with others like the detail called "the half-buried squirrel" whose trace can be followed including by me throughout nearly all my texts, either as a direct reinscription, or in the form of an allegory, or a metaphor, in contrast with the unerased details that since have been interiorized, fetishized, not at all worshipped but recurrent, familiar, inseparable

those details that didn't go into my books but into the most inert forgetfulness, that didn't give way to dreams, had no identifiable issue,

have, nevertheless, [...]

have, nevertheless, [...]

have, nevertheless, I am finding the proof many years later, travelled through my existence, my (hi)story, unbeknownst to me.] (*Manhattan*, p. 39)

As the repetition of "pourtant" [nevertheless] emphasises, a further paradox is at play here: the details that in the first paragraph are declared to be "sans suite dans mon histoire", are in the last paragraph proclaimed nonetheless to have marked "mon existence, mon histoire" unbeknownst to her. In addition, a further apparent opposition between the details that left traces in the narrator's texts and those that rather fell into the most "inert" forgetfulness is similarly unstable. For while the final "mon existence, mon histoire" appears to map the first opposition onto a difference between her books and her life, the fact that "histoire" means not only "history" but "story" makes the idea that the "totally forgotten" details can reliably be distinguished from those she has not only been aware of, but exploiting throughout her writing career, untenable. The distinction between the different sorts of details is as uncertain as that obtaining in *À la recherche du temps perdu* between voluntary and involuntary memory.

What is at stake here, then, is a partial distinction between different types of detail, that is, between different types of part. This partial distinction is superbly crystal-

lized in the overlap between the signifiers of the details chosen as representatives of the two categories, insofar as the last syllable of *cache-oeil* sounds the same as that of *écur-euil*: far from being opposed to the squirrel, the patch half appears in it. The two de-tails share the same tail. In addition to their commonality at the level of the signifier, they overlap figuratively, as the lines immediately following the long quotation above make clear:

Est remonté ultime du tréfonds et d'un seul coup de queue à ma surface
premièrement le détail « cache-œil »

la chose, précise, a un nom que je ne connais pas.

[Finally rose up from the depths to my surface with a single lash of its tail
the detail “eye-patch”

the precise thing has a name I don't know.] (p. 40)

The *cache-oeil* surfaces with “un seul coup de queue”, a lash of its tail. It too is in part animal.

This last detail is of particular significance in that it helps to explain the claim made at the beginning of the long quotation—a surprising claim, for anyone who has read many of Cixous's books—that the squirrel has left recurrent traces, verging on the ubiquitous, throughout her corpus (“throughout nearly all my texts, either as a direct reinscription, or in the form of an allegory, or a metaphor”). To the extent that the half-buried (“à demi enfoui”) squirrel can be traced throughout her writing, it is because it features there half-buried, as a passage that makes an explicit comparison between the squirrel and Goya's famous portrait of the half-buried dog subsequently elaborates:

Avec les écureuils j'étais bien. Je parle leur langue. [...] Les dieux vivants totalement innocents de mort et de vie comme mort voilà ce qu'ils sont à jamais pour moi depuis l'écureuil-premier, l'Écureuil de Central Park, à demi enterré, dont j'ai retrouvé le portrait au Prado tel qu'il fut peint par Goya d'après sa nature angoissée personnelle.

[I felt good with the squirrels. I speak their language. [...] Living gods totally innocent of death and of life as death that is what they have been for me ever since the first-squirrel, the Squirrel of Central Park, half buried, whose portrait I found again in the Prado as it was painted by Goya according to his personal anguished nature.] (*Manhattan*, p. 96)

If the portrait of the dog that figures in many of Cixous's texts can be considered a portrait of the squirrel, her text is indeed full of allegorical or metaphorical squirrels. For example, another (half-)portrait of the squirrel is similarly identifiable in another detail to which *Manhattan* frequently returns, the engraving mentioned on the first page of Kafka's “Metamorphosis” as hanging on the bedroom wall of the Gregor Samsa of whom Cixous's Gregor is a troubling counterfeit or double. Like Goya's dog, this representation of “une dame avec toque de fourrure et *boa* de

fouurrure et le bras tendu vers le lecteur disparaissant dans un épais manchon de fouurrure” [a lady with a fur hat and fur *boa* with her hand stretched out towards the reader disappearing in a thick fur muff] (*Manhattan*, p. 49) evokes a strong association with the half-buried squirrel. But so too, it could be argued, is the case for so many of the multitudinous “métaphores animales” [animal metaphors] that proliferate not only in *Manhattan* (*Manhattan*, p. 131) but in Cixous’s other books. Moreover, there is no logical reason why other, non-animal, details—including, as above, an eye-patch—should not be included in these allegorical or metaphorical squirrels. The chain of signification knows no end.

But does it know a beginning? Here the juxtaposition of allegory and metaphor is significant: while both tropes are defined by the supplementation of their literal meaning with a figurative one (typically on the basis of a partial similarity), allegory is usually considered to have a more clearly determinable final intention, a more rigorously determined ultimate meaning, than metaphor. While this is certainly the case in contemporary theories of metaphor, the difference was arguably less clear in the theory of the New Criticism, dominant in the sixties, whose conception of the distinction between “tenor” and “vehicle” in effect envisaged metaphor as a form of allegory. Moreover, the importance of the question of allegory in *Manhattan* is explicitly signalled by mentions (*Manhattan*, p. 169 and p. 235) of an Angus Fisher, author of *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, whose name bears a striking (partial) similarity with that of the (real) Angus Fletcher who had recently published a monograph with that title at the time of the narrator’s encounter with Gregor, a work which argued that allegory obtained much more widely across literature than had generally been considered and explored how the border between allegory and other tropes defied any attempt to fix it categorically.⁴ The quotation above from *Manhattan* certainly appears to privilege the squirrel as the allegorical or privileged meaning of the dogs/other animals/eye-patches etc. that proliferate throughout Cixous’s works, and furthermore to suggest the existence of an original squirrel, an “écureuil premier” or first squirrel, an Ur-squirrel, the half-buried one that forcefully affected her in New York precisely at the time of the love affair that she recounts in *Manhattan*. Yet the privilege granted “the Squirrel of Central Park” too is only a part of the picture, thrown into question by other passages. The half-buried position of the squirrel that presumably motivates the comparison with Goya’s dog in turn has another meaning:

(épisode de l’écureuil demi-entfoué que j’avais cru horriblement mort étouffé, la queue seule dressée comme celle d’un géant scandinave demeurant comme un défi visible sur la terre. Et après quelques minutes d’angoisse car je voyais là une allusion cruelle à ce qui attendait Gregor, le demi-mort était sorti soudain parfaitement vivant de cet enterrement.)

[(episode of the half-buried squirrel that I had thought horribly dead smothered, only its tail standing up like that of a Scandinavian giant remaining like a visible challenge on earth. And after a few minutes of anguish because I saw there a cruel allusion to the fate awaiting Gregor, the half-dead

creature had suddenly emerged from his burial perfectly alive).] (*Manhattan*, p. 187)

If this first squirrel so affected her, it was because she saw in it an allusion to the fate about to befall Gregor, the young writer suffering from tuberculosis with whom she had fallen in love. In other words, this first squirrel affected her so deeply because it served as an image of something else: it was itself already a metaphor. Furthermore, the strange upside-down posture itself also serves as a citation, evoking a posture adopted not in “life” but in literature. It recalls the supine position in which Kafka’s Gregor Samsa finds himself on awakening as an insect (an allusion already echoing in Cixous’s previously-mentioned description of the *cache-oeil* with the word “*ungeheuer*”, the adjective used to describe the “vermin” in the opening line of Kafka’s story): “Le jeune homme, désespéré, scarabée sur le dos. L’homme sur le dos est semblable à un écureuil sur le dos semblable à une tortue sur le dos: il est dans la position du mourir” [The young man, desperate, a beetle on its back. The man on his back is like a squirrel on its back like a tortoise on its back: he is in the position of dying] (*Manhattan*, p. 114).

“Le fait est que tout y est métaphore et peut-être que tout n’y est que métaphore” [The fact is that all is metaphor there and perhaps all is only metaphor there] (*Manhattan*, p. 69): *Manhattan* is in this sense profoundly concerned with the difficulty, or rather the impossibility, of distinguishing between allegory and metaphor, that is, of ascertaining the status of the hidden or secret meaning evoked by a figure. The relation between the squirrel in Central Park and all the other squirrels, literal and metaphorical, that repeat it throughout Cixous’s works is structurally similar to the relation between this forgotten love affair from her pre-writing past and her subsequent writing career. If the text invites its reader to see in this extra-textual, extra-literary affair the origin of the narrator’s literary production, it is because she herself believes in the existence of a primary cause:

Je crois au commencement. Je crois au commencement d’entre les commencements. Je crois que parmi tous les commencements qui ont donné finalement naissance au premier de mes textes, celui qui est sorti vivant du chaos, [...] je crois, mais sans aucune certitude, qu’il y en a un, qui a causé, un qui a accidenté le chaos, un événement entre tous les événements, qui a coché l’âme profondément. Sans aucune certitude.

C’est à cette encoche que je pense. C’est à cette blessure parmi les plaies.

Je crois en tout cas à une *Ursache*.

[I believe in the beginning. I believe in a beginning among beginnings. I believe that among all the beginnings that finally gave birth to the first of my texts, the one that emerged alive from the chaos, [...] I believe, but with no certainty, that there is one of them that caused, one that took shape in the chaos, an event among all the events, that deeply gouged my soul. With no certainty.

It's that gouge I'm thinking of. That wound among wounds.

In any case I believe in an *Ursache*.] (*Manhattan*, p. 111)

She believes that her "*folie littérature*" has a non-literary origin. But she believes "sans aucune certitude", and the text as a whole explores the impossibility of ever identifying that origin with any certainty. In inviting us to read this story as the narrative of what happened before she told stories, as a history of what caused her to write stories, the book tempts us in the same way she finds herself tempted: "Parfois, je suis tentée de dire: voici la Cause. *Die Ursache*" [Sometimes I am tempted to say: here is the Cause. *Die Ursache*] (*Manhattan*, p. 44). But time after time the conclusion we have been encouraged to reach is undermined. This is exemplified most clearly in the scene in which the narrator first meets Gregor, the scene therefore at the origin of their (original) love affair, which turns out to be the scene of a different wound (to an eye rather than a chest), to a different eye (her own) from that covered by Gregor's eye-patch, in a different library (the Beinecke in Yale). Gregor reaches out to the narrator when he sees a tear in her eye, caused by the sharp pain of a speck of dust caught in her contact lens. But, ashamed to "laisser voir un secret de salle de bains touchant une partie très sensible du corps" [reveal a bathroom secret concerning a very sensitive part of the body] (*Manhattan*, p. 101), she attributes the tear to the grief she felt as a

jeune mère traversée par la pensée de la mort de mon fils que je n'avais pas pleuré en réalité, au contraire, car sa mort n'était pas une simple mort et elle avait eu lieu dans une région qui se situe très au-delà de la scène des larmes.

[young mother traversed by the thought of the death of my son over which I had not in reality wept, on the contrary, for his death was not a simple death and it had taken place in a region located very far beyond the scene of tears.] (*Manhattan*, p. 102)

The narrator attributes a false origin to her tear. Yet the false origin in turn masks a true one; she later claims that the lie is the only way open to her of weeping for the loss of her son: "en mentant j'avais dit une vérité si profondément cachée en moi-même qu'elle n'aurait jamais pu jaillir sinon déguisée en mensonge" [in lying I had told a truth that was so deeply hidden within myself that it could never have been able to gush out except disguised as a lie] (*Manhattan*, p. 102). She herself is fundamentally unable to determine if the "cause" she ascribes to the tear is entirely fictional or not.

"Toute cette histoire tourne autour d'un œil, tantôt un des yeux d'un personnage, tantôt un des yeux de l'autre personnage" [This whole story turns around an eye, sometimes one of one character's eyes, sometimes one of the other character's eyes] (*Manhattan*, p. 43): the privilege awarded a few pages previously to the totally forgotten "détail *ungeheuer* du *cache-oeil*" was profoundly misleading insofar as another—or the other—eye subsequently heaves into view in the narrative as having played a critically determining role in the story it tells. The use of the verb "tourne"

[turn] in this last quotation is noteworthy: just as one eye (wearing an eye-patch) gives way to its double (an eye wearing a lens), so the text foregrounds one by one in turn a whole series of details, a textual practice it moreover explicitly draws to the reader's attention:

Détails qui occupent la totalité de la scène, dans la mesure où si grand soit le paysage on ne voit plus que le détail donc agrandi à la dimension du Tout :

Le *Couvre-Oeil* (totalement oublié) qui obture l'oeil atteint de cécité provisoire ou définitive de Gregor lors de la fameuse intervention chirurgicale. [...]

Le *demi-écureuil* [...]

La *gravure prémonitoire*, dans la petite chambre humaine de Gregor Samsa représentant une dame avec toque de fourrure et *boa* de fourrure et le bras tendu vers le lecteur disparaissant dans un épais manchon de fourrure

La Cicatrice sur la poitrine de G. Hamlet le 1er Janvier 1965, King's Crown Hotel.

La *lanterne magique* qui projette sur les murs de la *chambre* du narrateur, G.(olo) [...]

Lanterne magique projetant également G. en 1964 sur les rideaux sales de la chambre 91 à New York (à suivre...). (*Manhattan*, pp. 48-9)

[Details occupying the totality of the scene, insofar as no matter how big the landscape one can no longer see anything but the detail thus magnified to the dimension of Whole: – The *Eye-Patch* (totally forgotten) that blocks out the eye affected by Gregor's provisional or definitive blindness at the time of the famous surgical intervention. [...]

The *half-squirrel* [...]

The *premonitory engraving*, in Gregor Samsa's little human room representing a lady with a fur hat and fur *boa* with her hand stretched out towards the reader disappearing in a thick fur muff.

The scar on G.'s chest. Hamlet on January 1 1965, King's Crown Hotel.

The *magic lantern* projecting onto the walls of the narrator's *room*, G.(olo) [...]

Magic lantern similarly projecting G. in 1964 onto the dirty curtains of room 91 in New York (to be continued...). (*Manhattan*, pp. 48-9)

The narrative thus alerts us discursively to the sequence of thematic details whose significance it explores, each of which opens in turn onto its own separate series of displacements (the squirrel and the dog, the patch and the scar, etc.). *Manhattan* is in fact also a treatise on the detail, a double in certain respects of Naomi Schor's

seminal *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* that some years previously had itself drawn in some detail on Cixous in its exploration of the shift that it argues took place with realism from an earlier conception of the detail as sublatale, subordinate to the harmony of the whole, to one in which the concrete materiality of the detail resists all totalisation.⁵ “Le Détail fait la tragédie” [The Detail is what makes the tragedy] (*Manhattan*, p. 47): for Cixous, the sense of the tragic is inseparable from its concretisation in a detail that finds itself “agrandi à la dimension du Tout” in becoming visible, as for example with Kafka’s engraving:

Le Détail est un schibboleth visuel, terrible à voir. Qui le voit ne s’en remet pas. La plupart du temps on passe devant le Détail sans le voir la première fois que l’on entre dans le Récit. Dans l’histoire il est perdu dans la multitude des signes. C’est seulement après bien des années que j’ai remarqué le Détail qui donne accès à la *Métamorphose* (*die Verwandlung*) et pourtant il est bien placé à l’entrée où il végète et pue, éternel cadavre posté en avertissement au lecteur. Mais comme il ne crie ne geint ne grince le visiteur avide passe en coup de vent indifférent devant la vignette prophétique et se jette dans la pièce de devant d’où l’on ne sort plus vivant. Il eût suffi de lire l’avertissement et Tout ne serait pas arrivé. (pp. 47-8)

[The Detail is a visual schibboleth, terrible to see. Whoever sees it does not recover from it. Most of the time one goes past the Detail without seeing it the first time one enters the Narrative. In the story it is lost in the multitude of signs. It’s only after many years that I noticed the Detail that gives access to *Metamorphosis* (*die Verwandlung*) and yet it is clearly placed at the entry where it vegetates and stinks, an eternal corpse posted as a warning to the reader. But as it neither screams nor moans nor squeaks the eager visitor passes by the prophetic vignette in an indifferent gust and leaps into the front room from which nobody emerges alive. It would have been enough to read the warning for the Whole not to happen.] (pp. 47-8)

The detail accounts for the (tragic) impact of the story, its materiality serving to cast into relief something that would otherwise remain buried, unnoticed. However, rather than a full disinterment it only ever *half*unburies it:

Mais par définition magique le Détail cache ce qu’il montre. On *peut* toujours voir la gravure découpée par Gregor Samsa et encadrée exprès dans le cadre doré de la première page du Récit, mais justement on ne la voit toujours pas toujours on ne la voit pas. La loi des Détails, comment en penser la ruse ? Elle crève les yeux.

[But by magical definition the Detail hides what it shows. One *can* always see the engraving cut out by Gregor Samsa and framed deliberately in the golden frame of the Narrative’s first page, but precisely one still does not see it always one does not see it. How to grasp the cunning of the law of Details? It is blindingly obvious.] (p. 48)

The detail simultaneously reveals and hides, buries and unburies, just as the eye wearing a lens destined to make the world more visible is doubled by an eye wearing a patch that blocks it out. Similarly, the very act or fact of highlighting or unburying one detail—magnifying it “à la dimension du Tout”—simultaneously occludes or buries another. This is most brilliantly exemplified at the level of the signifier. By its use of italics and quotation marks, Cixous’s writing draws attention to the link between the tails of *cache-oeil* and *écureuil*. But in doing so it distracts the reader from the many other displacements that connect other parts of these words to others. For example, *cache* forms the tail of *Ursache*, whose head in turn can be heard in *écureuil* and in *gravure*. Indeed, from the earliest pages of the book Cixous signals clearly that there is no syllable ultimately more determining than any other, that the Ur-syllable—that is, the syllable *ur*—is missing: “au lieu de me retrouver sauvée à mon b-eau (comme je nomme mon b(ur)eau dans mes notes) je me vois en réalité sur le chemin de Certes” [instead of finding myself saved at my b-eau (as I name my b(ur)eau in my notes) I see myself in reality on the way to Certes] (p. 11).

This quotation overtly links the absence of any letters that can securely be identified as more original or primary than others to the contradiction explored in *Manhattan*’s opening chapter from its very first paragraph, the fact that the narrator finds herself going to Certes—an anagram of *Secret*, as she later points out (p. 34)—in spite of herself:

Je ne voulais pas aller à Certes et j’y allais côte à côte avec mon frère je fais toujours ce que je ne voulais pas faire pensais-je je suis en état de péché c’est jour de Pâques le premier jour de passage au lieu de passer de mon côté je passe de l’autre côté—regarderegarde comme c’est beau disait mon frère je regardai

[I did not want to go to Certes and I was going there alongside my brother I always do what I didn’t want to do I thought I am in a state of sin it is Easter the first day of passage instead of passing on my side I pass on the other side—looklook how beautiful it is said my brother I looked.] (p. 9)

What her brother judges “beau” [beautiful] is, from her point of view (“je regardai”), the site of a contradiction, one encapsulated in the French expression *avoir beau*, where an action is doubled by the action it excludes:

j’ai beau marcher au côté de mon frère, ça ne marche pas du même pas, le décollement commence, l’antique persécution inavouable, j’avance les pieds successivement, tandis qu’au fond ça crépite, le dédoublement avait commencé.

[in vain I walk beside my brother, it does not go in tandem, takeoff begins, the old inadmissible persecution, I move my feet forward in succession, while far away there’s a crackling, the doubling had begun.] (p. 20)

This opening scene, where she explores how she finds herself doing not so much what her brother wanted as the opposite of what *she* wanted (“je fais exactement

ce que *je ne voulais pas faire* et non ce que voulait mon frère” [I do exactly what *I did not want to do* and not what my brother wanted] (p. 11)), is in turn doubled later in the text by another one. She has no sooner left Gregor in order to continue to Buffalo on her tour of the different university libraries whose archives she had travelled to the US to consult, than she abruptly changes direction and returns to New York to see him again, on receipt of a letter from so him, a letter whose audacious, naked, crude [*cru*e] sentence “Je suis nu sur ma chaise longue” [I am naked on my chaise longue] (p. 125) so powerfully impresses her that she (mis)takes it for a letter from literature itself. She explains her about-face not in terms of a change in, or a realisation of, what she “really” wanted but rather as the outcome of another doubling: “Autrefois j’aimais beaucoup *le destin*, ce mot. Nous avons beau croire faire croire vouloir croire croire nous sommes doublés. Maintenant je sais que *le destin* est le nom d’une combinaison aléatoire de puissances-autres” [Previously I liked the word *destiny* a lot. It’s in vain we believe make believe want to believe believe we are doubled. Now I know that *destiny* is the name of a random combination of other-powers] (*Manhattan*, p. 121). What she once believed to be a stroke of fate, a pre-ordained course of events that will necessarily happen, she now sees as a chance concatenation, that is, as she goes on to develop, a concatenation of both predetermined and random combinations of events. Under the first category she notes the following:

1) la lettre G ; l’association entre les noms—éléments tendrement aimés des Georges et le nom non-reconnu de Gregor ; l’impossibilité où j’étais encore en 1964 de dire les mots *j’ai* et tous les autres mots-anges en *j’ai*, gé, jet, gel etc., j’essayais toujours instinctivement d’éviter tout contact gênant avec G mais elle est partout déguisée dans la langue française ; 2) la maladie précoce et la mort précipitée de préférence pulmonaire ou par étouffement, asphyxie, suffocations.

[1] the letter G; the association between the names—tenderly beloved elements of the Georges and the non-recognized name of Gregor; the impossibility still affecting me in 1964 of saying any words like *Gee* that sounded like the letter, instinctively I always tried to avoid any gibbering contact with G but it’s disguised everywhere throughout the French language; 2) premature illness and untimely death especially pulmonary or from smothering, asphyxia, suffocation.] (*Manhattan*, p. 121)

The fact that Gregor repeated certain signature elements that had determined her history—the decisive part that the letter G had played in her past, and the illness to which her father and son had succumbed—in itself was not sufficient to determine her future. It was the combination of that signature element with something that was not invested with any personal significance for her, “un élément extérieur d’une puissance unique et totalement accidentelle” [an outside element uniquely powerful and totally accidental] (*Manhattan*, p. 122), that affected her (and her behaviour) profoundly, catalysed her into doing something other than what she wanted/had decided to do. For her story to turn out the way it had, a conjuncture

was needed between the letters that were already loaded with meaning for her—notably G—and other, unrelated, utterly arbitrary letters:

La Lettre venue en vérité des confins ignorés par moi de la Littérature, chargée de toutes ses puissances séculaires et souterraines. Lettre de juif-se-disant-juif chargée des puissances millénaires d'un monde avec lequel j'étais en rapport de bannissance. Lettre qui était l'incandescence même de la Littérature, son scandale, sa quintessence, sa quinte déchirante, La Lave, le moment où le torrent hésite encore s'il deviendra racine d'oeuvre ou simple nuit d'agitation fébrile.

[*The Letter* arriving in truth from the unknown-to-me borders of Literature, invested with all its age-old subterranean powers. A Letter from a Jew-claiming-to-be-a-Jew invested with the millenary powers of a world to which my relation was one of banishing. A Letter that was the very incandescence of Literature, its scandal, its epitome, its heartbreaking effusion, Lava, the moment the torrent still hesitates if it will become the root of an oeuvre or simply a night of febrile agitation.] (*Manhattan*, p. 122)

La Lettre, Littérature, La Lave: the fact that in the original French all the capitalized letters in this quotation are Ls is a cogent visual reminder that the overdetermination of G is only part of the literary picture. The visibility of any one chain of signification at any one textual moment masks all the others that can variously emerge into the spotlight from a different point of view.

It is impossible to determine if the turning point specified at the end of this quotation (which itself brings the chapter including it to an end), the moment of hesitation before one can know for certain if the flow of letters will become a “racine d'oeuvre” or disappear with no literary follow-through, in this instance relates to Gregor (as author of the letter that moved the narrator to travel to New York) or—or as well as—to the narrator herself. In contrast, it is clear that receiving this letter “come from the borders of Literature” was a decisive turning point in transforming the narrator into the writer she would become. Yet the rhetorical flourish of ending the chapter on the first explicit evocation of the watershed moment that *Manhattan* as a whole explores should not blind us to the fact that the text states very clearly that this letter sent from literature itself is only part of the explanation. As mentioned above, the “random combination of other-powers” that the narrator sees as responsible for her destiny is a combination of combinations, “*la combinaison de cette combinaison* d'éléments internes [...] avec un élément extérieur d'une puissance unique et totalement accidentelle” [*the combination of this combination* of internal elements [...] with an external element uniquely powerful and totally accidental].

Gregor's destiny was different from hers. Gregor's destiny in fact remains undecidable to the extent that the reader is never able to ascertain if his “disparition” [disappearance] (*Manhattan*, p. 209) some months after the narrator's return to France involves his death from the pulmonary illness responsible for the scar on his chest or rather a literary disappearance, a renunciation of literature in favour of the

other string to his bow, mathematics, given that she learns of it from the atomic scientist in whose section he had been deemed “Best Young Maths Adviser” (p. 68). What appears beyond doubt, however, is that he did not become the writer he presented himself as already being. The penultimate chapter of the book explores the difference between the two aspiring writers, beginning with the narrator claiming that her love for literature had never led her to want to *be* the authors she so immensely admired: “*Je n’ai jamais voulu être Kafka, ni Stendhal, me dis-je et je fis une liste de tous ceux que j’aurais pu vouloir être par amour*” [*I never wanted to be Kafka, or Stendhal, I said to myself and I made a list of all those whom I could have wanted to be out of love*] (p. 211). She already felt herself so receptive to a host of others that she did not feel the need to “be” them: “*Moi comme autres cela me suffisait*” [*I was enough others for myself*] (p. 212). In contrast: “*Il aurait voulu être Kafka dis-je mais je ne savais même pas alors il y a plus de trente ans que certains voulaient être d’autres absolument; ou plutôt il voulait être Kafka, au lieu d’être un Kafka ce qu’il aurait pu être dis-je*” [*He would have liked to be Kafka I thought but I didn’t even know then more than thirty years ago that some people wanted to be others absolutely; or rather he wanted to be Kafka, instead of being a Kafka as he could have been I thought*] (p. 213). The difference is between wanting a partial overlap with one’s literary others and wanting an absolute one, a total replacement of his *moi* by another: “*Il voulait être Kafka et donc fuir Gregor, pensais-je, donc il ne voulait pas vraiment et absolument être Kafka, il voulait supprimer Gregor et être Kafka [...] il s’était totalement pris pour un autre*” [*He wanted to be Kafka and therefore to flee Gregor, I thought, so he did not truly and absolutely want to be Kafka, he wanted to eliminate Gregor and to be Kafka [...] he had totally taken himself for someone else*] (p. 215). Whereas she drew on the others she found overlapping with herself, he sought to appropriate an otherness that he located outside himself: “*n’étant peut-être personne à ses propres yeux il ne pouvait que vouloir un autre à la place de lui-même*” [*perhaps being nobody in his own eyes he could only want another in place of himself*] (p. 217). Cixous here suggests that the profound dislocation of one’s sense of identity that results from a traumatic loss, the fracturing of the self thus generated, may ironically result in a more secure sense of self; the narrator muses that perhaps the difference between them was that he had never known the kind of tragedy that she had experienced:

aucun ne lui était jamais arrivé encore de ces événements violents qui causent la naissance d’une âme vouée à l’alliance littéraire, aucune de ces circoncisions d’une partie du corps spirituel aucune de ces entailles en forme de bouches qui livrent passage aux premières imprécations de l’écriture il n’avait peut-être jamais encore perdu un père, ou l’ami plus cher que lui-même [...]. J’imagine qu’il avait le malheur de n’avoir pas été encore visité par un malheur.

[none of those violent events that cause the birth of a soul devoted to literary alliance had ever yet happened to him, none of those circumcisions of a part of the spiritual body none of those gashes shaped like mouths that

allow passage to the first curses of writing he had perhaps never yet lost a father, or a friend dearer to him than himself [...]. I imagine he had the misfortune never yet to have been visited by misfortune.] (*Manhattan*, pp. 217-218)

A profound loss proves a signature event, one that shapes the self in the very process of splintering it by making henceforward unassailable the simple certainty of being the contingent way one is. Those deeply marked by the unmistakable specifics of a traumatic experience are perhaps less likely to mistake themselves for another?

Insofar as Gregor's error, then, was "de n'avoir pas cru en lui-même" [not to have believed in himself] (p. 217), he could model himself entirely on Kafka, believe himself to be "exactly the same" as his chosen writer:

Il s'est cru, dis-je, je ne vois pas d'autre explication, il s'est cru le même exactement. L'idée de devenir le même de la manière la plus directe et la plus rapide a consisté dans les délais les plus courts à m'envoyer La Lettre crue: Voilà le piège: La Lettre. (p. 219)

[He believed himself, I don't see any other explanation, he believed himself to be exactly the same. The idea of becoming the same as directly and as rapidly as possible consisted in the immediate term of sending me the crude Letter: That is the trap: the Letter.] (p. 219)

He thought, in other words, that literature could be *entirely forged*. And the narrator goes on to realise that in taking him "à la lettre" [literally] (p. 221), in taking him for literature itself, in believing what he believed of himself, in confusing him with—or reducing him to—a letter, she too had committed a grave error: "Je l'aimais pour son génie contrefait il aurait aimé être aimé pour son autre génie le génie contrefacteur" [I loved him for his counterfeited genius he would have liked to be loved for his other genius his counterfeiting genius] (p. 231).⁶ The difference between them, in other words, is that Gregor's scar was *only* a fake one. Rather than inscribing a scar of his own in his writing, he sought to paint—forge—that of another: "Je soupire sur le sort du misérable peintre de cicatrice" [I sigh over the fate of the unhappy painter of scars] (p. 220).

As noted earlier, however, there is no reliable or surefire way of discriminating between the "fake" scar and the "true" one, of separating the literary traces that originate in one's personal history from those generated by the totally miraculous potential of literature itself, its extraordinary "puissance-autre." This is why the eye-patch offers a better figure of Cixous's writing—of literature in general—than the scar with which it in part overlaps. Like the scar, the patch alerts us to the presence of a wound although it does so even more indirectly, in a manner that strongly emphasises the impossibility of any access to it other than fictional: it hides the wound that it reveals. But the eye-patch has a further advantage over the scar as a figure of writing in that it emblematises *how* one sees (or does not see) as

well as *what* one sees (or does not see). At the same time that it hides the wearer's eye, it blocks out the world for the wearer. But also, just as the contact lens meant to enhance vision can do the opposite (as in the incident of the speck of dust that irritates the narrator's eye), so the eye-patch that obscures the world helps to elucidate it, by foregrounding that any vision is always partial. The patch magnificently visibilises the limits of any point of view, the fact that one of two eyes is covered ironically drawing attention to the inevitability of what in the book's final pages the narrator calls the "double point of view":

Dire ici qu'il existe un trouble dit « du double-point-de-vue » : on peut ne pas voir ce que l'on voit car on ne voit que ce que l'on croit voir ; on ne peut pas voir ce que l'on voit car on ne peut voir que ce que l'on veut voir ; on croit voir ce que l'on ne voit pas car on ne voit que ce que l'on croit.

[Say here that there is a so-called disorder of "the double point of view": one can not see what one sees because one only sees what one believes one sees; one cannot see what one sees because one can only see what one wants to see; one believes one sees what one does not see because one only sees what one believes.] (pp. 232-3)

At issue is not a failure of vision—a total inability to see—so much as an intrinsic partialness of vision: what we see is always skewed by what we want to see. That is, seeing is only ever part seeing. In particular, *Manhattan* develops the insight that the seeing involved specifically in literature—in combining letters together—combines both seeing and not seeing: it involves in part shining a spotlight on the singularities of one's own specific history, in part a random, unprogrammable, unsubstantiated shot in the dark.

Literature, then, is a space where everything is doubled. A seeing eye is doubled by a non-seeing one; allegory is overlain by metaphor; truth is intimately bound up with falsehood. One might believe that one can tell them apart, just as the narrator is confident that the chain of signification formed by the letter G and "les mots *j'ai* et tous les autres mots-anges en *j'ai*, gé, jet, gel etc." bears traces of the determining events of her prehistory in a way that other combinations of letters do not. One message of *Manhattan* is certainly that belief can never be verified. But another is that belief nonetheless plays an irreducible part in the literary experience. As the narrator's mother asserts, "On ne peut pas lire sans croire : tu lis tu crois" [One cannot read without believing: to read is to believe] (p. 20). Cixous's narrator may not be able to determine with any certainty which elements of her writing are rooted in her past. But her book admirably explores how combinations of letters need to

comprise part history, part story, for them to constitute what she considers literature worthy of the name.

Notes

1. Hélène Cixous, *Manhattan: Lettres de la préhistoire* (Paris: Galilée, 2002), p. 189. Henceforward abbreviated to *Manhattan*.
2. “*Cru*” is one of the words Cixous plays most untranslatably with in *Manhattan*, exploiting the homophony in French between the past participle of the verb *croire*, to believe, and the adjective meaning crude/raw.
3. Jacques Derrida, *Genèses, généalogies, genres et le génie: Les secrets de l’archive* (Paris: Galilée, 2003), p. 43.
4. “The main point is surely that in discussing literature generally we must be ready to discern in almost any work at least a small degree of allegory. All literature, as Northrop Frye has observed, is from the point of view of commentary more or less allegorical, while no ‘pure allegory’ will ever be found”, Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964), p. 8.
5. Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987); for Cixous, see pp. 165-70.
6. The question of forging inevitably evokes Stephen Dedalus’s line at the end of Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* that he will go to “forge in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated consciousness of [his] race.” For a discussion of the Joycean intertext in the book, see Eric Prenowitz, “Make believe: *Manhattan’s* Folittérature”, *New Literary History*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2006, pp. 147-67.

LAURENT MILESI

HÉLÈNE CIXOUS'S MISSED ENCOUNTER
WITH THE REAL

Reading "The-Book-I-Do-Not-Write" alongside Seminar XI

Among the many works of fiction in Hélène Cixous's voluminous textual output, some of which are interconnected in open-ended sequences, one increasingly prominent 'project' stands out, circling around what crystallized as "The Book I Don't Write" (*le livre que je n'écris pas*)—variously formulated and often hyphenated to emphasize its conceptual uniqueness.¹ In a 2006 interview, three years after Cixous's eponymous lecture on this theme at the "Genèses Généalogies Genres" symposium,² Frédéric-Yves Jeannet retraced to *Tours promises* (2004)³ and, more tenuously, *Tombe* (1973),⁴ the origin of this impossible unwritten/unwritable book, although *Jours de l'an* (1990) could equally be credited with the formula's 'official' patenting, in a symptomatic admixture of forgetting and repression, past and present tenses:

And for thirty years I have been writing [...] now, suddenly, I sense it: among all these books is the book I haven't written; haven't ceased not to write. [...]

[...] for thirty years we never think about the book we do not write. There is a book. That we do not write. We barely think about it, almost not at all, almost never; it does not exist. I forget about it.⁵

In her lecture Cixous herself attempted to date and enumerate the several attempts, each time failed, to tackle this elusive book: "I'd already tried in 1991, 93, 94, 96, 97 and each time there was a diversion, a dispersion of notes and evasions. And before that I'd had a go in the 70s [...]. I never stopped constantly not writing this book for decades and face to face on a dozen precisely dated previous occasions" (*VH*, p. 207). Just before the mention of "The Book of Life"⁶ a similar statement, with a more pliable temporality suggesting that the impossible book may indeed be envisaged as co-originating with the beginning of life, had appeared in *Benjamin à Montaigne*: "It's been dozens of years, forty let's say, I can say sixty or eighty while addressing the 2020 reader, that I have-not-stopped-not-writing the famous book" (*BM*, p. 66).

"[T]his bookidontwrite" (*VH*, p. 193) did not take off fully until the sequence of three texts to date in the Hamletian *Abstracts et Brèves Chroniques du Temps*, which foregrounds the impossibility to arrive at *the* bookstory as final destination, "perhaps a dream-that-does-not-arrive."⁷ Before that, in the years following both Cixous's lecture and the interview with Jeannet, several narratives had kept the (theme of the) missing, negated, substitute book both at bay and at the forefront of her writ-

ing, with the occasional record of precisely-dated notes corroborating its historical significance.⁸

Addressing the “*B. that...*” more closely in the interview, Cixous clarified that there were in principle two kinds of such books: those “that I aim at, and whose failure causes [...] a ‘diversionary’ book, an unexpected, an as-good-as-I-could” (*VH*, p. 254), written by default, for want of a better book, in a serial substitution, and “*The Book*, the only one, the unique, still uninterrupted, which is everywhere and nowhere” (‘*B*’, p. 256). She also highlighted both its originary status as “the first cause of all my books” and its ominous, sacrificial resonances, to which I will return: “maybe it’s the book left for dead by each book I write at the expense of a book I do not write” (*VH*, p. 213, p. 193).

Abstracts et Brèves Chroniques... was inaugurated by *Chapitre Los* (2013), whose very title hints, via a multilingual pun involving the mother’s native German language, at the *los(t)*, detached (*los*), episodic (‘chapter’) nature of the series, and whose insert (“To My Readers”) recalls those “thirty years’, barely updated since the dream of the Book formed, as if the inchoate project had frozen time and stood still in the narrator’s memory:

This book is a chapter of *The-Book-I-Don’t-Write*. [...]

There is a book I call *The-Book-I-Don’t-Write* that I’ve been dreaming of for over thirty years. It is the master, the double, the prophet, almost the messiah of all the books I write at its call. This book precedes me and sums me up. It collects all my lives and all my volumes. It haunts and guides me.

This is one petal of the Book-I-Don’t-Write. A petal. Detached from the rest of the flower of the Book. *Los*, as my mother would say in her German language. *Los*: detached.⁹

In the Prologue to the 2008 re-edition of *Tombe*, Cixous had written that “*Tombe* senses in advance, writes in advance the book which haunts it, unknowingly. Keeps watch. Waits. Unbeknownst to me. Waits thirty years.”¹⁰

First to be preserved but perhaps ultimately destined not to remain more primordial than any other (*L*, p. vi), *Chapitre Los* was followed by *Le détronement de la mort* (2014), its “shadow book [...]. Its witness and its double”,¹¹ before *Corollaires d’un voeu* (2015), whose own insert begins by rephrasing its lineage and status as “part object” equally explicitly. Playing on the polyglottal resonances of loss and German *los* (*L*, p. 3, p. 7), these loose (fly)leaves or “petals around the heart of the flower”¹² are haunted by substitutions, produced and detached *in the place of* through some kind of kenotic writing or *circum-scriptio* which writes around in order not to write—the absent Book, compared to an empty grave, is called “The Empty Book” (*BM*, p. 67).

How can one interpret this “more and more present, more and more insistent” (‘*B*’, p. 249) Book and return of serial books, which are all “deviations of the Empty

Book" (*BM*, p. 67) which subsumes them all, in the place of the one that never materializes? Notwithstanding the seemingly *conscious* nature of Cixous's articulation of the Book's problematic, mentions of "unknowingly [...] Unbeknownst to me", seen above, but also the paradoxical concession that "*The Book* [...] is the object of an unconscious pursuit" ('B', p. 256), authorize a rapprochement with Jacques Lacan's conceptual redeployment of the Aristotelian couple *automaton*, "the return, the coming-back, the insistence of the signs", versus *tuché*, or the encounter with a real that eludes us.¹³ "[A] second life off to the side of my life, my other life which gives life to my life" (*VH*, p. 215), the Book-I-Don't-Write, which "[s]ince the beginnings [...] contains my lives and their deaths/dead [*morts*]",¹⁴ would signify the real which "is beyond" / "lies behind the automaton" (*Sem XI*, pp. 53, 54) or, here, those sequential, "automatic" repetitions around an absent centre or "Ground Zero" of writing, an "essential encounter" which is always missed until that ineluctable event which awaits us all and yet at which we cannot be present: our own death. It is in this sense perhaps that one can construe Cixous's intriguing remark, in the Prologue of the 2008 re-edition of *Tomb(e)*, that "This Book-which-I-Do-Not-Write [...] will come only one day after the last page of the last book in my lifetime",¹⁵ once the implacable appointment with death as the utmost elusive Real has taken place, with nobody to substitute in one's place. Or else and more strikingly at the end of the eponymous essay: "The-book-I-don't-write, the night I die I'll spend reading it" (*VH*, p. 219). Meanwhile, "I went on writing-but-not-this-book, this book, I wasn't writing but another. An other" (*VH*, p. 207).

But the book-I-don't-write is also a "shortcut to the house of the dead" (*VH*, p. 194), a "yawning coffin on end, a customs house for ghosts" (*VH*, p. 196), as Cixous recalls entering into writing as "a descendent of the dead" (*VH*, p. 197)¹⁶—for instance, her dead father in *Dedans*, her very first novel, but also Cixous as a successor to dead writing masters whose masks she takes on and whom she impersonates. And these spectral, sepulchral entities include her former selves, who may or may not be "Hélène Cixous"—cf. *VH*, p. 195: "I do not take myself continuously or deeply or simply and comfortably for Hélène Cixous"—who therefore may no longer recognize herself as the writer of these books—cf. *VH*, p. 195: "I could say that each of "my books" is a book I don't write, I who sign Hélène Cixous, I she whom I often, too often, hear speak up with authority"—as the subject emancipates itself "in a magic asyndeton" which amounts to an interminable writing cure: "Here the epiphany of *You* flares up. This You I shall be one day and that I already am. [...] I am the one you were. You are the one I shall be" (*VH*, p. 197-8).

Dates and numbers return incessantly like haunting, cyclical anniversaries.¹⁷ It is thus not a chance paradox that Jacques Derrida, who might have said "the one you don't write writes itself differently" (*L*, second page of insert) and who is himself called "a book which existed" and which "I'd already read", should stalk into Cixous's essay, especially as her reiterated recollection of his recollection, pronounced in 1998 at the first Cerisy *décade* on Cixous's work, that "I-met-her-some-thirty-five-years-ago", adding that Cixous subsequently told him that she had already seen

him from behind lecturing on “the subject of death” (*VH*, pp. 199, 200). Nor is it “by accident, as if by chance” (*Sem XI*, p. 58) that, uttered in 2003, this statement of a thirty-five-year gap—coincidentally also the number of years which Cixous spent away from their native Algeria until her hesitant return in 2005—would take us back to the years when *Tombe*, itself haunted by (memories of) death, was soon to be conceived.¹⁸ Before that statement Derrida, then Cixous, in *H. C. pour la vie, c'est à dire...*¹⁹ and *Portrait de Jacques Derrida en Jeune Saint Juif* respectively,²⁰ had repeatedly recalled and restaged their first ‘real’ meeting at a Paris cafe in 1963, some seven years after the primal scene of an asymmetrical missed encounter *a tergo*.²¹

Cixous’s relation to the Book, full of digressions²² and battles fought (and lost) as if they were real (*vrai*; cf. *VH*, pp. 196-7, in a passage referring to Stendhal’s *The Charterhouse of Parma*), is of such ambivalence that it also recalls the tug-of-war between the reality and pleasure principles evoked in *Seminar XI*. On the one hand, Cixous often stresses the imperious as much as imperative urge to write “*The-Book-I-Don’t-Write* that I’ve been dreaming of for over thirty years” (*L*, p. 6), while conversely she constantly reneges on it in repeated, apotropaic gestures of denial that however seem to perversely turn against her as soon as they are sketched:

I won’t write this book. I write this sentence down in my scribbler “I won’t write this book.” There, it’s written. There it is in the book. (*VH*, p. 206)

Ten times in ten years I wrote: “I won’t write this book.” and “How can I have confidence in whatever or me when, upon opening the files in which I archive my quarrels I find myself repeating the same sentence three months or three years later? I promise myself in vain?” (*VH*, p. 207)

Why have I so often written (and for starters, said and thought): I won’t write this book? (*VH*, p. 208)

Yet, as Cixous declared in a forum on France Culture,²³ one must do everything one can in order to write what one cannot write, and the best-known instance of such an endeavour to defy the impossible relates to her solemn declaration “in October 1991”, then recantation twelve years later (cf. ‘B’, p. 252: “the book” “*denounced* and renounced” in 2003), that she would not write about her mother:

As for writing about my mother, I’ve done it with extreme succinctness. What I’ve done, in fact, amounts to nothing. It seems to me that we can’t write about our mother. I’m sure about it. It’s one of the limits of writing.

Yet, in October 91, I wrote and declared publicly in Kingston, Canada, in front of my friend Mireille that I will never write a book about my mother, I even dated my declaration of faith with my mother’s anniversary, you could hardly be more credulous and solemn than that, and afterwards right away I did the contrary, a model of innocent forswearing, or forswearing rather.²⁴

But as Cixous soon readily admits, “October 91 must have been too late, the book had no doubt already begun [...] Often books begin concealed in non-books, as

prenatal spectres.”²⁵ since indeed, as we saw previously, “[t]his book precedes me” and originates from the dead. The Book is thus tensed between a pre-existential “always already there” and—to echo Derrida’s critique of Lacan’s notorious formula closing the “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’”—a letter whose fate (*destin*) is to structurally never arrive at its destination,²⁶ until we reach the end of the line, the incontrovertible real of death itself. Or, in response to part of Jeannet’s first question whether this book was a *f/phantasm*, the book-as-phantasm (to which I will return) “is an other presence. And there are two kinds of that: the phantom of a “past” and the phantom of a “not-yet” [...] pledged to a *never*” (‘B’, p. 249), about which one can legitimately ask: “what is the first encounter, the real, that lies behind the phantasy?” (*Sem XI*, p. 54).

However, the counter-performative nature of forswearing what was inherently an impossible promise contrasts with the perlocutionary effects in the real of the resisted book:

How does it happen that I came down with pneumonia the very week I embarked on all these stories of lungs and consumptive man? On the one hand I didn’t want to write this book. [...] Can you give yourself pneumonia via a book? [...] Did the thought of the book contaminate me? Or did the illness call up the book I wasn’t writing? (*VH*, p. 208)

This symptomatic, contagious porosity between the book and the authorial agency, the repeated, ‘automated’ phantasm and the subject affected in the real, brings us to the (reality within the) dream famously analysed by Freud, then reinterpreted by Lacan, of the father waking up to hear his dead son whispering reproachfully: “Father, can’t you see [...] that I am burning?” (*Sem XI*, p. 58). More often than not, Cixous equates the (impossible) book with a dream, specifically “a dream-that-does-not-arrive”, but the status of this book-as-dream not infrequently hesitates between the imaginary (ideality²⁷) and the real, as if poised on the intersection of the two orders for its effectiveness:²⁸

I may tell myself I’d like to write it but that’s a thought that belongs to the realm of neverwrite, you are happy to toy with ideas that stand no chance of ever becoming a threat of reality. Nor is it exact to say I don’t write the Book I-don’t-write, this would be restricting myself to believing that what is called writing is only the tracing of dark words on bright paper, many are the ways, I wish to believe, of writing the Book I don’t write [...]. (*VH*, p. 213)

[The-book-I-don’t-write] is itself a dream but ongoing not always noted down but indelible which leaves no pages, real or imaginary, blank. (*VH*, v215; translation modified)

An inkling of a clarification can be glimpsed still in the reply to Jeannet’s first question, which stresses the symptomatic, transactional nature of the book/dream-that-does-not-arrive,²⁹ ultimately related to the unassimilable traumatic real (cf. *Sem XI*, p. 55) of family deaths:³⁰ “There is a lot of death inside there, even if I have

“learned” to think that not-to-do (not to write, to say, and so on) can be converted, through displacement, just as a “not to dream”, a “do not dream” produces symptoms” (VH, pp. 249-50). This conversion or transference of sorts is central to Cixous’s resistance to psychoanalysis³¹ through the very nature of dreams, one of its traditional interpretive tools but one which she reinvents not so much as a process disclosing the traumatic real behind the repeated stagings of the fantasized book-I-don’t-write but as constituting in itself its own reality seen as the ‘truly real’ or *vrai* (cf. ‘B’, p. 252), thanks to what she calls, after George du Maurier’s precursory *Peter Ibbetson* (1892), “*rêver vrai*” (dreaming true),³² in the light of which one should perhaps (re)read her insistent questioning of the status, “truly real” or illusory, of the graphically depicted battle in *The Charterhouse of Parma* (VH, pp. 196-7). Here is how Cixous accounts for her “gift of dreaming true” in *Philippines*,³³ which elaborates it through a patient analysis of du Maurier’s book:

Why have I always responded to *Peter Ibbetson* and to Peter Ibbetson as if *this lesson in dreaming true* were addressed to me?

My apocalypse takes place the moment I write this. I hear inwardly (but what does “inwardly” mean?) Jacques Derrida responding to me in the same second, the very second, it seems to me, “there is only autoteleanalysis.”³⁴

Thus, the Calderonian formula “*life is a dream*”, dismissed by Lacan towards the beginning of the session on “Tuché and Automaton” (*Sem XI*, pp. 53, 55), is redeemed in Cixous’s writing, and the “Book of Life”, despite never materializing as such, is as if (in a) “true dream.” One may oppose the Cixousian *vrai* to the Lacanian real, the importance for her of, in Derrida’s felicitous formula, *écrire au rêve* (writing on dreams, running on them as fuel),³⁵ of writing a “*book of dreams without interpretation*”,³⁶ to his (Freudian) interpretation of the dream and its (non)relation to life.

As we saw earlier, the dream(t) Book-I-Don’t-Write acts as an irresistible guide whose call Cixous heeds, a conception which conjures up Lacan’s view of the dreamer’s position as “profoundly that of someone who does not see. The subject does not see where it is leading, he follows” (*Sem XI*, p. 75). Blindly, we might add, and indeed “writing blind”, at night, when “I write without seeing that I write, what I write”,³⁷ is the activity that the near-sighted³⁸ Cixous herself privileges as her paradoxical *modus operandi*; in her eponymous essay she also confesses that “I cannot write without *distracting* my gaze from capturing.”³⁹ Cixous’s genius as a writer is to have turned her innate condition into a fortuitous blind spot from which her writing and even non-writing (*nécrire*) can find expression, symbolized in the Book-I-Don’t-Write.

It is no coincidence that Lacan’s reconceptualization of Aristotelian *tuché* as missed encounter with the Real appears in the vicinity of the section about the split between the eye and the gaze, in the anecdote of Petit-Jean in which the subject is made to feel like a stain/spot out of place (*faire tache*) in a *tableau vivant* where s/he does not belong (*Sem XI*, pp. 95-96)—as well as near the evocation of mortality in the *vanitas* of Hans Holbein’s anamorphosis *The Ambassadors*, for which Cixous

offers as an (albeit “conscious”) equivalent her own sidelong glance into the impossible book: “sometimes I don’t think about it face to face but obliquely, off to one side” (*VH*, p. 213). For Lacan, “[t]he picture, certainly, is in my eye. But I am not in the picture” (*Sem XI*, p. 96), to which we could add that likewise what I read, and even write, leaves an impression on me, even as it springs from me, but I am foreclosed from its scenes of representation, scotomized (cf. *Sem XI*, p. 84) as a writing subject, absorbed as a blind spot in the scene of a writing over which I cannot have a commanding view.

Such a perspective also accounts for the Orphic nature of Cixous’s notwriting (*nécrire*) which, while not generalizable as the condition and “experience” of all literature—the desire and search for the work (Eurydice) by the poet (Orpheus) leading to its disappearance and the forbidden, trespassing gaze revealing its essence as inessential (Maurice Blanchot)⁴⁰—illustrates the (impossibility to look at the) elusive nature of the unwritable book (cf. ‘B’, p. 251). With each serial attempt at approaching the-book-I-don’t-write, the repetition of this disappearance resembles the game of *fort-da* evoked by Lacan as the staged repetition of a repetition (the mother’s departure), causing a *Spaltung* in the subject: “Orpheus is any creature who writes, and divides itself in two, dies in writing, lives in writing, dies in living in writing” (‘B’, p. 251), and Cixous’s iterative yet absent book “is aimed at what, essentially, is not there, *qua* represented” (*Sem XI*, p. 63).

Prompted by death(s), Cixous’s performiterative notwriting is aptly called *nécrire*,⁴¹ in which one should also hear the Greek *nekros*: dead body/person since it pertains to necroneurography. Fuelled in a large measure by the living memories of her tale-spinning ancient mother (“Homère”) until the latter’s death, Cixous’s apotropaic notwriting of the Book of Life / of the Dead operates as some sort of *nekuia*, this ritual form of necromancy in ancient Greek cult-practice and literature by which ghosts were called up and questioned about the future (cf. *VH*, p. 196: “a customs house for ghosts”). A book “to come and never” since “[i]t does not belong to this world, but rather to the other world” (‘B’, p. 252, p. 251).

Notes

1. The English phrase can also be translated as “the book I am not writing”, i.e. it can refer, as we shall see, both to a general condition of Cixous’s writing, the diversionary nature of her books, and to Cixous’s awareness, in the act of writing, that something is being written that is other than what was intended.

2. See Frédéric-Yves Jeannet, “The Book That You Will Not Write: An Interview with Hélène Cixous”, translated by Thomas Dutoit, *New Literary History*, vol. 37, no. 1: “Hélène Cixous: When the Word is a Stage”, edited by Eric Prenowitz, 2006, pp. 249-61 (hereafter ‘B’ with page references in the text), and Hélène Cixous, “The Book I Don’t Write”, translated by Beverley Bie Brahic, in *Volleys of Humanity: Essays 1972-2009*, edited by Eric Prenowitz (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 193-220 (hereafter *VH* with page references in the text).

3. Hélène Cixous, *Tours promises* (Paris: Galilée, 2004), especially p. 146. In her reply to the first question bearing on the status of this elusive 'book', Cixous resorts to the pun on *tour* (p. 249), a frequent leitmotif in her works on account of Montaigne's Tower and the 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers, associating *des tours* with the *détours* or circumvention of (non-) writing: *nécrire* (see *infra*).
4. See Cixous's retrospective reminiscences, "Mémoires de Tombe", in the book's 2008 republication: "That is how *Tombe* comes close to what, much later, I will eventually call The-Book-which-I-Do-Not-Write." (*Tomb(e)*, translated by Laurent Milesi (London: Seagull Books, 2014), p. 24.)
5. Hélène Cixous, *FirstDays of the Year*, translated and with a Preface by Catherine A. F. MacGillivray (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 5. See also Eric Prenowitz, "Fleurir", in *Hélène Cixous. Corollaires d'une écriture*, edited by Marta Segarra (Paris: PUV, 2019), p. 115, n. 10 for a partial genealogy of the motif in relation to the then two chapters of *Abstracts and Brief Chronicles*, to which he adds another prefigurative passage, from *O R, les lettres de mon père* (Paris: des femmes, 1997), pp. 14-15.
6. Hélène Cixous, *Benjamin à Montaigne. Il ne faut pas le dire* (Paris: Galilée, 2001), p. 67, translations mine; hereafter *BM* with page references in the text.
7. Hélène Cixous, *Osnabrück Station to Jerusalem*, translated by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), p. 6. See *infra* for the book-as-dream.
8. Hélène Cixous, *L'amour du loup et autres remords* (Paris: Galilée, 2003), pp. 109, 151, 159, 160, 161, 163; *Love Itself in the Letter Box*, translated by Peggy Kamuf (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), p. 43; *So Close*, translated by Peggy Kamuf (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 24 (referring to a note dated 27 July 2006); *Hemlock: Old Women in Bloom*, translated by Beverley Bie Brahic (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), p. 42: "I won't write the book I'm writing, I'll write the book I don't write."; *Mother Homer Is Dead*, translated by Peggy Kamuf (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), p. 1.
9. Hélène Cixous, *Abstracts and Brief Chronicles of the Time I. Los, A Chapter*, translated by Beverley Bie Brahic (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), pp. vi, viii; hereafter *L* with page references in the text. Cf. already 'B', 252: "At this moment, it haunts me—or its double haunts me in an even more insistent manner."
10. Cixous, *Tomb(e)*, p. 9. For a brief development on the "thirty years' motif, see also my "Enacting Postmemory in Hélène Cixous's 'Jewish Family Romance'", *Parallax*, "Holocaust Narratives in the Post-Testimonial Era", edited by Arleen Ionescu and Simona Mitroiu, vol. 29, no. 1 (2023), pp. 47–66.
11. Hélène Cixous, *Death Shall Be Dethroned: Los, A Chapter, the Journal*, translated by Beverley Bie Brahic (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), p. 1.
12. Hélène Cixous, *Abstracts et Brèves Chroniques du temps II. Corollaires d'un Vœu* (Paris: Galilée, 2015), second page of insert; translation mine.
13. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), pp. 53-54; hereafter *Sem XI* with page references in the text. Cixous's 'consciousness', however, can equally be described as "*l'inconscient à fleur de mot*", or the unconscious itself on edge, on the surface of language; see René Major, "L'inconscient d'Hélène Cixous", in *Genèses*

Généalogies Genres. Autour de l'œuvre d'Hélène Cixous, edited by Mireille Calle-Gruber and Marie Odile Germain (Paris: Galilée / Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 2006), p. 203.

14. Cixous, *Corollaires d'un Vœu*, first page of insert; translation mine.

15. Cixous, *Tomb(e)*, p. 24. See also, for instance, *L*, p. vii: "I would have liked to see it one of these days before I die" and, in the interview with Jeannet: "It is not to come. In any case not in my lifetime"; "This book is not already written, nor is it not-yet-written. It is of a kind that is not reducible—and I fear that it will never be "written", neither by me, nor in my lifetime" ('B', pp. 249, 250).

16. I have analysed how this open-ended project of the Book-I-Don't-Write intersects with a more sombre memorial project of writing the impossible trauma of the Jewish family saga during World War Two in "Enacting Postmemory in Hélène Cixous's 'Jewish Family Romance'."

17. For the theme of the annular anniversary as repetition, see Jacques Derrida, "Shibboleth: For Paul Celan", translated by Joshua Wilner, in *Word Traces: Readings of Paul Celan*, edited by Aris Fioretos (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 3-72.

18. The beginning of the text's composition can be inferred from the remark, in "*Memoires of Tomb(e)*"—a pun on Chateaubriand's famous *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe*, recalled soon after—that it was "about the age of thirty-three" that the 'author', born in 1937, decided "to look Tombe in the face and side-on" (*Tomb(e)*, p. 2), some thirty-three years before the "Genèses Généalogies Genres" colloquium...

19. Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say...*, translated, with additional notes, by Laurent Milesi and Stefan Herbrecter (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 5.

20. Hélène Cixous, *Portrait of Jacques Derrida as a Young Jewish Saint*, translated by Beverley Bie Brahic (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 5-6, where Cixous also speaks of Derrida as "[t]he book of books", a phrase which uncannily echoes Cixous's description of *Tombe* as "but a faint emanation of the book of books" (*Tomb(e)*, p. 154).

21. See the "Translator's Preface: Taking Sides in Translation", in *H. C. for Life*, p. ix, and, for a more ample development of this *Urszene*, my "Portraits of H. C. as J. D. and Back", *New Literary History*, vol. 37, no. 1: "Hélène Cixous: When the Word is a Stage", edited by Eric Prenowitz, 2006, pp. 51-70.

22. Cf. 'B', p. 251: "approach [the book] through detours, reveries, dreams."

23. "La Masterclasse d'Hélène Cixous", 50:50, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1jKX3No3IU&pp=ygUcSGVsZW5lIGNpeG91cyBsYSBtYXN0ZXJjbGFzcw%3D%3D>; accessed 12 September 2023.

24. Hélène Cixous, "In October 1991...", translated by Keith Cohen, in *Stigmata: Escaping Texts*, with a foreword by Jacques Derrida and a new preface by the author (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 39; *Tours promises*, p. 95 (translation mine), recalled in condensed form in *L'amour du loup*, 161, and *VH*, p/ 211. For critical developments, see, for e.g., Elissa Marder, "Birthmarks (Given Names)", *Parallax*, vol. 13, no. 3: "before the book—hélène cixous", edited by Eric Prenowitz, 2007, pp. 49-61; Mairéad Hanrahan, *Cixous's Semi-Fictions: Thinking at the Borders of Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), pp. 161-2. The (discreet) intrusion of the mother into Cixous's writings occurs as early as the inaugural short story in her very first work of fiction, "L'outre vide", which closes on an

ominous “*Deuxième conversation et meurtre de ma mère*”, after a “*Conversation avec la mère*”; see Hélène Cixous, *Le prénom de Dieu. Nouvelles* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1967), pp. 29-32. For other instances of forswearing, see, for e.g., *Manhattan. Lettres de la préhistoire* (Paris: Galilée, 2002), p. 99; and, related to dreaming, *Dream I Tell You*, translated by Beverley Bie Brahic (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), pp. 1-2.

25. *VH*, 211. Compare with *Tours promises*, p. 96.

26. Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, translated, with an introduction and additional notes, by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), *passim*, especially pp. 33, 121, 123, 136, 195, 324; (in “Le facteur de la vérité”) pp. 444, 489.

27. For the equivalence between ideality and the imaginary in Lacan’s writings, see, for example, *Écrits. The First Complete Edition in English*, translated by Bruce Fink et al. (New York: Norton, 2002), p. 76, and *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book I: Freud’s Papers on Technique 1953-1954*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated with notes by John Forrester (New York: Norton, 1988), p. 282 (about the tie of the ideal ego to the specular image).

28. Cixous, *Osnabrück Station to Jerusalem*, p. 6.

29. Or even ambivalently desired journey and destination, as in *So Close*, p. 12: “To go there as in a dream, that would be the ideal I used to say to myself. To go there as a dream, I dreamt.”

30. See, for example, the evocation of ancestral graves in *VH*, pp. 194, 213, 214. About the “book of death”, see, for e.g., *Déluge* (Paris: des femmes, 1992), p. 96, and especially *Tomb(e)*, p. 110: “That’s why this book lacks the book of death which this book is only a parody of. But this book does not come far from the book of death, and at times even brushes against it.”

31. On the occasion of a conference in Paris dedicated to her work, Hélène Cixous recounted a dream she once had, in which she was shivering after coming out of a psychoanalyst’s practice. The implication that what she jokingly yet derogatorily called “pissanalyse” (pissanalysis) in *Partie* (Paris: des femmes, 1976), p. 53, somehow leaves her cold should not be lost, nor should the inversion of the father’s dream of the burning son into an underlying formula such as “Uncle [Freud], can’t you see that I am shivering?” from a writer whose work, especially in the 1970s, is known for overturning psychoanalytic concepts and their phallogocentric underpinnings, often with the help of (rewriting) ancient mythology. (References to “(n)uncle Freud” first appeared with *Neutre* (Paris: Grasset, 1972), p. 36, then *Souffles* (Paris: des femmes, 1975), pp. 94, 122, 148, 173.)

32. George du Maurier, *Peter Ibbetson, with an Introduction by his cousin Lady ***** (“Madge Plunkett”)*, edited and illustrated by George du Maurier, Preface by Daphne du Maurier (London: Victor Gollancz, 1969), pp. 164, 166, 167, 179, 212, 224, 227.

33. Hélène Cixous, *Philippines*, translated by Laurent Milesi (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), p. viii, p. 25.

34. Cixous, *Philippines*, 42, referring to Derrida’s statement that “there is only tele-analysis” in “Telepathy”, translated by Nicholas Royle, *Oxford Literary Review*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1988, p. 26. See also pp. 55, 60, and the interview by Ginette Michaud, “L’avenir de la scène primitive. Entretien avec Hélène Cixous”, *Spirale*, vol. 231, 2010, pp. 21-27.

35. Jacques Derrida, "Ants", translated by Eric Prenowitz, *Oxford Literary Review*, vol. 24, no. 1: "Reading Cixous Writing", edited by Martin McQuillan, 2002, p. 25; *H. C. for Life*, p. 75; *Geneses, Genealogies, Genres, and Genius: The Secrets of the Archive*, translated by Beverley Bie Brahic (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 39ff. (with *réveil*: waking). Cixous's major titular "oneirographies" to date include *Dream I Tell You, Reveries of the Wild Woman: Primal Scenes*, translated by Beverley Bie Brahic (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006); *Hyperdream*, translated by Beverley Bie Brahic (Cambridge: Polity, 2009); *Révoir* (Paris: Galilée, 2021).
36. Cixous, *Dream I Tell You*, p. 7.
37. Hélène Cixous, "Writing Blind: Conversation with the Donkey", translated by Eric Prenowitz, in *Stigmata*, p. 123.
38. For Cixous's short-sightedness, see also "Savoir", in Helene Cixous and Jacques Derrida, *Veils*, translated by Geoffrey Bennington (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 1-16.
39. Cixous, "Writing Blind", p. 115.
40. See, in particular, "The Gaze of Orpheus", in *The Gaze of Orpheus and Other Literary Essays*, preface by Geoffrey Hartman, translated by Lydia Davis, edited, with an afterword, by P. Adams Sitney (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Pres, 1981), pp. 98-104. For the interdiction to write the Book, which could be tacitly compared to Orpheus being forbidden to gaze back at Eurydice, see 'B', p. 250, p. 253 ("an eleventh commandment: 'Thou shalt not write.'")
41. The most significant uses of this nonce verb can be found in "Le Livre que je n'écris pas" (in *Genèses Généalogies Genres*, pp. 234, 248, 249), partially overlapping with *Tours promises*, p. 25 (about the passage from nocturnal obscurity to the night of day), pp. 59, 114, 171. See also *Portrait du soleil* (Paris: Denoël, 1973), p. 65, and *With ou l'art de l'innocence* (Paris: des femmes, 1981), p. 51.

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BRYAN COUNTER

READING, DREAMING, WRITING
IN PROUST AND CIXOUS

“Et pourtant tous les événements de cette vie suraiguë ont l’air d’être taillés dans l’hyperrêve [And yet all the events of this hyped-up life seem to be cut from the hyperdream].”²¹

Hélène Cixous’s writing, creative and critical alike, focuses on the question, itself, of writing. In her quasi-fictional or semi-autobiographical writing in particular, she often refers to writing (and reading) in a very literal sense, including scores of references, both by name and through deep intertext, to literary, philosophical, and psychoanalytic writers. But most striking is perhaps her attention to the *experience* of reading and writing, which goes far beyond turning pages or putting pen to paper. A key convergence of these concerns is Marcel Proust, in whose work reading and writing has a similarly complex place.

Throughout Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu*, books are very often the site of aesthetic education, whether they are the character Bergotte’s books, classics of literature like the *Thousand and One Nights*, or the more surprising *François le champi*, whose inclusion is striking because it highlights the importance of the particular *scene* of reading in the formation of what we might call a personal canon, regardless of, or even counter to, a more objective assessment of the book’s content or value. Alongside these many discrete books, however, is what we might call the Book: a hidden, obscure, and essentially virtual set of discrete signs that each one of us is tasked with reading, a reading that takes place across the course of a life. In *Le Temps retrouvé*, Proust writes: “Quant au livre intérieur de signes inconnus (de signes en relief, semblait-il, que mon attention, explorant mon inconscient, allait chercher, heurtait, contournait, comme un plongeur qui sonde), pour la lecture desquels personne ne pouvait m’aider d’aucune règle, cette lecture consistait en un acte de création où nul ne peut nous suppléer ni même collaborer avec nous [As for the inner book of unknown symbols (symbols carved in relief they might have been, which my attention, as it explored my unconscious, groped for and stumbled against and followed the contours of, like a diver exploring the ocean-bed), if I tried

to read them no one could help me with any rules, for to read them was an act of creation in which no one can do our work for us or even collaborate with us].”² As it is evoked here, the Book can only be read by being written, and can only be written by first being unlocked through an indirect, mysterious process of discovery in which the intellect, as it often is in Proust, is powerless to help us. This paradoxical form of reading—a reading disconnected from the intellect, a reading that is also a writing—entails also that the process of reading is at least as important as what is being read.

Cixous begins *Philippines* by writing: “Chacun de nous a un livre secret. C’est un livre chéri. Il n’est pas beau. Pas grand. Pas si bien écrit. On s’en fiche [Every one of us has a secret book. It is a cherished book. It is not beautiful. Not great. Not so well written. We don’t care].”³ The point, which resonates between Proust and Cixous, is that such a book—distinct from, but also related to the Book—does not necessarily respect our usual standards for what is worthy of appreciation; this is why, and how, “we don’t care.” Instead, they speak to us in a more direct, personal way, and yet remain secret due, at least in part, to the fact that their value for us is not immediately legible to others. But perhaps—and this is where these secret books relate back to the Book—something about these books is illegible even to ourselves.

Proust’s characterization of his hero’s conscious attention as a diver navigating the dark depths activates certain key echoes of the psychoanalytic discourse around the unconscious. It is not possible, in encountering the inner book, to exercise our normal readerly work of interpretation on it—but what this even means to begin with, and how we may be unable to straightforwardly read such a Book, is what interests me here. In this sense, the book gives way—theoretically, but also literally—to dreaming. In a recent essay on the book and the library vis-à-vis Proust, Virginie Greene writes that “Falling asleep is like falling into the book you were reading as a preparation to sleep.”⁴ It is not only a question of the place of books in our lives as reading material, but also as our nighttime dreaming material. At times, it is difficult to navigate between reading and dreaming. Michael Silverblatt, in an email conversation shared with me by Chris Via, wrote: “If I fall asleep while reading I will dream I’m still reading the book. Therefore when I wake up I have to go back around 20 pages to be sure I know what’s on the page and am not intermeshing the book with my dreams.”

The Book, for Cixous, if it is to be written and read, must first be *dreamed*. And indeed, she writes that “Proust aurait pu lire le livre qui me fait pleurer. Moi-même je ne le lis jamais : je le rêve. Je le revis [Proust might have read the book which makes me weep. I myself never read it: I dream it. I live it again].”⁵ François-Nicolas Vozel, in an article dealing with Cixous, Proust, and Freud, makes the connection that dreaming, writing, and reading all “[allow] one to retreat into the depths of the self.”⁶ *Philippines* is mainly concerned with the idea of dreaming as a kind of writing and reading, and to dream here is first and foremost to delve into a fundamentally creative dimension of experience that disallows us any mastery or foresight, and even any ability to orient ourselves. It is to renew, repeat, or even continue

accessing an experience of the book. But it is not only that, and does not only look like that. Dreaming goes beyond representation, and so must literature, to a certain extent. Nor is it concerned with a raw improvisatory state that we might normally associate with dreaming; this is not, in other words, automatic writing or surrealism. It may be fair to say that, with its close connections to dreaming, this book engages the experience of dreaming *intransitively*, rather than as a process leading to a final product, not unlike the way that Roland Barthes concerned himself with writing as a *state* in his late lecture courses.⁷ Just as Barthes' aim was not necessarily to actually write a novel—in the sense that the novel remained a desideratum, and his final lectures explored the *state* of desiring to write rather than novelistic techniques—the dreaming of the book is a process that resists decoding and reduction to corresponding nodes, whether this means biographical details, “dream-like” etymological wordplay, or some other process of unfolding that depends on an analogous relationship to external facts or events. On the side of the reader, the dreamed book will therefore not necessarily appear dream-like in any predetermined way, but only through each separate reader's (and reading) engagement with it. The “*signes inconnus*” referred to by Proust will retain something of their opacity.

In this article, I will argue that Cixous takes up Proust's idea of the Book and, through her engagement with dreams, develops it in a new direction. Vozel succinctly glosses *Philippines*, writing that it “pursues Proust's vision of reading as an initiation into ‘la vie de l'esprit,’ as the beginning of an inner journey of self-discovery and self-creation, which is, in fact, a journey toward foreignness that departs from the conscious self and ventures into a wider realm of experience.”⁸ If reading (and even not-reading, as in Cixous's statement above) is implicated in a self-discovery that leads us far away from what we think we know, then writing, as an activity related both to reading and to dreams, is doubly complex insofar as it mobilizes a creative impulse that might lead us away from sense itself, into non-sense or at least toward a difficult reading experience.

Exploring this paradox will require exploring the related moments of reading, not-reading, non-sense, and dreaming without view of a second moment, keeping any possible resolution or decoding in abeyance. Relative to psychoanalysis, as Freud suggested in more than one place, artists in general and literary writers in particular are ahead of ordinary people and psychoanalytic researchers alike because they grapple with psychological questions that have not yet been researched.⁹ Proust and Cixous are interested in examining the phenomenon of dreaming in a way that does not necessarily seek to stop meaning where it would be traced to origins, thereby retaining and communicating something of its force *as a dream*. I will begin by turning to one of the best-known sections of the *Recherche*, “Les Intermittences du coeur”, which includes a strange and compelling dream passage. My aim here will not exactly be to interpret this dream, but rather to examine the narrator's exploration of the dream logic upon waking and consider how it may speak more broadly to how we, literally, *read* dreams in literature. Following this, I will

turn to a passage from Cixous's *Revirements: dans l'antarctique du coeur* to argue that Cixous responds, by her very prose and through her complex interweaving of dreams and narrative, to Proust's engagement with dreams, and to the relationship between dreams and literature more broadly.

Writing the Dream in Proust

The famous "Les Intermittences du coeur" section of the *Recherche* is considered by many to be Proust's finest moment as a writer, with Samuel Beckett suggesting that it "is perhaps the greatest passage that Proust ever wrote."¹⁰ It is also well known that Proust at one time was considering this section's title as a title for his entire novel. In general, interpreters of the *Recherche* have pointed time and again to this passage and its astute evocation and theorization of mourning, by way of a peculiar kind of involuntary memory. The dream contained within this section, however, bears further exploration. According to Angela Moorjani, this section "links writing to the reading of a cryptic text inscribed within", and she proposes a "cryptanalysis" of the passage.¹¹ She substantiates a reading of the strangest portion of the dream sequence, tracing connections between Proust's text and certain oblique semi-biographical details from his life. However, as I will argue here, a different kind of attention can be paid to the dream, especially the hero's bizarre speech within it and his attention to that speech upon waking, allowing certain questions regarding the relationship between reading, writing, and dreaming to resonate more fully.

The key event contained in this passage begins in earnest with the following fragment: "Bouleversement de toute ma personne [A convulsion of my entire being]."¹² The hero bends down to remove his boots, and is suddenly, inexplicably in the presence of his dead grandmother once again, in the very same moment as he is taken by the bodily, involuntary realization of her death, as if for the first time. This "bouleversement", particularly in the context of what is to follow, brings to mind Deleuze's explication of thought in the Proustian context. Deleuze writes that "truth is never the product of a prior disposition but the result of a violence in thought. The explicit and conventional significations are never profound; the only profound meaning is the one that is enveloped, implicated in an external sign."¹³ Keeping in mind the chance nature of the hero's access to truth, what I want to develop here is the latter idea, that profound meaning (as well as experience) occurs in an encounter with a complex sign that can only be apprehended and read in its own particular context, perhaps even only in the moment out of which it emerges.

As is often the case for Proust's hero, a realization about the external world, and about interpersonal relationships, is mediated before all else through the self and inner experience. As this is a case of involuntary memory, multiple selves are in question, united once more through time. Speaking of the convergence of these past and present selves, the text reads: "il était moi et plus que moi (le contenant qui est plus que le contenu et me l'apportait) [it was both me and more than me

(the container which is more than the content, and had brought it to me)].¹⁴ Involuntary memory participates in a structural process not unlike what is at work in dreams insofar as these processes entail a rearrangement that—directly, yet at the same time indirectly—forcefully imparts a kind of meaning to the subject. Directly, due to its force, as Deleuze notes; but indirectly due to the potentially illogical or contradictory nature of the path toward this insight, both chronologically (involuntary memory allows direct access in the present to the essence of the thing as it was never experienced in the past) and in a readerly way (what in dreams is the most significant thing can only definitively be experienced as significant by the dreamer, and a later narration of it will tend to fall flat). A concern for form over thematic or symptomatic criticism will become salient in what follows.

Following a series of reflections on the phenomenon by which the narrator begins to work through the mourning of his grandmother, he eventually falls asleep and begins to dream. Even the very moment of falling asleep is theorized, with a focus on the strangeness of the sleeper's dormancy and the inverted or subverted logic that will play a large role in dreaming itself:

Mais dès que je fus arrivé à m'endormir, à cette heure, plus véridique, où mes yeux se fermèrent aux choses du dehors, le monde du sommeil (sur le seuil duquel l'intelligence et la volonté momentanément paralysées ne pouvaient plus me disputer à la cruauté de mes impressions véritables) refléta, réfracta la douloureuse synthèse de la survivance et du néant, dans la profondeur organique et devenue translucide des viscères mystérieusement éclairés.¹⁵

But as soon as I came to fall asleep, at that more truthful hour when my eyes were closed to the things without, the world of sleep (on the threshold of which my intellect and my will, momentarily paralyzed, could no longer contend with the cruelty of my genuine impressions) reflected, refracted the painful synthesis of survival and nothingness, in the organic depths, now become translucent, of the mysteriously illuminated viscera.¹⁶

Recalling for a moment the above comments about Deleuze and the violence that incites thought, the paralysis of intelligence and will here seems to suggest that something else in the subject is at work in responding to this event—furthermore, something that is activated once the subject falls asleep and can no longer exercise its waking faculties. During sleep, when “l'instinct de conservation [the instinct for self-preservation]”¹⁷ is arrested, the unconscious can be allowed to speak. With the reference to depths, which recalls any number of psychoanalytic references to the unconscious, we are introduced to the hero's particular state of dreaming, with its heightened relationship to truth, despite its blindness to the external world.

It is in what follows that this passage becomes truly fascinating, as it raises several questions about dreaming, writing, and representation, all stemming from the initial concern with mourning. James Dutton argues, following Derrida, that “the aporia of mourning ... is also the aporia of writing,”¹⁸ and with reference to this particular moment in Proust I would argue that the aporia of mourning the

dead grandmother also becomes an aporia of writing *dreams*. How can a dream, which bears a logic and a force all its own (as even Proust's hero notes in what will follow), be written in a work of literature? How can the experience of mourning, a personal, unspeakable experience, be understood by others? How, in other words, can a "Léthé intérieur [internal Lethe]"¹⁹ be made exterior and communicable? Cixous evokes "Letherature" as a literary capacity of association that stops us in our tracks, awakening us to the world around us.²⁰ Picking up also on *Philippines'* fascination with the idea of dreaming together, telepathically, as well as the way that Cixous troubles the notion of attempting to trace dreams (or literature) directly back to life by way of legible, objective facts or events, Vozel writes: "Tele-Lethepathy operates in literature as in dreams, blurring the boundary between both realms."²¹

Proust's hero begins to experience a narrative dream, which concerns his foiled attempts to find his grandmother. At first, the situation is straightforward enough: he experiences the simultaneous presence and absence of his grandmother—"la douloureuse synthèse de la survivance et du néant"—and subsequently has a quest-like dream about locating her. In the dream, he comes across his father, and their brief exchange ends with his father promising to give him directions to where his grandmother is staying, though he notes that the nurse may not admit him to see her. (I will pause here to note that even this very brief paraphrase of the hero's dream so far sounds typically dreamlike: a quest revolving around a significant meeting and including a specific detail that sticks in our mind.) Matthew Spellberg, examining several dreams from the *Recherche* (though, interestingly, not this one) draws from Ludwig Binswanger's suggestion that in dreams "each individual experience immediately provides its own framework, its own structure of justification; the dream rearranges itself around each new stimulus."²² This accounts for the somewhat abrupt manner in which the narrator's conversation with his father proceeds, and the immanent logic and force that it seems to possess, as well as his confusion upon waking up from the dream. But Spellberg's statement becomes especially helpful and compelling when considering the hero's outpouring in response to his father, which is as follows: "Tu sais bien pourtant que je vivrai toujours près d'elle, cerfs, cerfs, Francis Jammes, fourchette [You know very well, though that I should always live near her, stags, stags, Francis Jammes, fork]."²³ It is at this point that he wakes up, immediately reflecting on the strange turn of phrase in the lines above:

Mais déjà j'avais retraversé le fleuve aux ténébreux méandres, j'étais remonté à la surface où s'ouvre le monde des vivants ; aussi si je répétais encore : « Francis Jammes, cerfs, cerfs » , la suite de ces mots ne m'offrait plus le sens limpide et la logique qu'ils exprimaient si naturellement pour moi il y a un instant encore et que je ne pouvais plus me rappeler. Je ne comprenais plus même pourquoi le mot *Aias*, que m'avait dit tout à l'heure mon père, avait immédiatement signifié : « Prends garde d'avoir froid » , sans aucun doute possible.²⁴

But already I had recrossed the river with its gloomy meanders, I had come back to the surface, where the world of the living opens out; so, if I was still repeating “Francis Jammes, stags, stags”, this sequence of words no longer held the limpid, logical meaning they had expressed so naturally for me only a moment before and which I could no longer recall. I could no longer understand even why the word Aias, spoken to me just now by my father, had at once signified “Take care not to catch cold”, beyond any possible doubt.²⁵

Not only does the hero examine his dream-speech, but, upon waking, he repeats part of it (albeit in reversed order) in an attempt to unlock its meaning in waking life. Besides remarking upon the failure of this attempt, the lines cited above give a vivid sense of the inscrutable way in which phrases, words, and images can become cathected within a dream, often in ways that the dreamer is unable to unravel. My purpose in citing this passage, and in particular this dream, is to suggest that the inability to reconcile the force of dream logic with waking life is not a failure—far from it. Instead, the one-way transformation or translation highlights a problem of writing, and of the creative act more generally. The experience described here, that of repeating a series of words while no longer possessing their logic, is in many ways the driving force behind the desire to write, and as such deserves to be preserved and commented upon, rather than decoded. If the hero no longer possesses the dream logic, he can still marvel at the intensity of the dream and of that logic, and it is perhaps this experience—whether or not dreams are in question at all, in any explicit way—that Cixous pursues in her texts.

In *Hyperrêve*, Cixous writes that “le narrateur de *Sodome et Gomorrhe* serre sur son coeur une fourchette dont il n’a plus la formule et qui pourtant à bord du rêve qui le débarque avait la toute-puissance alchimique” [the narrator of Sodom and Gomorrah holds to his heart a fork whose formula he has lost and which however aboard the dream that is now disembarking him had alchemical omnipotence].²⁶ In addition to suggesting her recurring characterization of dreams as a journey or environment, Cixous pinpoints that the hero, on remarking about the dream logic upon waking, is doing something quite different from trying to uncover his dream’s “hidden meaning”, the way we might be tempted to when reading dreams in a therapeutic sense, or even in interpreting literature. But this is a natural endeavor—after all, if the unconscious is an obscure, profound, deep realm, what is our task if not to navigate it by making it conscious? Lucie Cantin has noted that Freud describes the navel of the dream as “a dark spot that reaches down into the unknown, amidst a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unraveled”, meaning that “the dream’s navel is therefore what, in the motive force, can in no way be structured by a representation. It is the point where the unrepresentable real emerges through, despite the signifiers elaborated by the dream.”²⁷ It is precisely with the question of representation that dreams and literature can be drawn more closely together. Both must navigate the process of representation, even if this means rejecting it to a large degree, as in non-representational painting. But just as

a shot-for-shot remake of a film will not necessarily have the same spirit or force as the original, representation does not guarantee its own effects from moment to moment. Something else is at play in dreams and literature that resists our attempts of capture, especially when we rely on normal interpretive means.

Here, I want to make a connection with surface reading, a recent trend in literary criticism that takes issue with the sort of symptomatic reading that purports to “plumb [the] depths” of texts, instead seeking to “attend to the surfaces.”²⁸ As the editors of a special issue on surface reading write: “A surface is what insists on being looked *at* rather than what we must train ourselves to see *through*.”²⁹ The editors advocate for “just reading”, which “sees ghosts as presences, not absences, and lets ghosts be ghosts, instead of saying what they are ghosts *of*”, that is, instead of presupposing that the navel of the dream carries a meaning that would be legible to us if only we could bring it to the surface.³⁰ Writing about the dream in the “Intermittences”, Moorjani highlights some possible resonances of the strange series of words uttered by the hero, arguing that “[t]he Proustian narrator sets out to decipher the unconscious without flinching, delineating in all its ferocity the other side of idealistic flights. It is a path readers are challenged to double by working through the narrative’s maskings, scatterings, displacements, and reiterations.”³¹ I will end this section by suggesting that it is precisely by keeping these scatterings and displacements, as well as the unconscious more generally, in suspension—meaning also preserving them—that the Proustian text touches on what makes dreams so potent in the first place, and why they continue to be imbricated with the endeavor of writing.

Reading the Dream in Cixous

In “La Venue à l’écriture” Cixous refers to the passage from being “touchée, caressée, blessée [touched caressed, wounded]” to the attempt to “découvrir le secret de ce toucher pour l’étendre, le célébrer et le transformer en une autre caresse [discover the secret of this touch to extend it, celebrate it, and transform it into another caress].”³² In addition to describing the activity of writing, this movement suggested by Cixous can be said to respond to the questions posed in the previous section regarding how to write dreams. If transforming the caress of literature into another work of literature is something other than decoding or deciphering the text—for, indeed, Cixous seems in her prose to be invested in preserving the crypted nature of writing—what exactly is the relationship between dreams and writing in Cixous? What roles do writing and dreaming play in our reshaping of the world through our creative engagement with it? How is this reshaping implicated in a proliferation of the desire to write, to dream? In what way might dreams themselves be considered our “secret book”?

As I noted at the beginning, Cixous is concerned with writing and reading, and with books in general, often in a sense proximate to the autobiographical, whether through references to her own life, writing, reading, or research. However, she

writes in *Ciguë: Vieilles femmes en fleurs* that “Ce livre m’empêche de produire ici la trace *exacte* de l’événement [The book is keeping me from reproducing the *exact* trace of the event]”, only to write later of “l’influx des émotions dans mon livre intérieur [the flood of my inner book’s emotions].”³³ Books do not always have the same value, and themselves take up properties that must be considered according to context. I highlight this because even when Cixous’s writing feels most autobiographical, this is by no means a hermeneutic key to understanding the value or meaning of the writing, reading, or above all dreaming that is in question.

Like all of Cixous’s quasi-fictional texts, *Revirements* is worthy of a book-length exposition. This text explicitly highlights the connection between literature and life in an almost overdetermined way: “Dans la fusion entre la littérature et la vie, j’avais écrit une pièce pour le Grand Théâtre” [In the fusion between literature and life, I’d written a play for the Great Theater].³⁴ Some lines down, after describing a fight between the narrator-character H. and her brother O., the text remarks upon the deep resonances between the violent real-life scene occurring in the narrative present and the violence depicted in the play. In parallel to these concerns are the interrelated themes of navigation, uncharted territory, and the threat of shipwreck, which touch back on the threat of violence and even the possibility of suicide. One passage in particular from *Revirements* evokes dreams, but does not exactly describe them in a straightforward narrational sense—nor, arguably, is it framed explicitly as a dream, as in *Rêve je te dis*, for example, since to do so would require an orienting preamble or framing device. The passage in question serves as a meeting point between Cixous’s general dream-like writing style and her preoccupation with dreams, suggesting that preserving the experience of dreams requires a combined approach of style and emphasis. What I want to suggest is that Cixous, by incorporating the above themes in a subtle way, achieves something akin to a dream state with this passage, as well as telling us something about dreams and their importance for writing.

This passage comes at the beginning of a section entitled “L’autre froid.” Given the already complex and narratively uncertain nature of the preceding text, it is somewhat difficult to tell how this passage narratively should be read, and therefore it already thrusts us into the ambiguously weighted experience of dreaming. This passage begins as follows:

Je peux l’affirmer sans embarras, j’ai bien passé ces quinze derniers mois dans l’Antarctique, avec la même surpuissante sensation de réalité que si j’y avais été en rêve, la différence avec la surforce du rêve tenant à la ténacité régulière, au prolongement sur des mois de cette sensation de rêve en réalité. Pendant les premiers mois surtout, j’ai eu des troubles cardiaques, des vertiges, ces brusques défaillances des jambes qui me causent les pires craintes d’entre les craintes, et mes yeux sont encore ahuris par la contemplation des énormes volumes de couleurs épaisses laiteuses de laiteurs bleuâtres nacrées surnaturelles, je dis laiteurs car laitances ne convient pas, il s’agit de sortes d’épaisseurs presque animales de bleuissures, comme si l’on voyait

des cubes géants de lait congelé qui eussent jailli de mamelles de monstres marins disparus, on pense aux laits de Léviathan, c'est d'une effrayante beauté, les blocs de glaciers qui se lèvent sur notre passage sont polis comme des sorcelleries optiques, parfois un paysage s'arrête de se tordre en jets de douleurs dont les lames d'eau de fer volent par-dessus les embarcations, et tombe subitement dans un calme sidéré aussi violent que le déchaînement que ce coup de calme vient de saisir.³⁵

I can, without embarrassment, say this: I really did spend the past fifteen months in the Antarctic, with the same overwhelming feeling of reality as if I had been there in a dream, the superior force of the dream having to do with the tenacity, the month-after-monthness of this sensation of dreaming in reality. During the first months especially, I had cardiac problems, vertigo, a sudden wobbliness in the legs that triggers the worst of my worst fears, and my eyes are still dazzled by the contemplation of the huge clotted milky slabs of bluish supernaturally opalescent milkinesses, I say milkinesses because milt isn't right, I have in mind blubbery thicknesses of a bruising-blue, as if one saw huge cubes of frozen milk spewed from the udders of vanished sea monsters, one thinks of the milk of leviathans, it's so fearsomely beautiful, the glacier chunks that heave themselves up in front of us glitter like optic witchcraft, sometimes a landscape ceases to writhe in spurts of pains whose steely blades of water fly over the boats, and subsides into a flabbergasted calm itself as violent as the turmoil that this outbreak of calm has just stunned.³⁶

Though she goes on to specify that there was “Ni aller ni retour [Neither voyage nor return]”³⁷ there is movement happening here, if only in a compromised or unusual sense. The vertigo experienced is a function of this imaginary voyage, which, importantly, seems neither real *nor* a dream. However, the commonplace relationship between dreams and reality is upended: dreams are not unreal, but are in fact overwhelmingly real. If Cixous then goes on to write of the tenacity of this sensation, it is because dreaming is a state for which one must get one's sea legs, so to speak. The digressions that follow continue to play on the established theme of navigation at sea, as well as mirroring the oftentimes undue or bewildering attention to detail found in dreams. Echoing Socrates' discussion of wonder in *Theaetetus*, the passage moves from vertigo to bedazzlement, and becomes reflexive, stumbling over the homonymy of milk/milt [lait/laite]. At once, this wonder opens onto a magnitude rivaling that encountered in the Kantian sublime, and yet does so in a markedly strange, dream-like way, describing the glaciers with vivid and almost mythological detail.

Even with the difficulty of situating the passage as a whole in mind, trying to chart out what exactly is happening within it is particularly difficult—are the glaciers vibrating? Is their violent turmoil simply an extension of the wonder being described? In turn, beyond its content, the form of the passage its most striking aspect. After introducing other figures—“mes parents-d'Antarctique [my Antarctic

parents]”—the text moves on to pose further questions, including the highly relevant question of communication, stating that

dans ces climats—si ce mot a un sens dans ce monde totalement gouverné par l'imprévisible —, il est convenu naturellement qu'on ne se parle pas en profondeur mais seulement en réseaux, en surface, en télécommunications, les distances entre nous étant multipliées à l'infini, même à trois mètres d'écart apparent.³⁸

in these climates—if this word has any meaning in a world wholly governed by the unpredictable—it goes without saying that one doesn't talk to one another in depth but only in networks, on the surface, via telecommunications, the distances between us being multiplied to infinity, even at a distance of what would appear to be only three meters.³⁹

Calling into question the very fact of climates on the basis of chance and unpredictability as governing principles highlights something fundamental about the division of form and content in communication. In the context of this passage, communication occurs specifically on the surface, nonverbally. With dreams in particular, the content—as anyone who has heard a dream described will likely know—utterly fails to give a sense of the dream's force or impact on the dreamer. It is more specifically the formal aspects of the dream, as with literature, that are effective in creating a certain experience.

The passage continues on, shifting from communication to deal with the issue of identity, by way of variations of the first and third person: “Tout cela sans discours. On n'est ni nous ni eux, on est *on*. Il y a *qui* aussi [All this without speeches. One is neither us nor them, one is *one*. There is *who* too].”⁴⁰ After a poetic digression discussing “que, sur les continents développés, on appelle *l'humanité*, sans savoir ni comment écrire ce mot ni le sentir vivre [what on the developed continents one calls *humanity*, without knowing either how to write this word nor how to take its pulse]”,⁴¹ the text becomes personal, even ostensibly autobiographical:

On ne sait rien des uns et des autres, et aucun ne savait rien de « moi ». Personne n'a jamais manifesté auprès de moi disposer d'une information relevant de mon curriculum vitae, que j'aie une histoire, que j'aie publié des histoires. Rien n'est caché ni montré. On est lié par les vents et les glaces comme par les liens de sang surgelé. La plupart du temps je n'ai même pas su leur nom.⁴²

One knows nothing about one another, and no one knew anything about “me.” Nobody showed any sign of having any information about my curriculum vitae, that I might have a story, that I might have published stories. Nothing is hidden or shown. One is tied by the winds and the icepack as if by threads of frozen blood. Most of the time I didn't even know their names.⁴³

The self becomes essentially anonymous and unmarked here, while the narrative voice delves even deeper into its particular attributes. The dream landscape is such that facts are sensed and noted in a passive manner, with an immanent value that resists the kind of interpretation we normally like to undertake. As Nicholas Royle writes, dreams “wait for us, they are up ahead. There is no bus or taxi, passport or other document enabling entry. And then the dream country lovingly releases you, without your ever having had a proper chance to get your bearings.”⁴⁴ Just as we fall into a dream without any foresight, our time in “the dream country” is aporetic; we must make our own way each and every time anew.

One might say that in this passage as a whole—as well as in dreams and in literature—“nothing is hidden or shown.” Or perhaps everything is hidden and shown at once. Either way, nothing in particular is definitively narrated here, with what would be referents, characters, or events taking on a highly abstract quality, a distance that is also extreme proximity. And yet, something emerges and becomes palpable through the very rhythm of the prose itself, its repetitions and thematic maneuvering. We return again to a description of this imaginary Antarctic, cold, vast, alienating, but also familiar:

Mais de tout ce blanc ce froid ces étendues coupées, ce rassemblement, a perlé pendant quinze mois une sensation intarissable de peuple, de familiarité engourdie et cependant extrêmement animée, semblable à celle que nous goûtons en rêve, ou lorsque, lisant certains livres dont les toiles ont été sécrétées par les organes d’individus ultradoués de compétences vitales, des explorateurs inlassables, des génies de la curiosité, je pense aux bienheureux Goethe ou Montaigne, Kafka, Stendhal, à tous ces inconnus dont le charme nous envoûte fortunément si bien que nous oublions que nous ne les avons jamais rencontrés car ils ont l’espace psychique si hospitalier qu’on se sent reconnu, attendus, bienvenus, et sis, sans façon, sans condition, sans contradiction, sans commentaire, sans demande de justification, sans aucune remarque, ni contrat, ni pacte, ni délivrance d’un visa ou d’un signe de consentement. Un indicible indice de parenté. Entrée libre entrée sortie séjour nuits transports douleurs découvertes surpassements vertigineux, longs désespoirs aux couloirs mal éclairés, autoroutes aux eaux parcourues d’effrayants véhicules zoologiques, scènes de tortures inouïes comme il n’y en a que dans la famille et, d’un autre côté, scènes de voluptés à toute heure, fêtes d’impertinence et averses d’éternité comme il n’y en a que chez chez-soi, l’inconnu.⁴⁵

But all this white this cold these jagged wastes, this gathering, had strung together over fifteen months a bottomless sensation of people, of familiarity numbing and yet extremely animated, similar to what we savor in dreams or when reading certain books whose webs have been secreted by the organs of individuals super-gifted with vital capabilities, untiring explorers, geniuses of curiosity, I think of the blessedness of Goethe or Montaigne, Kafka, Stendhal, of all those strangers whose charms bewitch us luckily so

well that we forget that we've never met them for they have such a hospitable mental space that one feels recognized, expected, welcomed, and given a place, without more ado, without conditions, without contradictions, without commentary, without need for justification, without any remark, or contract, or pact, or issuance of a visa or sign of consent. An indescribable indication of kinship. Free entry exit stay nights transportation pains discoveries dizzying experiences of surpassing oneself, long moments of despair in ill-lit corridors, watery high-ways with fearful zoological vehicles, unbelievable scenes of torture such as exist only within the family and, on the other hand, scenes of voluptuousness at all hours, festivals of impertinence and downpours of eternity such as happen at home with oneself, that stranger.⁴⁶

Here we have the dream environment as the animating principle of the dream, just as, in literature, the fact of writing itself (rather than any particular story being told) is what constitutes the literary dimension. This makes good on the earlier skepticism of the term "climate" if we take the unpredictability that calls it into question as, strictly speaking, an impossibility of determining beforehand what the content (of dreams, of literature) will be. The multi-valent aspect of dreams—involving movement, despair, fear, torture, but also voluptuousness—is side by side with a list of classic literary figures. What both share is the ability to draw us in unconditionally, "without any remark, or contract, or pact, or issuance of a visa or sign of consent."

Finally, it appears that this dream, this dream country, is oddly a place without writing, but this does not exactly mean that it is a place without literature:

Pendant ces quinze mois j'ai été hors de moi sauf le dimanche—je devrais dire treize mois car les derniers mois j'ai commencé à me détacher de la famille antarctique, j'ai fait banquise à part, j'étais fatiguée et j'avais presque épuisé mes provisions de distraction intérieure, d'abandon au sort, d'extrême passivité, mon Stylo était énervé, il commence par aller et venir dans mon lit à quatre heures du matin, une mimique d'impatience encore patiente, un avertissement, encore un peu et c'est le harcèlement que rien ne peut raisonner, les petits cris qui se plantent dans mes oreilles, dans mes joues, et comme l'apparition d'une cruauté d'oiseau de proie mais justifiée selon le droit de chaque être à exercer sa nature. D'ailleurs il me sauvait, sans que j'en aie eu conscience : en janvier j'avais atteint le degré de léthargie où les rêves ne parviennent plus à venir respirer à la surface. Silence, ça coule. Le cahier de rêves dérivait en apathie et je ne sentais plus l'angoisse de ne plus sentir les angoisses.⁴⁷

For fifteen months I was out of my mind except on Sundays—I should say thirteen months for in the final months I began to detach myself from the Antarctic family, I made myself a separate floe, I was tired and I had almost exhausted my supplies of inner amusement, of yielding to chance, of

extreme passivity, my Pen was annoyed, it starts stalking my bed at four o'clock in the morning, mimicking still patient impatience, a warning, soon the harassment nothing can reason with, the little shrieks that plant themselves in my ears, in my cheeks, like the manifestation of a bird of prey's cruelty, but justified according to the right of each to act according to its nature. Besides this saved me, without my being aware of it: by January I had reached a degree of lethargy dreams can no longer breathe at the surface of. Silence, the ship is sinking. The dream book was adrift in apathy and no longer did I feel anguish at not feeling anguish any more.⁴⁸

"Yielding to chance" and "extreme passivity" provoke the ire of the Pen, and we cannot help but hear a Blanchotian echo in this "still patient impatience" in the face of writing, the "impatience [that] must be the core of profound patience" for Orpheus.⁴⁹ This exhaustion, lethargy (and also lethe-argy, forgetfulness) is a fundamental requirement for writing, as is the unproductive "lost time"—time wasted, but also time spent lost, adrift, disoriented. This "dream book" could be any book, but to be written the inner book must first be accessed. Paradoxically, this requires a patient impatience, which means above all an attunement to how exactly dreams are experienced, and how exactly we can make them communicable. Royle, glossing Cixous's point that the dreams in *Interpretation of Dreams* are *written* by Freud and therefore no longer possess the vital dimension of dreams, writes: "*How to treat the dream as a dream*: is it possible? Probably not. But this is the driving desire. To treat a dream as dream, to allow ourselves to be *treated* by the dream."⁵⁰ Cixous, then, allows herself (and us) to be treated by the dream by allowing it to breathe through her writing.

Notes

1. Hélène Cixous, *Hyperrêve* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2006), p. 178; *Hyperdream*, trans. by Beverley Bie Brahic (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), p. 135.
2. Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, ed. by Jean-Yves Tadié (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), vol. IV, p. 458; *Time Regained*, trans. by Andreas Mayor and Terence Kilmartin, rev. by D. J. Enright (New York: Modern Library, 1999) p. 274.
3. Cixous, *Philippines: Prédelles* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2009), p. i; *Philippines*, trans. by Laurent Milesi (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), p. ix.
4. Virginie Greene, "Contemplating a Proustian Library", in *The Proustian Mind*, ed. by Anna Elsner and Thomas Stern (London: Routledge, 2023), p. 212.
5. Cixous, *Philippines: Prédelles*, p. i; *Philippines*, p. ix.
6. François-Nicolas Vozel, "Reading for the Revelation: Hélène Cixous, Marcel Proust, Sigmund Freud, and Tele-Lethe-Pathy", *MLN*, vol. 136, no. 4, Sept. 2021, p. 910.
7. Lucy O'Meara points out that the novel "is something which, by design, will *always* be ahead for Barthes, no matter how far he advances." He is oriented toward the novel in terms of a sort of experience or sensitivity, and not as set of writing tasks before him. See

O'Meara, *Roland Barthes at the Collège de France* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), p. 167.

8. Vozel, "Reading for the Revelation", pp. 907-908.

9. In "Delusion and Dreams in Jensen's *Gradiva*", Freud writes that "creative writers are valuable allies and their evidence is to be prized highly, for they are apt to know a whole host of things between heaven and earth of which our philosophy has not yet let us dream. In their knowledge of the mind they are far in advance of us everyday people, for they draw upon sources which we have not yet opened up for science. If only this support given by writers in favour of dreams having a meaning were less ambiguous!" Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, trans. by James Strachey, vol. 9, p. 8. Cixous cites from this passage as well; see *Philippines*, pp. 48-49.

10. Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (New York: Grove, 1931), p. 25.

11. Angela Moorjani, "A Cryptanalysis of Proust's 'Les Intermittences du coeur,'" *MLN*, vol. 105, no. 4, 1990, p. 875.

12. Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. III, p. 152; *Sodom and Gomorrah*, trans. by John Sturrock (New York: Penguin, 2005) p. 152.

13. Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, trans. by Richard Howard (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 16.

14. Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. III, p. 153; *Sodom and Gomorrah*, pp. 154-155.

15. Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. III, p. 157.

16. Proust, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, pp. 158-159.

17. Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. III, p. 157; *Sodom and Gomorrah*, p. 158.

18. James Dutton, *Proust between Deleuze and Derrida: The Remains of Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), p. 174.

19. Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. III, p. 157; *Sodom and Gomorrah*, p. 159.

20. Cixous, *Philippines*, p. 11.

21. Vozel, "Reading for the Revelation", p. 924.

22. Matthew Spellberg, "Proust in the Dreamtime", *The Yale Review*, vol. 104, no. 2, 2016, p. 61.

23. Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. III, p. 159; *Sodom and Gomorrah*, p. 160.

24. Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. III, p. 159.

25. Proust, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, p. 158.

26. Cixous, *Hyperrêve*, p. 106; *Hyperdream*, p. 77.

27. Lucie Cantin, "From Delusion to Dream", in *After Lacan*, ed. by Robert Hughes and Kareen Ror Malone (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), p. 89.

28. Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: an Introduction", *Representations*, vol. 108, no. 1, 2009, pp. 1-2.

29. Best and Marcus, p. 9.
30. Best and Marcus, pp. 12-13.
31. Moorjani, "A Cryptanalysis of Proust's 'Les Intermittences du coeur,'" p. 888. She points out how "Exegetes have associated the *cerfs* and the name of the poet Francis Jammes with the theme of sadism against the mother", arguing also for echoes between the "Intermittences" passage with the Montjouvain scene based on Proust's own biography. See pp. 883-884.
32. Cixous, *La Venue à l'écriture* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1977), p. 50; *Coming to Writing and other Essays*, ed. by Susan Rubing Suleiman, trans. by Sarah Cornell, Deborah Jenson, Ann Liddle, and Susan Sellers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 45.
33. Cixous, *Ciguë: Vieilles femmes en fleurs* (Paris: Galilée, 2008), p. 14, p. 50; *Hemlock*, trans. by Beverley Bie Brahic (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), p. 5, p. 31.
34. Cixous, *Revirements : dans l'antarctique du coeur* (Paris: Galilée, 2011), p. i; *Twists and Turns in the Heart's Antarctic*, trans. by Beverley Bie Brahic (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), p. viii.
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FERNANDA NEGRETE

CIXOUS'S AND LACAN'S DANCES

There's a dancing force in Hélène Cixous's writing practice, beneath or beyond the signifier. I will attempt to foreground it and consider its relevance to the intersection of writing and the feminine, explored by both Cixous and Jacques Lacan in the 1970s. The question that interests me in dance here involves both the effects of this undertheorized force over the signifier and a related displacement of the problem of the feminine, which may be more relevant than ever. In 2007, Cixous wrote an essay on Nancy Spero's paintings to accompany a retrospective MACBA gallery exhibit whose title shared with the essay the key neologism *dissidances*.¹ The displacement of "dissidence", which is silent in French, certainly echoes the deconstructive operation of *différance* undertaken by Jacques Derrida in his groundbreaking 1967 essay, by making an inaudible modification in spelling the French word *différence*. But while Cixous's essay and Spero's art certainly develop the problem of non-identity, non-unity, and differing from both others and self as other, they are less concerned with exposing and debunking a metaphysics of presence than with releasing some knowledge about the body in pieces and the body in movement, since it can open a different or "dissidancing" space for desire in the world.

Furthermore, I find this concern to lie close to the work Simone Debout undertakes in reading Charles Fourier's encrypted letter of August 25, 1825, as observed in the 1975 essay, published in *Scilicet* 5, "Une 'corps est-ce pont danse' à ouvrir."² If the epistolary practice of correspondence fundamentally involves an addressee and some amount of spatiotemporal distance between emitting and receiving written speech, in Fourier's hands, cutting up and altering the stream of letters at different points, "correspondence" becomes the interrogative form "est-ce" involving body "corps", bridge "pont", and dance "danse." Fourier is after all the utopianist who invented the word "feminism." The essay notes in this "corps est-ce pont danse" a "fleeting evocation of all those bridges where one danced in the song, whether it be d'Avignon bridge or the North bridge, the suspicious bridge where the brother and sister recklessly ventured, destined to collapse and drown" (p. 206). In the plot of "Sur le pont du nord", the nursery song with which the author associates Fourier's odd configuration, a girl (from Nantes in one of its versions) transgresses with her brother the mother's prohibition to enjoy a ball held on the bridge, and both pay for

it with their lives as the river floods and the bridge collapses. Thus to the author of the *Scilicet* essay, Fourier's writing operation is precisely one of leading the addressee adrift by revealing a body's subversion of the law. Yet Fourier's point, as Debout and the essay's author also recognize, is that this act of dissidence, taking hold of "sound" as "the raw material of language", shakes the epistolary bridge; Fourier's "scratches" ("coups de 'griffe'") mobilize "traits of spirit" whose power is suddenly revealed to a reader struck by them ("Une 'corps...,'" p. 207).³ Drowning, then, isn't the only possible consequence. There is also the discovery of what Cixous wrote as *dissidance*.

Violence or the Aesthetic

I suggest that *dissidance* is indeed an effect of the force of dance over both the feminine and the signifier; not only over "dissidence" in particular, but rather over the work of sense as such. If language is the structure of the social bond and the field of the Other where the signifier is an element constitutive of sense, of meaning, I view the feminine as instead pointing to the body of the drive and to the surging up of an excess unlimited by the signifier in logically disruptive and disconcerting actions. Post-Lacanian psychoanalyst Willy Apollon therefore speaks of the *passage à l'acte* (passage to the act) of an out-of-language.⁴ Yet the feminine, as Cixous proposed in *The Newly Born Woman* with Catherine Clément, doesn't only emerge in violent manifestations; it may also appear in aesthetic modes. For example, when they consider Charcot's hysteric female patients at the Salpêtrière hospital, these attacks that sustain a pathologizing research are literally turned on their head to reveal a festive, acrobatic flourishing, as in other modes of crisis across various contexts: "The sorceress and the hysteric manifest the festival in their bodies, do impossible flips, making it possible to see what cannot be represented, figures of inversion" (p. 23). But is this inversion capable of breaking through to disrupt language and truly inscribe something new, or does it only provide, like the joke according to Freud, a momentary release from repression?

In the aesthetic mode, the passage to the act isn't necessarily reduced to a theatrical number, to spectacle aiming for distraction and entertainment without consequences. For the real remains at stake. The wager of the aesthetic, with which I'd like to align *écriture féminine* and its *dissidance* by further developing some of its psychoanalytic implications, is this: a censored dimension of experience can become the source of a different writing and sensibility for that which breaks the frame of ego and cultural identity. A different story can be discerned and disclosed on the grounds of attunement to singular experience rather than to diagnosis. While a body's experience is necessarily dissident, opposed to the social order seeking ideological reproduction, another "correspondance", as Fourier dreamed, is possible: the body can be a vehicle for the feminine, a bridge for excess to cross in exuberant rather than destructive gestures.⁵

The alternation between violence and aesthetics recurs in Cixous's meditations, where the feminine or the "woman" part of things is associated with a poetic potentiality against which violence in changing avatars is recurrently exerted. As late as her 2007 essay on Nancy Spero's paintings, Cixous reads the feminist artist's works on paper as poems that "begin with the end":

Today is the end of the world, Violence and Oblivion trample the Earth underfoot, ten thousand years that Marduk killed Tiamat, he has disemboweled her, eviscerated and flattened her ... turned her flesh into a fine paper film, made lampshades with her skin and soap with her fat, and it continues, the massacre of everything that is "woman" on the Soil of the World, woman the poets, woman the revolutionaries, woman the dreamers, woman the Vietnamese people on which Helikopter, the Americans' god of devastation, drops its shitloads of excremental bombs, spews its runny torrents of poisoned sperm, ten thousand years it's been going on, the end of the world, woman the Jews, woman the deportees ... ("Spero's Dissidances", p. 21)

In Cixous's reading of Spero's works on paper, Tiamat, the chaotic, watery goddess of primordial creation in the Mesopotamian myth related in the *Enûma Elish*, continues to be murdered to this very day in every scene animated by a passion for domination that makes its actors incapable of recognizing other living beings, except as monstrous threats to the murderer's control. This idea echoes Spero's piece *Marduk* (1983), which features a hand-printed description of Marduk's splitting of Tiamat's body in two halves to make the heavens with one of them (pp. 128-29),⁶ as well as pasted typewritten fragments with accounts of women tortured around the world around the time when the artwork was made. This feminist stance that denounces a fundamentally violent and destructive power that repeatedly positions itself against "everything that is 'woman'" responds not only to this creation myth but to a deep-rooted historical misogyny. One should note both that this misogyny isn't absent from the origins of psychoanalysis, and that it raised for Freud an important metapsychological question on what he called "a repudiation of femininity", which he recognized as the key issue to confront at the end of an individual analytic treatment (*SE XXIII*, p. 250).⁷ In analysis, the subject could find a way to stop repudiating the feminine, which isn't, as it turns out, merely a synonym for passivity, but rather a surprising creative force to support in oneself and in others.

The world's creation in the Babylonian myth is accomplished through the murder of the goddess Tiamat, who had been responsible for creation by mixing her seawaters with those of the undersea god Apsu, "when on high the heaven had not been named" and "firm ground below had not been called by name" ("Creation Epic", pp. 60-61). It's possible to draw from the myth's dynamic the initially mentioned tension between language and the body of the drive unanchored by the signifier, where the feminine is at stake. If language censors the feminine to guarantee sense and identity for the collective, as well as its reproduction, whereby the created world is rendered stable, Cixous, observing Spero's work, states that this situation instead depicts "the end of the world." Thus, arriving to the point where heaven

and earth are named, when the world becomes determined by language creation doesn't reach its apex but is instead arrested or distorted into an endless chain of disaster. Yet if we consider that violence remains a mode in which what exceeds language passes to the act, a mode of the feminine, it's evident that simply assigning the masculine or "man" as the villain doesn't open another future beyond the end of the world, where "woman" is in turn reduced and remains restricted to the status of the victim. Cixous writes: "How not to say, [Spero] thinks, that all those who are born under the sign 'woman' (that is, those who are for the flowers, for laughter, for the splendor of daybreaks, for the delights of running on Greek sands, for Archimedes' overwhelming jubilation, the scientists, the poets, the children, the champions *running on and for life*) are doomed to the fate called *Victimation*" (p. 22).⁸ The urgency of an ethical choice becomes apparent before the alternatives of violence or aesthetics. Mass destruction or poetry. Cixous highlights Spero's soaring women, "leapers over the abyss", drawing "from their beauty, their air of victory, their arms raised like wings, their steps eager to dance" the sense that they are "the daughters of the dream of freedom of a female being tossed into the invisible prisons of the old history" (p. 28). Upon this leap of insurrection, Cixous discerns that "the age of *Dissidances* has begun. Unbound, absolved coming from all countries, mischievous, how delightful and funny they are, these bodies which *no longer allow themselves to be upset!*" (p. 28).

Given these tensions where world creation and destruction are at stake and where a distribution of forces across space-time occurs—as Spero's heroines in Cixous's reading "briskly leap across the virgin space" and welcome a female being "who moves all the time. Who moves time. Makes it scream with laughter" (p. 28)—where to place writing and dance?

Writing is of course a technology that has developed into various systems across civilizations, whose shared characteristic is the notation of symbols that record and make transmissible some kind of utterance. The written appears as evidence of a subject's effective and enduring symbolic articulation. The structure of this articulation implies a censorship of the feminine, as the part of the subject that exceeds the symbolic. Yet writing practices can have other purposes than the stabilization of utterances and their receivability in the social bond, when put in the service of the feminine, as strategies to give expression to a real that insists beyond language, rather than to reinforce its censorship. This would be the case in poetry, as Cixous's passage suggests, and it can also be that of other writings and graphic practices in an expanded notion of writing. Dance has certainly also developed into various forms across civilizations, where they can have important roles in organizing space and collective experience. It can therefore also serve to censor the feminine. Also like writing, in dance bodies can represent situations and make gestural transmissions, for instance to spectators, to other dancers, or to musicians interacting with the dancers—for instance in Afro-Caribbean forms such as Bomba (Puerto Rico) or Gwoka (Guadeloupe), where percussion instruments respond to a dancer's improvised kinetic propositions. In this relation, then, the instruments make audible the

repercussions of a force transmitted from dancers to musicians. Yet writing and dance have different temporalities. In dance there isn't necessarily a stable surface that captures the dancer's gestures as enduring inscriptions to be considered after they are made. Instead, even when dance results from choreographic work, the appearance of repetitive and escaping gestures remains inextricable from the moving body making them. But as the dancing body throws itself into the next step and momentary pose, the subject's potential expression of something out-of-language doesn't simply die. The field of the Other can itself be touched, moved, carried away beyond sense and perhaps even transformed by dance.

It is perhaps also a force of dance that in a personal psychoanalysis can make the signifier undergo a process whereby its unacknowledged condensations and displacements come to the surface and mobilize associations that uncover a specific bond to the body, pointing to desire and jouissance. In Cixous's writing, I find, words are recurrently put through this process which can be qualified as analytic, insofar as this very work with speech and signifiers is central in an analysis, which presupposes listening in a certain way or hearing the echoes or overtones of something else and something more in what is said. The direction of writing in Cixous's work notably follows the chain of associations that derive from the splitting open of key signifiers. This writing proceeds by ear, then, which is to say with a fundamental attunement to self-alterity, or what Lacan called "extimate." Instead of consolidating and stabilizing meaning, words enduring this treatment bring the work of the signifier to surface and thus become splintered and spelled otherwise, while its polysemes are rendered audible and its letters wander. Lacan also notoriously engaged in this practice in his teachings and writings, particularly through the play of homophonies and other resonances. This practice of "jouis sens" (of hearing enjoy-meant beyond, perhaps, good or common sense) is part of what fascinates the *Scilicet* author in Fourier's encrypted letter, which places on the surface a torrent of "indecent", scandalous, and inarticulate streams of words referring to body parts and fluids, and to perverse scenes. The letter's supposed decryption presents instead an innocent and friendly salute to a young woman named Laure. The author appreciates Debout's resistance against "eruditely, implacably decoding this drifting signifier to unveil the language of the symptom, a language that offers so much innocence that no psychoanalytic straitjacket is prepared to bring it back to reason?" ("Une 'corps...'" p. 203). Instead of a decoder, the author sees Debout as the letter's willing addressee, which implies allowing herself to be struck by it beyond sense and to follow its play between the two readings and through its particular harnessing of the body to nearly discern the work of the letter of the body. Cantin explains that the letter in the clinic after Lacan, which ruptures semblance and escapes the signifier belonging to the symbolic, is a real inscription of jouissance ("The Drive", pp. 43-44 n1).⁹ To put this letter to work, she observes through no other example than Pina Bausch's indications to one of her dancers, is, indeed, to mobilize it without interpreting so it "begins to 'dance'" (p. 36).

Perhaps something of the letter's bodily effect appears, in one possible, painterly literalization, in Rembrandt's painting *Bathsheba bathing* (1652), particularly in Cixous's reading of the event: "the letter has just been read. The two women are under the letter's sway. The letter has taken their breath away. Has dispatched them over there into the closed time, before the closed doors to the future" ("Bathsheba...", p. 12). This explains that "something unreadable catches [Cixous's] eyes" while observing Bathsheba's naked body in profile, which she is able to determine as "time's writing" (p. 10) descending from the head to the lower body. But the letter isn't restricted to bringing "a despondency, a prostration", (p. 11) as it does in Rembrandt's *Bathsheba*. While a confrontation with mortality is at stake, it's also possible to find "the immense limitless life hidden behind restricted life" (p. 18) through the letter of the body. Turning back to the reading of Fourier's letter, we find the *Scilicet* author suggesting that the "simultaneous unfolding of two texts at once, of which neither can be taken as the true text" makes the letter "a kind of illustration avant la lettre of the Lacanian analysis of language" ("Une 'corps...'", p. 212). Importantly, this reading of two texts enables a distinction between, on the one hand, play on words that could go anywhere without approaching the specific bodily inscription causing a subject, and, on the other, the production of the specific signifying chain leading to a letter, a scratch¹⁰ opening the body to desire. I would say the interest of this process with the signifier would be precisely to create a space to sustain the feminine rather than to shut it down, and to evoke the out-of-language with words in forms that enliven and reopen desire.¹¹

Returns, portraits

It's noteworthy that both Cixous and Lacan closely engaged with the feminine at a time when they were in conversation with each other. One can read, for instance, in his session of March 9th, 1976 of *Seminar XXIII, Le sinthome*, that Lacan announces, with a warm and approving recommendation, the debut of Cixous's *Portrait de Dora*, staged under Simone Benmussa's direction. He states: "Je voudrais vous faire connaître, ou vous rappeler, pour ceux qui le savent déjà, qu'il y a quelqu'un que j'aime beaucoup, qui s'appelle Hélène Cixous" (p. 105) "I would like you to know, or to recall, for those who know it already, that there's someone I very much take to, whose name is Hélène Cixous." This simple, playful statement draws attention to the sound of words and names ("beaucoup" "Cixous"), before turning to the theatrical work and its theme. Coming from the proponent of a return to Freud, Lacan's affectionate and rhyming gesture may come as a surprise to readers who situate Cixous's *écriture féminine* in anti-psychoanalytic territory, insofar as she contests patriarchy, phallogentrism, and a certain understanding of castration. For example, in "The Laugh of the Medusa", from the same period and plausibly her most well-known piece of writing, she points at the pitiful situation of still existent "women of yesterday" (p. 892/ "Le rire...", p. 65) who accept an interpretation of their desire by "the builders of the analytic empire" (p. 892/65) who wish to shackle this

desire, and whose help consists of bringing them to accept castration in the form of an Oedipal, prescribed ordinary unhappiness.

Ventriloquizing these agents, she writes:

Which castration do you prefer? Whose degrading do you like better, the father's or the mother's? Oh what pwetty eyes, you pwetty little girl. Here, buy my glasses and you'll see the Truth-Me-I tell you everything you should know. Put them on your nose and take a fetishist's look (that you are, me the other analyst, I'm telling you) at your body and the body of the other. You see? No? Wait, you'll have everything explained to you, and you'll know at last which sort of neurosis you're related to. Hold still, we're going to do your portrait, so that you can begin looking like it right away. (p. 892/65)¹²

Strikingly, these agents focus on a visual register; a capture of the girl's eyes enables a control of seeing, believing, learning, and understanding that at the same time fetishizes and paralyzes the body. "Don't move" is an essential injunction. The portrait too operates in this passage in service of a mechanism to subjugate desire to the order of resemblance and the given, which is to say, to not much desire. (One could say the Oedipal glasses placed on her nose have the opposite effect to the *griffe au nez* "scratch on the nose" Debout emphasizes as effect of Fourier's letter.)¹³

Conversely, a glance at Cixous's script for *Portait de Dora* has a destabilizing effect. It unsettles, first of all, the role Freud ascribes to himself as the young woman's analyst in his famous case study of hysteria, undoubtedly performing a feminist critique of Freud's way of handling the case. Freud certainly presents a self-criticism in his publication, given that he considers his treatment to have failed, since Dora broke off the treatment early. In the play, Cixous has Dora explain her decision to Freud as a gesture of self-autonomy as the young woman enters the new century: "I'll go 'alone.' I'll heal 'alone.' And I decided to abandon you on the day chosen by me. It will be January 1st 1900" (p. 101).¹⁴

Yet what is sought by these "builders of the analytic empire", as Cixous calls them in "The Laugh of the Medusa" or "the new old men" who undermine women's desire isn't synonymous with Lacan's return to Freud in the 1950s. The latter is precisely not a dogmatic or fanatical gesture to consecrate the father of psychoanalysis. Lacan writes: "Freud's discovery calls truth into question, and there is no one who is not personally concerned by truth" ("The Freudian Thing...", p. 337). Lacan's reading of the problematic Dora case therefore interrogates and indicates Freud's limits and oversights, while observing Freud's own self-critical reflections in the case and putting pressure on the Oedipus complex to highlight, some years later, the hysteric's knowledge that the master is castrated (*Séminaire XVII*, p. 110).¹⁵ Thus, the "return" in Lacan's work is already very different from an attempt to revive the reality of some glorious past moment. Instead of a gesture inspired by nostalgia, toward what has already been seen, said, done, in other words toward halting the psychoanalytic movement Freud set in motion, Lacan's return to Freud is above all

about resuming the rupture that characterized the beginning of psychoanalysis and that must introduce something new in the return at a particular moment.¹⁶

The ground of psychoanalysis therefore welcomes above all impermanence, action, and an attunement to process rather than a fixed, consolidated state of things, bodies, and statements. This distinctive approach to movement and to time suggests a sense of what it takes to pursue change and bring about the new that differs from a strictly forward-facing, linear progression. We are in a field of dance here too, where movement undoes the illusion of a consolidated, unified whole while returning and turning around entails disclosing exactly what did not find its place before, as well as rewriting unprecedented lines, or taking unforeseeable steps.

For its part, Cixous's own return to Dora in a "portrait", specifically, is no less a gesture in favor of continuing the movement whereby women—against all odds, against the continual invitation to remain silent as history is written and a certain portrait of womanhood is reiterated in all its oppressiveness—attempt to speak beyond the limits of what is socially acceptable, the content of which certainly varies at different moments. In Cixous's writing—as in any artistic practice committed to rendering sensible what would otherwise remain inaccessible—the portrait form has nothing to do with imprisoning the complexity of a living being within a static image, nor with replacing the body and face traversed by forces with a lifeless likeness or with yielding a countenance as representation of the person. It's useful to recall here that James Joyce, the author of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, was the focus of Cixous's 1968 doctoral dissertation.¹⁷ Her sensibility for the portrait relates to Joyce's writing process with this novel. Jean-Michel Rabaté recalls that Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is the result of initially producing "Portrait of the Artist", an extremely condensed, eight-page sketch whose style was "breathless, frenzied, symbolist" (*Joyce hérétique...*, p.16, my translation). This text, rejected for publication, then became diluted into six-hundred pages in *Stephen Hero*, after which it was finally pared down into the two-hundred and fifty pages of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Even if the initial text made the supposed mistake of "want[ing] to say everything at once", (p. 16) the style described in rhythmic terms by Rabaté and its overlaid quality leading to an opaque, practically illegible text prompts us to think about the stakes of the portrait in terms of intractable active forces that bear on the body and have effects.

Considered with Cixous's writing in mind, the portrait results from a very physical and active engagement with fleeting forces. Both the portrait maker and the portrait undergo the effect of these forces. In a portrait these forces and the play among them become not annulled but rather assembled and suspended in midair; they balance delicately, intensely, in a singular gesture, look, expression. Cixous makes room for the portrait to dance and remains attentive to the forms that emerge. Never, under her pen, will the portrait format be put in the service of fetishizing the body.¹⁸ She has, indeed, produced numerous portraits in different formats/genres: *Portrait du Soleil* (1973), *Portrait de Dora* (1976), "Reaching the Point of Wheat, or A Portrait of the Artist as a Maturing Woman" (1987), *Portrait de Jacques Derrida en*

jeune saint juif (2001), "Portraits de Portraits: Le jour même de Roni Horn" (2007).¹⁹ In the latter essay on Horn's photographic portrait series, Cixous insists that Horn doesn't portray a person, and she is interested in the notion that in "Portrait of an Image (with Isabelle Huppert)" Horn "deconstructs the entire traditional unthinking approach to the thing called Portrait, the use made of the word 'Portrait,' when it is referred to people" (p. 78). It's striking, then, to notice a non-traditional approach is also Cixous's own, although her emphasis is on fleeting forms and temporality, on impossible objects, or the work of time itself. From the sun to "the very day" (*le jour même*), her practice of portrayal insists on drawing the elusive and the ephemeral as it passes by. In this sense she is undoubtedly inspired by Clarice Lispector's 1973 *Água Viva*, on which Cixous wrote and Horn made a series of silkscreens and an installation artwork that consists of a rubber tile floor with inlaid, circular and curved fragments of sentences from Lispector's work. The following English translation of a phrase by Lispector becomes a set of ripples on the floor that at times collide into palimpsests: "I try to see strictly within the moment when I see—and not to see through the memory of having seen in an instant now past.... The instant is of an imminence that takes my breath away.... At the same time that I live it, I hurl myself into its passage to another instant" (*Rings...* p. 111). To read these fragments on the rubber floor is to dance around them, and to dance is to become open to a world still in creation. In her own essay responding to the installation, Cixous writes:

If these Rings fascinate and move us it is because they remind us of a forgotten time, a prehistory, a still-restless, unstable, undecided era when the verbal elements danced around the eclipsing light waves, light-darkness-light, describing curves. The lips' curves. It was 'before' straight lines, but this 'before' has probably never *existed* except in dreams. In dreams or in art. ("See the Neverbeforeseen", p. 62)

The passage reflects on the fragments of *Água Viva*—these Rings that resonate, trace arches, progress in multiple directions spreading across the rubber surface—emphasizing the living status of the instant and its effect of disrupting or flooding the linearity of the written, especially in a Western economy that resulted in the book format (p. 62). The process leading to aligning writing and forcing it into the spacetime of the book is also a scene of renunciation; what is renounced, the quivering passage of the instant, insists and is sustained in *Água Viva*, *Rings of Lispector*, and Cixous's idea of writing as dreaming or as art.

In adopting a concept from painting and drawing to develop the texts she defines as portraits, Cixous highlights the word's ending "*-trait*", a past tense form of the Old French *traire*, "to draw", or trace. But her focus is consistently on the unfinished, on-going process of tracing; she privileges the present participle rather than the completed task that calls for a past tense. Or if the *por-* in *portrait* derives from the French prefix *pour-*, often used in antiquated verbs indicating thorough and conclusive operations (for example *pourmener* and *pourpenser*, meaning "to take something to its full end" and "to think something through from all angles"), this

thorough and meticulous traversal of the action in Cixous's hands sustains the drawing activity without end. Her portraits are therefore more attuned to the *pentimenti* or visible traces of previous drawings on a canvas, and this, just as with Lacan's return, not to recover and remain in a past version of the drawing, but rather to highlight the real effect of unstoppable movement revealed in these different moments of drawing, ("Sans arret, non...", p.38), whereas the perspective of the completed work, written or painted, typically occludes this destabilizing activity and presents the illusion of a circumscribed static object. Consistent with the embrace of movement and incompleteness, her *Portrait de Dora* stemmed from the 1973 text *Portrait du soleil* [Portrait of the Sun], whose title in itself presents an impossibility, both because human eyes cannot indefinitely stare directly at the sun in the way they would observe the object of another face to be portrayed, and because the sun will not sit still as a human face might and as an inanimate object for a still life most likely will. Cixous's inclinations therefore show that a portrait doesn't stop changing and that to write or draw a portrait is to welcome—that is, to be opened up and moved by—the rhythms, time signatures, and gestures of both tracing and of the subject being portrayed.²⁰

Adoradances

Dance is therefore a conceptual presence in Cixous's approach to writing fleeting and unstoppable forces, and even a metaphor of her turns around and back (to rough sketches and drafts, to memories and dreams, as well as to the early case of a hysteric woman such as Dora who enjoyed strolling around the lake and through art exhibits to look at paintings). But it is also a factual component of some of her works. Across the decades, Cixous's practice of open-ended poetic writing developed alongside essays about literature and art, and certainly also alongside her work as a playwright. In concrete, embodied, spatial terms, choreographic work is inherent to the performance of her plays, and dance as such was present already in the initial staging of her *Portrait of Dora*. This combination is especially interesting in a play that features a spatial situation where physical movement is generally minimal, and at least not central to the analytic work with the analysand's speech. An analysis takes place in a space where the analysand speaks and the analyst listens. It's well known that in the classic Freudian consultation room, the analysand lies on the daybed while the analyst sits behind the analysand, out of sight. The analyst's task isn't to medically examine or diagnose this reclining body, but rather to welcome unconscious speech. Yet this isn't to say that the analysand's body is inessential to the treatment. Far from it, the body under transference becomes hystericized, that is, it "joins the conversation" about a fantasy underlying the analysand's associations and suffering.²¹ The point of encounter between the psychoanalytic clinic and the writing Cixous pursues is thus insistently a force of dance that underlies multiple creative gestures where desire is mobilized.

In any case, to highlight the more concrete presence of dance, Cixous's feminist approach to the case Freud published in 1906 about a young hysteric woman he

treated while developing his groundbreaking technique with dreams incorporated Marguerite Duras' film sequences evoking the lakeside walks Dora narrated on Freud's couch, with her father, and Herr and Frau K. at their summer house. These film projections, in conjunction with the characters onstage, evoked the work of memory, of reminiscing and reconstructing past scenes; it also appeared as a sort of visual externalization and expansion of Dora's mind, doubling her verbal work. When Cixous wrote the play, Duras herself had been directing her highly choreographic and interrelated experimental films *India Song* and *Son nom de Venise à Calcutta désert*, which both place recollections of dance scenes at their center, while presenting sequences where characters perform intensely slow, quasi-hypnotic pacing that foregrounds the bodies moving under the grip of what Duras calls love. Dora's strolls with the K.s and her father in Duras' filmed sequences for Cixous and Benmussa preserve this notable slow-motion quality, which imposes a certain rhythm and flow on the play otherwise punctuated by dialogues in the analytic setting, where body movements aren't typically expansive, nor are they necessarily rhythmic.

Even more explicitly, *Portrait de Dora* also involved screen projections of fragments of actual dance choreographed and performed by Carolyn Carlson. While these recordings aren't readily available, other clips from her dances to contemporary music in 1970s Paris begin to give us a sense of her style. In particular, her solo to Edgar Varèse's *21.5* flute solo at Opéra Garnier features her long, slender, arching body suspended in extremely bent low arabesques and other long-held poses that suddenly shift to staccato sequences of isolated movement, making sharp angles with her elbows, wrists, knees, and ankles. Retrospective documentaries, where Carlson mentions the comment on her performance that she resembled a bird in a cage, also highlight her innovative gesture of incorporating floor work onstage at Garnier, at a time when this was unacceptable in classical ballet. In both standing and floor work her movements notoriously envelop space into her body (rather than the body unfolding out into space as it does in ballet),²² interspersing moments of sculpting space in small and large angular strokes with her limbs, as if sudden electrical currents passed through them. In the context of reading Cixous's take on a case of hysteria, the recurrence of these pronounced arches and drops to the floor in Carlson's performances calls to mind the photographs of hysterical attacks in Charcot's *Iconographie de la Salpêtrière* that preceded it, for instance those featuring Augustine's *arc-de-cercle* pose, and other convulsive stances. However, just as Cixous's portraits do not seek a permanent resemblance or the reduction of a living body to its portrayed image, in this related visual comparison between Carlson's poses and the Iconography photographs the point would not be to read Carlson's dancing body as simply a later edition of what was viewed as the hysterical attack at the turn of the 20th century, especially if its interpretation lowers it to a distorted and partially disguised expression of some kind of shameful lust.

Freud had already modeled caution against giving too much authority to general diagnoses and showed the crucial relevance of case-led work with Dora, who didn't

present the great attacks described in the iconography and would thus qualify as one of merely “petite hystérie.” But if Carlson’s dancing isn’t a veiled or tamed (like a bird in a cage) version of the sexual energy pathologized and systematized at the Salpêtrière, it’s not because the sexual register is absent. It’s simply that the sexual isn’t caught in the framework of the couple, of a wandering womb that would be fulfilled by the penis and child. For gestures of writing can also be intensely sexual and unconcerned with matters of copulation and penetration. In Carlson’s more recent choreographies and performances—to which one should add the practice of calligraphy she has developed—it’s remarkable to find the insistence of her sharp angles, and specifically that her body movement fundamentally originates from the wrists. In a fragment of a dance class featured in the 2007 documentary *Dance as Karma* she tells her students “you leave a trace ... in the space”, an idea she invites them to understand in terms of “resonance and energy” (7’20”), which she proceeds to demonstrate with a large curve swiftly traced with her right arm, starting at her head and ending across her body with her palm extended. Indeed, her distinctive hand strokes, for example in *Immersion*, a 2020 performance in front of Claude Monet’s *Nymphéas* at the Orangerie museum, draw hieroglyphs in space and present quite directly the gesture of writing she also executes on paper. In conversation with this act of what Carlson calls visual poetry and with Cixous’s *Portrait de Dora*, Freud’s interpretation of Dora’s account of viewing a painting with nymphs at a Secessionist exhibition might take a new direction. To Freud, Dora’s attention to “nymphae” pointed, in connection to other, previously mentioned signifiers, to the inner labia, the medical name of which he and Dora know, and to Dora’s supposed sexual craving (“A Case of Hysteria”, p. 99). In Carlson the water-lilies—whose French name is *nymphéas*—inspire an energetic execution of wrist movements that evoke calligraphic and painterly strokes and bring the resonance of the wall’s liquid and bluish denseness into the dance’s timespace. The dancer’s body then becomes indeed immersed in the aqueous sensation. It is this confluence of the dancing body with its surroundings and its ephemeral inscription²³ that could be considered sexual in a way that opens different possibilities from what Dora’s culture endorsed, except, perhaps, in painting, which inclined her to dream.

I would say that Cixous’s *Portrait of Dora* is fundamentally oriented by dreams of escaping the Oedipal prison and by irrepressible desires that never fit into this prison to begin with. How to make an aesthetic space for them in the physical, spatiotemporal world? Is such an ambition doomed to failure? In a 1984 Quebec dance-theater production of Cixous’s play, director Denis Marleau, who found Carlson’s screened presence of dance too metaphorical, decided to add a dancer on stage, which he thought of as a matter of “integrating a double to the character of Dora.” Marleau considered that this double “could bear witness to the intrasubjectivity of the character and illustrate the displacements of discourse that can manifest on the ‘playing field’ of an analysis” (“Trajet”, p. 74, my translation). However, he tells us, the introduction of another body on stage (the dancer playing Dora’s double) brought practical complications upon the relation between dance and Cix-

ous's text, which he viewed as "an extremely strong structure" (p. 74). His labor of spatializing this structure needed to also make room for the choreographer "to fully offer the dancer her means of expression" (p. 74). Interestingly, what Marleau seems to describe as a failed experiment resembles the palimpsestic composition in Joyce's first *Portrait of the Artist*, as well as the hysteric's body as it is explored by Freud in the Dora case: as a site of symptoms, of inscribed compromise formations managing between a failed and inadmissible jouissance, on the one hand, and, on the other, societal demands upon a body marked a certain way.²⁴

There's still more dance—*y a encore d'la danse*, one might perhaps write, and evoke two of Lacan's key formulations in *Seminar XX*. First, of course, is *encore*, an expression he hears as homonym of *en corps* ("in the body") and resonant with feminine jouissance (always longing, like the audience of an outstanding performance, for "more", that is to say, never satisfied, not limited by the signifier). Second, Lacan's *Y a d'l'Un* in the same seminar points to a matchless singularity beyond sense, whose isolation and materialization is sought in an analysis. But in borrowing *y a*, the contracted oral transcription for *il y a*, there is, and the again transcribed oral contraction of the partitive pronoun *de la*, for *y a (encore) d'la danse*, I wish to indicate, first, dance's involvement with the implicit impersonal *il* and its site, *y*, which points to a latent unconscious that is heavy with something, that has, *a*, the third person of the verb *avoir*, and that perhaps also marks out the site of the object *a*, the cause of desire. Second, that dance is not only movement but also uncountable, perhaps also un-recountable, untellable, and inexhaustible or ungraspable in its totality. Which is also to say it falls on the side of the *pas-toute*, the not-all (with a feminine ending).

Sides, positions, economies

Woman must write her self (*Il faut que la femme s'écrive*): must write about woman (*que la femme écrive de la femme*) and bring women to writing (*fasse venir les femmes à l'écriture*), from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies; for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. ("The Laugh...", p. 875/ "Le rire...", p. 37)²⁵

This is the second sentence in Hélène Cixous's « Le rire de la méduse », which is still considered a manifesto of *écriture féminine* (Cixous's first statement is indeed "I will speak of *écriture féminine*, of what it will do") and a fundamental text in the psychoanalytically inflected French feminism of difference that inspired much of the 1980s study of theory in the United States (this is therefore one thing her speech on *écriture féminine* did). In the English translation, "la femme" strikingly becomes a combination of "woman" without a definite article and "women" in plural. It's significant to think of this translation problem considering the context implied in the essay. In the previous years, Jacques Lacan had been thinking of woman through modal logic, in relation to the problem of the not-all (*pas-toute*, with a feminine ending), which undermines universality as a category while com-

plicating the logic of adding integers to a growing set. There is also the fact that the use of modal logic to describe different subjective situations—necessary, possible, impossible, and contingent—leads Lacan to define these different modalities with regard to writing, and more specifically in the pronominal *se* preceding the verb *écrire*, to “what writes itself”, stops, doesn’t stop, and doesn’t write itself. Thus, Cixous’s declaration “Il faut que la femme s’écrive” (*woman must write her self*) invokes and speaks to the problems Lacan had been discussing, leading him to the well-known, provocative claims that “The woman doesn’t exist”, that women say nothing about feminine *jouissance*, and that the impossible is what doesn’t stop *not* writing itself. It’s important to consider then that from the initial paragraph of her essay, Cixous’s decision to take up speech and writing entails much more than the actual action of opening one’s mouth or jotting or typing to put some words out into space, where some other might notice them. It was also not only a matter of increasing the number of publications by female authors who write about woman, to remedy a systemic gender disparity and to develop a repertoire of women’s accounts of the life, thought, and experiences of women, although these are certainly powerful sociogenic strategies, and Cixous was concerned with such social and historical problems as well. This violent, calculated distance established between writing and women (*les femmes*), parallel to that between women and their bodies, would be overcome by woman writing about woman and so beckoning women to this space of writing. What does it take for a woman to effectively write, whereas “the hysteric does *not* write, does *not* produce, does nothing—nothing other than make things circulate without inscribing them” (*Newly Born Woman*, p. 37)? Must she cross over to a “man” side of sexuation?

In Jacques Lacan’s *Seminar XX (1972-73), Encore*, the questions of woman and feminine *jouissance* called for a certain spatial arrangement, distribution of elements, and organization of lines of force. The formulas of sexuation, which use logical functions and quantifiers, had already been placed in relation to each other on the board and discussed at length in the previous year’s seminar, ...*Ou pire (...Or worse)*. The formulas involve different positions regarding the notion that the sexual relation is dominated by what Lacan called the phallic function, which is a matter of the signifier, sexual difference, and *jouissance*. The four terms, in two columns,

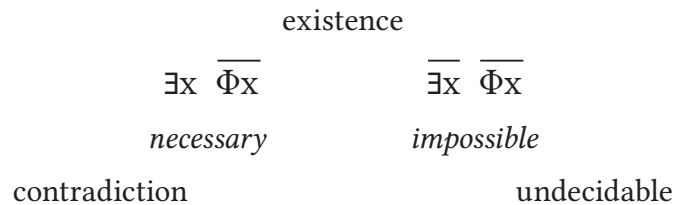


Figure 1. Schema from June 1 1972 (...*Or worse*, 186)

articulated the necessary and the possible, on the left side, and the impossible and the contingent, on the right.

In this right-hand column, Lacan saw an opportunity for “something to be articulated ... in the capacity of woman” (...*Or worse*, p. 180). He specifies that the impossible proposes that “there doesn’t exist an x to satisfy a negated Fx ” and the contingent posits that “not all of x is under Fx .” On this side there isn’t an exceptional x whose exemption from the phallic function (the signifier of all signifiers that emerges with a cut) grounds the law. Instead, there is something of each x on this side that escapes the phallic function, or the signifier. From this situation that prevents a relation of universal and particular in a relation of contradiction between these categories, also preventing a simple addition of integers to a set, Lacan proposes that the relation between these two categories of impossible and contingent on the right side is undecidable. Not only does the subject in this feminine position say at once yes and no to the phallic function, but this undecidability has the effect of unsettling the signifier as a limit to jouissance. Lacan therefore says, “she is that which, in my graph, is inscribed by the signifier of the Other as barred, $S(A)$ ” (p. 182, trans. modified). This leads him to suggest that “in the non-existence of what might negate the phallic function, is the fact of absencing oneself, and even of being this *jouis-centre* ... conjugated to what I shall call, not an absence, but a *de-sense-cy*. That is why she becomes the signifier of the fact that not only is the great Other not here, it’s not her, but that it’s altogether elsewhere, in the place where speech is situated” (p. 183, trans. modified). Thus, in *Encore*, Lacan in a graph below these sets of formulas develops the notion of feminine jouissance for the subject’s relation to the barred Other and not exclusively to F , in contrast to the masculine subject’s relation to an object a , which appears as the relation between the possible and the contingent in the above-cited schema.

I would highlight a couple of questions resulting from this logic regarding the feminine, writing, and dance. First, the question of whether the only outcome of that instability can be a failed, unintelligible scribbling insists. What is at stake in destabilizing the signifier? Second, undecidability as mentioned complicates counting, and therefore also writing in its basic track-keeping or accounting function. If something can appear as writing here, how is it relevant? Lacan suggests speech is elsewhere regarding woman, and in *Encore* he stresses the notion that she experiences a jouissance she knows nothing about and therefore cannot speak about (p. 96). As if nothing could be said or written on this. To this image of muteness, Cixous, of course, responds with laughter, cutting off the *éc-* from *rire* with a nod to both Médusa, mythical instigator of castration anxiety, and to Friedrich Nietzsche, who promotes laughter and dance as indispensable to the human apprenticeship. Cixous therefore reframes the question of the feminine in terms of libidinal economies, where jouissance and excess result in writing too, and where the signifier revels in a joyous polysemy, a refusal of only one meaning and of its stability. Women in an expanded sense inhabit this position and economy, participating in a certain ethics of feminine writing that involves the gift, theft, and

flight (“The Laugh...”, p. 882; pp. 887-88) while dismantling a use of power for the dynamics of domination grounded in a repudiation of femininity. Linking Cixous’s economy to Lacan’s schema with the formulas of sexuation, it’s important that this economy bring about a new signifier, where undecidability offers the opportunity for the subject to act, that is, to write what has never been written, an unheard-of writing that refuses to relinquish laughter. Cixous viewing Horn’s *Rings* thus glimpsed the “neverbeforeseen”, which as cited earlier, appears as “a still-restless, unstable, undecided era when the verbal elements danced around...” (“See the Neverbeforeseen”, p. 62).

To Lacan, this possibility is related to “mystical jaculations”, where he would place his own *Écrits* (*Encore*, p. 98).²⁶ While helpful to nuance a possibility for writing that takes up an excess the signifier cannot control, where dance is in play, the ethical consequences of a feminine position and economy are limited. The contingent encounter of a new signifier can certainly have a comical effect as Cixous in her essay, the *Scilicet* reading of Fourier via Debout, and Lacan all point out. But this effect can continue only to briefly suspend repression to open and close a gap revealing unconscious desire, whereas the aim in foregrounding the force of dance is to hold open a space for the feminine to be the source of a different *correspondence* to what the masculine subject proposes by way of the object *a*, where he is supported by a fantasy. While thinking of the feminine in terms of subjective positioning (Lacan) and libidinal economy (Cixous) is key to orienting an interrogation of desire beyond an Oedipal logic, in considering, with Apollon, the feminine as a dimension of each subject (“The Subject of the Quest”, p. 11), an ethical choice emerges beyond the limits of any cultural construction of sexuality. In other words, what is at stake in the feminine and in desire isn’t whether one is a man, woman, queer, or asexual person within a given culture; rather, the choice concerns the freedom to welcome the dimension that becomes censored in identificatory tactics, and a desire that becomes restricted and corrupted under the illusion that another gender or single human being could ever be the object satisfying the desire that causes each subject. When a subject engages in an exploration of this dimension, which can be conceived as an attunement to the signifier carrying *jouissance* beyond meaning, a subsequent choice presents itself, concerning the aesthetic over violence—or the joyful feelings of the beautiful and the sublime, as well as of “spero”, “espoir”, “esperance”, “uma esperança”²⁷—as the relentless register of *dissidences*.

Notes

1. Nancy Spero: *Dissidences*. The 2009 exhibit catalog includes an English translation of Cixous’s essay.
2. My translations for this unsigned essay by a member of the *École freudienne de Paris*. Simone Debout-Oleszkiewicz was a specialist in the work of the nineteenth-century utopianist philosopher Charles Fourier and a member of the French resistance during the Second World War. This essay from the *École freudienne de Paris* discusses “*Griffe au*

nez” ou donner “*have ou art*”, *écriture inconnue de Charles Fourier* where Debout reads the encrypted “corps est-ce pont danse.”

3. The author’s use of “spirit” here refers to Freud’s thought on the simultaneously astonishing and illuminating effect of *Witz*, joke, in French “*mot d’esprit*”, but through Debout’s commentary, whose claim, cited by the author, is that “the quill ... transcribes the effects of a dispossession”, “*esprit*” also becomes something close to spiritual possession.

4. Interview with Willy Apollon, December 8, 2023.

5. Roland Barthes distinguishes Fourier’s harmonious deviance from Sade’s evil one through the example of Dame Strogonoff, whose “habit of harassing her beautiful slave by piercing her breast with pins” is unmasked by Fourier as resulting from “a congestion”: Dame Strogonoff was in love with her victim without knowing it: Harmony, by authorizing and favoring sapphic loves, would have relieved her of her sadism.” (*Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, 1976, p. 82).

6. In a 1983 statement, Spero points out that this half of Tiamat that becomes the sky is an attempt at “absolv[ing]” “the timeless fear, hatred of and cruelty directed towards women” by “idealization.” (*Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, p. 128).

7. For recent discussion of psychoanalysis regarding misogyny see Adam Phillips and Devorah Baum, “Politics in the consulting room” (2019), <https://granta.com/politics-in-the-consulting-room/>. Gill Gentile reflects on this with recent political expressions of this misogyny in mind in “Vaginal Veritas” (2019), <https://analytic-room.com/essays/vaginal-veritas-by-jill-gentile/>.

8. Several of Spero’s works around 1968 feature scenes of violence and suffering and have “victims” and “Helicopter” in their titles. See *Nancy Spero*, pp. 56-63.

9. The explanatory endnote is by the essay’s translator, Tracy McNulty.

10. Debout’s publication discussing Fourier’s letter has “*Griffe au nez*” at the beginning of its title, which cites Fourier’s play between *griffonner*, a verb that signifies writing in an illegible manner, and “claw to the nose” or “scratch on the nose”, evoking the mark of an animal’s attack on a face.

11. For a distinction between the signifying chain and the letter, beyond the unary trait, as a non-identical “invisible mark” left in the body see McNulty, “Desuturing Desire.”

12. *Quelle castration tu préfères ? Lequel [abaissement] tu aimes mieux, celui du père ou celui de la mère ? O les zolis zyeux, tiens zolie petite fille, achète-moi mes lunettes et tu verras la Verité-Moi-Je te dire tout ce que tu devras croire. Chausse-les à ton nez et jette le coup d’œil du fétichiste (que tu es, moi l’autre analyste, je te l’apprends) sur ton corps et le corps de l’autre. Tu vois ? Non ? Attends on va tout t’expliquer et tu sauras enfin à quelle espèce de névrose tu es apparentée. Bouge pas, on va te faire ton portrait, pour que tu te mettes bien vite à le ressembler.*

13. See note 24.

14. My translation. The dialogues between Freud and Dora in the analytic session highlight both the analyst’s foreseeable interpretations and the moments when Freud thinks like a man formatted by his culture. On Dora’s side, Cixous highlights her dream of women relating to other women outside of the competition for the father’s love.

15. The father “plays this master-role in the discourse of the hysteric” (p. 108).
16. Freud reflects on the effects of social and disciplinary rupture caused by his new ideas and techniques, including returning to childhood experiences, in “On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement.”
17. See *L'exil de James Joyce ou L'art du remplacement*, 1984. This is a significant point of contact between Cixous and Lacan, who certainly considers her work in his exploration of Joyce in the mid-1970s, as well as in other engagements with literature. In “L'écrivain, l'écriture, et l'enfant” he states his thoughts are parallel to some by Hélène Cixous regarding Joyce (p. 175).
18. As portraitist, Cixous thus doesn't say: “hold still, we're going to do your portrait, so that you can begin looking like it right away”, 1976 (p. 892).
19. Translated as “The very day/light of Roni Horn.” Christa Stevens has also listed several other portraits in Cixous's texts, in “Hélène Cixous and the Art of Portraying.”
20. In *Portrait du Soleil* the narrative voice sketches the lips of a god named Dioniris, whose name, like a dream, condenses “Dieu” “Osiris” and “Oniric.” Like a dream, it also allows the reading “dis on y rit”, (say one laughs there). However, his face resembles that of a pharaoh and is full of death (p. 30). In sketching his lips a transformation begins to occur and gaps begin to open within sentences. She traces the line as though “describing the trajectory of the sun, or the flight of a bird. One might also say a mountain; then I close the line with a soft, arched line” (p. 31). The mouth furthermore speaks to say that “he will make the sun rise himself and will set it himself on his bed” (p. 32). My translation.
21. Freud writes about this clinical phenomenon in his “Wolf Man” case study.
22. Many thanks to Carla María Negrete Martínez for sharing her expertise in dance techniques to fine-tune my descriptions of Carlson's style.
23. When Carlson speaks of the influence of Buddhism in her choreographic work and conception of dance as visual poetry, she suggests that each passing gesture inscribes itself eternally (11'41”).
24. Freud had thought of this problem in hysterics in relation to their artistic gift: “hysterics are undoubtedly imaginative artists, even if they express their phantasies *mimetically* in the main and without considering their intelligibility to other people.” (“Preface to Reik's Ritual”, p. 261).
25. Translation modified to highlight number choices in the original.
26. To Lacan, a writing, an “écrit”, has the unreadable but striking quality my essay has been exploring in terms of a dancing force unsettling the signifier and transmitting something real.
27. Cixous's essay on “Spero's *dissidances*” plays on the artist's last name, which means “I hope” in Italian. The question of whether hope is still alive for the women on the paintings, also of the hope of remaining alive in the face of atrocity, is combined with allusions to Clarice Lispector's chronicle of May 10, 1969 on the family's encounter of a cricket informally called *esperança*, which means hope in Portuguese. Lispector starts by distinguishing the “classic” hope that often turns out to be an illusion from this real living being (“Uma esperança”, 1984, pp. 192-94). The *Scilicet* author on Debout reading Fourier's

letter also emphasizes Fourier's critical disturbance through "*laid ce pet rance*" ("ugly/rude this rancid fart") of the Christian theological virtue of hope, "l'espérance" ("Une 'corps est-ce pont danse' à ouvrir", p. 204). The point isn't to only assent to a disillusioned despair, but rather to discover a new sensibility beyond the pleasure principle and the limits of language.

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CINDY ZEIHNER

ÉCRITURE FÉMININE: SPIEL ON WORDS...

(Reading 'Portrait of Dora')

Spiel /ʃpi:l,spi:l/ (noun)—an elaborate or glib speech or story, typically one used by a salesperson.

(verb)—recite.

Spiel [ʃpi:l] (neuter noun)—fig. Das ist ein Spiel mit dem Feuer;

informal. *Etw aufs Spiel setzen*;

lit/fig. *das Leben ist kein Spiel*;

ein Spiel des Schicksals or Zufalls¹

There is something sublime lingering in the phrase *écriture féminine*; its very unknowability tantalises a promise of something already apparent and something else to come. Through words which struggle to mirror an already existent desire, the analysand wills for the emergence of feminine *jouissance*; the analyst listens for it. Here the analysand's desire goes beyond putting words together sequentially. Hélène Cixous seizes upon this not so much via the Lacanian delineation of empty and full speech but rather by postulating a feminine subject whose speech for woman is a commuting between unconscious desire and the body bearing the inscription of the will towards *jouissance*. In addition, she proposes that this commuting back and forth is what designates feminine *jouissance* as neither a passive experience nor a will towards phallic negation, but rather as an oscillation fraught with the uncertainty of subjective and political contention. We can think of this as not only a semiotic moment infused with sexuality but also one from which (woman-by-woman/woman-by-woman) a new language exceeding the capture of the signifier might emerge. What can we say about Cixous's curiously urgent claim of utopian *jouissance* being uniquely feminine and tied to body-politics? Rather than take up critique of her ontological position in *écriture féminine* for its essentialism and perhaps unattainable idealism, we might more profitably offer a different position. Cutting to the crux of the Lacanian question concerning feminine *jouissance* we are compelled to ask via Cixous's ontology of *écriture féminine*, exactly which fantasies (impulses towards *jouissance*) of political subjectivities that refuse to neatly appropriate the world, are worth preserving?

In response to this we must first take a step back by considering how fantasies are always libidinally based in the psyche, as Juliet Mitchell points out:

The psychoanalytic concept of sexuality confronts head-on all popular conceptions. It can never be equated with genitality nor is it the simple expression of a biological drive. It is always psycho-sexuality, a system of conscious and unconscious human fantasies involving a range of excitations and activities that produce pleasure beyond the satisfaction of any basic physiological need. (p. 2)

Dora's fantasies fascinated Cixous; she was not afraid to be identified with them and lamented Freud's failure to understand Dora as a woman. In *Sorties (The Newly Born Woman)* Cixous unapologetically says, "I am what Dora would have been if women's history had begun" (*Newly Born*, p. 99). For psychoanalytic theorists Dora is ripe with feminist imaginaries—how her one slap is not aimed merely against the annoying Herr K but against the patriarchy he represents. For those in psychoanalytic praxis a different, almost urgent desire emanates: how can we cure Dora?² How can woman exist without riding on the coat tails of the patriarchy? How is it that woman must admit to at times having done so? Why must woman pay with her being? Moreover and in light of these meta-psychoanalytic questions, how might we assess Freud's 'cure' of Dora? Cixous valiantly took up all these questions when she wrote *Portrait de Dora* in 1975 and in doing so allows for the possibility of politics to orient part of the psychoanalytic cure.

It is well worth noting Jacques-Alain Miller's account of 'true woman' as necessarily distinctive from man and as one which is psychically formed:

A true woman is the subject when it has nothing—nothing to lose. A true woman, according to Lacan, doesn't retreat from anything, before any sacrifice, when what is most precious is at stake. She doesn't retreat from anything. Whereas the man, obsessed, tangled up by what he has to lose, unable to advance, diverts the gaze, moves on to something else. That's what makes Freud say women don't have a superego. (p. 2)

'True woman' or ~~woman~~ marks impossibilities; it is the category in which the subject recognises that the enigmatic original lost object resides in the subject themselves. Such an enigma of woman starts with the Mother and her desire. We have probably all experienced challenges, even difficulties in the relationship with our Mother and these leave a trace. Freud took a long time to fully recognise this in Dora's neurotic question: *what does it mean to be a woman?* In his papers between 1925 and 1933 Freud developed his theory of the maternal relationship in terms of a confrontation with castration, wherein the maternal is a figure from which the young subject needs to separate yet remain connected to. We could say that the lifelong transference shared with one's mother is like an elastic band. However many years earlier in 1905, in Freud's most poignant case-study of feminine *jouissance*, that of Dora, he had neglected this all-important maternal figure. Dora failed to identify with her Mother and thus saw her as a stand-in figure for imperialist

modesty. The lack of attention to the absence of Dora's Mother by Freud (and subsequently, Cixous) is intriguing especially since psychoanalysis gives such primacy both to the figure of the mother and to her role in feminine *jouissance*.

As the story goes in the famous 'Lake Scene', Dora had grown weary of Herr K's ongoing, clumsy attempts to seduce her during which neither her father nor Freud were of much support in spite of her short but arguably successful analysis. In a last-ditch effort to convince Dora to be his lover, Herr K dropped his bombshell: that his wife Frau K meant nothing to him. This declaration memorably signified his extraordinary stupidity in failing to understand Dora had never wanted him because she was in love with Frau K, the very woman he was declaring to be his nothing. No wonder Dora's parting gesture to Herr K was a sharp slap—her ultimate speech act which although not delivered from the couch had nevertheless been fully formed there.

Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria (to be subsequently referred to as "Dora") was written in 1901 but only published four years later in 1905. Freud's aim was to confirm his psychosexual theory of hysteria as well as to show the clinical value of the interpretation of dreams. Since Dora cut off treatment prematurely, the treatment was considered a failure. Haunted by Dora's rejection both of him and of the viability of his cure, Freud made use of this failure to recognize and elevate the importance of the interpretation of transference.

From Cixous's literary and theatrical handling of Dora something a little different might be gleaned. Instead of Dora landing on Freud's couch with her narrative intact but unable to be spoken (she coughs it out), Cixous wills the body of Dora to speak,

DORA

The unsaid, lost, in the body, in between the bodies.

No need to open it. It's always opened. I can open. Don't.

[..]

I still feel it there. I can't breathe. Pushing with all his strength.

It was a new sensation.

[She acts this out on a side stage

DORA (voice sometimes clear, sometimes drowsy.)]

Cixous then allows the feminine to speak for the man,

FRAU K

He's a man of base desires; he doesn't know what a real woman is. Men are often like this: they think only of their own satisfaction.

On the face of it, Frau K's counter intuitive moment seems absurdly obvious, especially if her contention is to allow feminine *jouissance* to be expressed not as some pseudo-utopic illusion (arguably, a comic-cynical position). Something else is taking place here which accords with Cixous's project of *écriture féminine*. Although fully aware of the impossibility of the project, Cixous absolutely rejects the notion that, psychoanalytically speaking it is futile, because it nevertheless speaks artistically to an absolute gap (once occupied by Dora's Mother who vanished into a patriarchal commodity) which is both deliberated and deferred. Frau K's marking of 'the' man by woman may appear an irreverent undertaking but it nevertheless both locates woman and distances her from the task of inscription, an enigma which Cixous recognises:

So, in the end woman, in man's desire, stands in the place of not knowing, the place of mystery. In this sense she is no good, but at the same time she is good because it's the mystery that leads man to keep overcoming, dominating, subduing, putting his manhood to the test, against the mystery he has to keep forcing back. (*Laugh*, p. 170)

Lacan too recognises this when he says, "for to suppose that a woman herself assumes the role of fetish merely introduces the question of her different position with respect to desire and the object" (*Ecrits*, p. 617). In some ways Frau K makes light of it—she has the advantage of being both the object of desire for Dora's Father and at the same time, able as a woman to articulate this feeling of exile (from man) whether self-inflicted or otherwise. Cixous understands that such self-realisation is intrinsically linked to the gaze of desire as one which cannot be altogether consciously known. Dora's plea to Frau K is one of her desire, that when Frau K's eyes are shut she clearly sees Dora as an image of desire: one that is both interpellated and split off from castration. This is how Cixous's frames hysteric desire, in a (symbiotic maternal-love) scene oriented towards nothing specifically nameable:³

DORA

Look at me.

I would like to go into your eyes.

I would like you to close your eyes.

Lacan rightly reminds us that we can never see ourselves in the way in which we are seen. Hence Cixous's Dora depicts woman in a most tragic situation (as one who does not yet know herself) from which the only way out is via submission to *écriture féminine*: that what is written is symbolic and lingers in the shadows as a wish fulfilment. What is this enigmatic writing and why does Cixous persist in claiming its viability for reconstructing the author as uniquely feminine? As Cixous writes of Dora,

Her libido is cosmic, just as her unconscious is worldwide....

Her language does not contain, it carries; it does not hold back, it makes possible. (*Laugh*, p. 889)

It is the neurotic's desire to be seen as unique, that their subjectivity be born into and borne out of inscription and thereby lives this fictitious script, gesture by gesture.⁴ For Cixous, the neurotic organises their symptoms within the discourses of life which must include fictions of what constitutes pleasure. Deployment of the fiction of Otherness is to some extent distinctive in being overdetermined by critical symbolic forces such as culture, gender or politics, all of which promise to provide consistency. Barthes's infamous phrase, "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author" (Barthes, p. 143) speaks to the extimate and fictitious spaces occupied and shared by author and reader—in other words, the same space—within and without each other. As a poetic example, it is often said by those who write haiku that it is never finished until it has been read. The function of this aesthetic command is paradoxical because whilst setting the scene for a relationship it at the same time ruptures it. Perhaps even ends it. Cixous's radical break attempts to personalise the impersonal by insisting on a certain enigmatic force, that feminine writing requires the writer be intrinsically feminine (as a writer). Such a focus on an interiority of the author enables the reader to witness a moment of performative subjectivity in which the aesthetic embracing of the potentiality of language transcends the ego. For Cixous, this radical interiority is a curious site in so far as the very idea of it existing inspires repetition of fictions as producing a theatrical (feminine) subject. Such repetition is Cixous's illuminous point: she knows that in the act of repeating we don't necessarily see the same thing again and again. Thus she rewrites Dora as a singular subject who portrays the end-game fantasy of hysteria as an act of self-authorisation by first registering a certain suppressive symbolic charge:

DORA

Everyone knows how to be accommodating.

We can say that *écriture féminine* is Cixous's effort to reclaim something lost in the phallic order, a way to speak about alienation, desire and distance as a particular authoring of the subject. In this way Cixous is chasing an impossible ideal—after all, as Lacanians well know, everything that can be uttered is already in the Phallic order as a production of language and moreover, a production of subjectivity as constructed through language. What then is Cixous's plea for theatrical fiction attempting to accomplish? In approaching this question it is first worth noting Lacan's position on *mi-dire*:

It's a defensible proposition to say that truth has the structure of fiction. This is what is normally called 'myth'. Many truths have a mythical existence, and it is precisely for this reason that truth cannot be exhausted, the whole truth cannot be said. This is what I stated in the following form: truth can only be half-said. One speaks the truth as best one can, that is, in part. (Lacan, "Columbia", p. 9)

Perhaps this is Cixous's reading of Dora, Lacan providing one half and she, the other:

I've opened the way to something I've called 'the saying of the truth' [...] The analysand—if the analysis is functioning, if it's moving forward—comes to speak in an increasingly focused way, focused on something that has always stood in opposition to the polis—in the sense of the city—. (Lacan, "Columbia", p. 10)

Whilst grounded in the symbolic for it to be realized, feminine *jouissance* is enigmatic, fictitious, and somewhat anxious in its pleas to work through the angst of ordinary desire. Freud puts this perfectly:

Mental work is linked to some current impression, some provoking occasion in the present which has been able to arouse one of the subject's major wishes. From there it harks back to a memory of an earlier experience (usually an infantile one) in which this wish was fulfilled; and now it creates a situation relating to the future which represents a fulfilment of the wish. What it thus creates is a day-dream or phantasy, which carries about it traces of its origin from the occasion which provoked it and from the memory. Thus, past, present and future are strung together, as it were, on the thread of the wish that runs through them. (*Creative Writers*, p. 57)

However just as there is nothing natural about the category 'woman' and her wishes, so also with her *jouissance*, as Lacan hints at:

It could be said that *jouissance* is limited by natural processes. But actually, we have no idea whether they are natural processes. We simply know that we have ended up considering to be natural the mollycoddling that a society that more or less orderly maintains us in except that everyone is dying to know what would happen if things went really bad. (Lacan, *Sem XVII*, p. 261)

Certainly, *jouissance* is *there*, it is apparent, one experiences it but it exists beyond language, beyond the spoken, lingering at the edge of fantasy together with the exciting horror of it. Yet at the same time, as Freud points out, *any* wish fulfilment is simply very ordinary, even if presented as theatrical. *Jouissance* exists in the gaps not only of what is said but also in the struggle to say at the level of wish fulfilment. For Cixous and Lacan ~~woman~~ cannot be spoken and exists necessarily both *in* the void and *as* the void of man. Can the void be thus spoken?

FREUD

Do you like to write? Yes.

DORA

No.

For Cixous, the author holds transcendent potential which is ironic given the author's eventual impersonal status once a work has been read. Work becomes *the work* which has the function of being repeatedly read and judged—worked through.⁵ The idea that authorship is discerning of some sort of universality, a notion so important to Cixous, is more destabilizing than comforting, her designation *woman* being a complete escape from the singularity of the will towards uniqueness. Cixous's rewriting of Dora is a blueprint for the neurotic first to take up another image and then speak it plainly, this requiring willingness for submission to an ethic of self-erasure regarding authorship. Cixous sacrifices her own status as an author so that the fiction of Dora can live on. This is precisely what Dora's Mother does—she submits to domesticity over desire and thus fades into patriarchal oblivion. Moreover a further requirement of self-authorship (as Freud, Lacan and Cixous all agree) is acceptance that under the pressure of the unconscious, transcendence not only falters but completely collapses. Nevertheless, they all preserve the enigma and anxiety of the feminine, the not-all as 'remaining to be seen'...⁶

On the path that condescends to my desire, what the Other wants, what he wants even if he doesn't know in the slightest what he wants, is nevertheless, necessarily, my anxiety. It is not enough to say that woman overcomes hers through love. That remains to be seen. (*Sem. X*, p. 180)

After all, the big Other fails to manifest when most needed. Such a failure of wish-fulfilment produces a very ordinary fantasy, as when Freud likens the creative writer to a "day-dreamer in broad daylight" (*Creative Writers*, p. 58). There is nothing controversial about this subject position, which is precisely Cixous's point.

If we abstract the subject from what is spoken, we are then looking at the manifestation of symptoms. In other words, if we remove the will to take up uniqueness, we can then perceive some sort of destination for the speaker. For example, affirming that one should like to write does not necessarily mean that one takes up the *jouissance* of writing. What might Cixous then have to tell us about symptoms? We can find out by abstracting Cixous into the void along with Freud and Dora:

Do you like to write?

Yes. No.

We are presented with an ambiguous response to the unanswerable question/task (praxis) of writing:

Do you like to?

Write, yes.

No.

Moreover, we have *spiel* of words as an attempt to (re)write:

Do you like to?

(w)rite

Yes? No?

That Dora should desire to be the object is a rite of patriarchal passage that she rejects, “the unsaid, lost, in the body, in between the bodies” (*Dora*, p. 35). Perhaps Freud could have instead asked, “Do you like to (be) right?” In which case, Dora’s emphatic ‘no’ is the perfect cue for interrogating the oedipal mess she finds herself in. In his prefatory remarks to ‘Dora’, Freud is defensive, anticipating the ‘judgment of the world’. He explains that if his theory that “the causes of hysterical disorders are to be found in the intimacies of the patient’s psychosexual life”, then he has no choice but to approach the matter with disarming candidness “even with a young woman” (Freud, “Fragment”, pp. 7-8). As justification, Freud compares his role to that of the gynaecologist who knows that the body contains knowledge of one’s psychic suffering. This is arguably Freud’s first misstep which Lacan attempts to mediate by maintaining that there are indeed consequences to the “imaginary mold” in which Dora is caught (Lacan, *Ecrits*, p. 221):

In order for her [Dora] to gain access to this recognition of her femininity, she would have to assume her own body, failing which she remains open to the functional fragmentation... that constitutes conversion symptoms.

Interestingly, according to Lacan this is where ‘The’ woman fails, where there is a failure of the appeal to femininity, and where in its place is an appeal (perhaps a regression) to identification with man. Dora’s relation to her body is organized around this “earliest imago” (*Ecrits*, p. 221) that of her brother Otto, through the experience of sucking her thumb whilst tugging at her brother’s ear. Experiencing her body as an ‘enjoying’ body (in Lacanian terms, where the imaginary register is knotted to the Real of *jouissance*) occurs not directly but via an identification with the brother’s body (another body borne out of her Mother). For Lacan this is fundamental because—in line with his mirror stage theory—it constitutes “that primordial identification through which the subject recognises herself as I” (*Ecrits*, p. 221).

It is important to note that Freud’s clinical picture of Dora is different to those of his other case histories. With Dora he offers no orientation as to technique, unlike for example in the case of the Rat Man. His structure of what constitutes a case is with Dora noticeably different, departing not only from his method but perhaps also from core psychoanalytic concepts, such as lamenting the central figure of the Mother. To this extent Freud’s technique with Dora is experimental as well as messy and perplexing. Freud emphasizes his role as investigator when he introduces two kinds of ‘disingenuousness’, the conscious and the unconscious. These together with amnesia, contends Freud, lead to doubt and falsification of memories. Freud specifically emphasises the importance of memory. Indeed, he states that the aim of the treatment is to “remove all possible symptoms and to replace them by conscious thoughts” and to “repair all damages to the patient’s memory” so that their story may be “intelligible, consistent, and unbroken” (Freud, “Fragment”, p. 11).

We could say that Cixous, too, offers technique, one which she stands by through rewriting Dora. Furthermore *écriture féminine* is the writing of the feminine, specifically a reauthoring of *woman*. Within the category of *woman* is contained not only Dora's urgent question—what it does to mean to be a woman?—but also the fictions necessary in sculpturing the space occupied by *woman*. Cixous etches her way into these fictions which stage Dora's symbolic and psychic life. She is a daughter without the enigma of her (M)other. Moreover, whether Dora likes writing or not becomes irrelevant because through Freud she is already written by the name-of-the-Father and Herr K. Dora has herself plenty more to say and Cixous makes sure of this through an ambiguous yet threatening *spiel* on words... (*Dora*, p. 9).

DORA (*une voix qui déchire un silence—ton entre la menace et la demande—s'écoute*)

Si vous osez m'embrasser, je vous donnerai une gifle!

DORA (*d'un coup proche de l'oreille*)

Osez m'embrasser, je vous donnerai une gifle!

[DORA (*her voice, threatening and demanding rips through the silence*)

If you dare to kiss me, I will slap you!

DORA (*with a slap close to the ear*)

Dare to kiss me, I will slap you!]

Which symptom is Cixous abstracting in her reauthoring of Dora? After all without Freud's initial miss-step Dora would not be Dora, furthermore this not only renders her question as one to be asked in the Symbolic but also situates it as ultimately unanswerable. Cixous grasps onto this moment of realisation, that *woman* exists because all subjects are divided and must, moreover live with each other's division.

Cixous's situating of the impossible feminine subject is exactly where she places Dora. If we ask the two most obvious questions inspired by Nietzsche about authorship: *who is speaking and why are they speaking?*, the destination of the subject-supposed-to-speak is not particularly clear. However what is striking is how Dora's situatedness constitutes an unbearable subjectivity which is also somewhat detached in being sutured to the fantasy of knowledge as an ethical drive. Through speaking, Dora is provided with a destination of sorts, albeit somewhat obscure and uncomfortable. The will to knowledge is a fantasy of enlightenment which necessarily fails when the subject takes up the duty to speak. For Cixous, the author's task is to demystify not language itself but the experience of it. That the subject does not represent language (otherwise this would be to fetishize it) nor defends or defies it (which would lead to subjugation), but rather elucidates or

manifests how the crux of subjectivity is complicit in the discrepancies language inevitably brings: this is what leads us to say one thing and mean another.

In these ways *écriture féminine* not only expounds an author-reader (non)relation but also a theory of language. Although it may appear hyperbolic, repositioning the author does similarly for the reader; furthermore rewriting as a situated subject is undertaking an activity of indeterminacy. What then disappears in Cixous's reading of Dora? She becomes a feminist anti-hero who is bound by the void of her indecision precisely where her subjective relocation is to be found.

In Freud's case history he gives Dora a fictitious name, a pseudonym. In doing the same Cixous confronts us with Freud's fantasy of tying dreams together with his theory of neurosis as emanating from the name-of-the-Father. This is especially so in Dora's dream about the bejewelled case, representing "a substitute for the shell of Venus, the female genitals" as a normal hysterical manifestation of repressed sexuality (Freud, "Fragment", pp. 113-14).⁷ Cixous's intervention gives us a glimpse of her fantasy in which psychoanalysis has an investment in the politics of feminism, in which she proceeds to write into her hysterical and redemptive play, *Portrait of Dora*. The lack of determiner in Cixous's title is noticeable. It is not *The Portrait of Dora* or *A Portrait of Dora* but rather *Portrait* stands alone, where Dora is both the image and the one who frames the gaze of her own subjectivity. Although her image doesn't say everything about her desire, this deliberate half speaking implied in the play's title identifies her as the subject who is struggling,⁸ her gaze directly invoking the split subject tarrying with contradiction,

DORA (to her Father)

You *do* understand me, but you are not honest.

DORA (then attempting to clarify her previous statement)

You *don't* understand. *I* am not honest.

Cixous plays around with the so-called category of honesty from the very beginning:

...comme une ombre, dans les rêves, ils deviennent souvent si distincts qu'on croit les saisir d'une façon palpable, mais, malgré cela, ils échappent à un éclaircissement définitif, et si l'on procède sans habileté ni prudence particulière, on ne peut arriver à décider si une pareille scène a réellement eu lieu... (Cixous, *Newly Born*, p. 9)

[...like a shadow, in dreams, they often become so vivid that we believe we grasp them in a palpable way, but despite this, they escape definitive clarification, and if we proceed without particular skill or prudence, we cannot decide whether such a scene really took place...]

For Cixous's Dora, to be honest and to be understanding are more than simply doing words. Rather for Cixous they are both positions into which Dora implicates

herself as a universal position contending with the contradiction inherent in split subjectivity. Yet at the same time, Dora refuses the universal feminine position which has been thrust upon her when she says “I am not honest”, which resituates her subjectivity as one thrust into a cluster of competing and incoherent feminine discourses. Feminist theorist, Nancy K. Miller, puts this well,

Because women have not had the same historical relation of identity, to origin, institution, production that men have had, they have not, I think collectively felt burdened by too much self, ego, cogito, etc. Because the female subject has juridically been excluded from the polis, hence decentred, ‘disoriginated’, deinstitutionalised, etc., her relation to integrity and textuality, desire and authority, displays structurally important differences from that universal position. (Miller, p. 106)

Cixous highlights the feminine as *par excellence* localized, a perfect space from which to write ironically. Cixous well knows that writers and readers are at one another’s mercy. Words can become tarnished, dishonest, acquire new meanings or grow old and die. Furthermore, cynically it might seem that there is no merit in being original, only appearing as such. Cixous is a modern writer and as a trail-blazer for feminist psychoanalysis is not intimidated by vulnerability, apparent impossibility or inevitable judgement. There is merit in the power of inspecting ourselves and this is exactly the scrutiny to which she puts Dora as a figure of the feminine. Here we can draw on those poets who are inspired by symbolism. Like Mallarmé, Cixous allows subjectivity to distil in its embodiment, even if it is an embodiment of the idea that one can be freed from the necessity of restraint. As a thinker and writer Cixous harbours an internal necessity to transform ideas into words. For her, as for Mallarmé, even silence or mumbling can be expressive units of linguistic structure. Like Dora, Cixous speaks with the urgency of instinctive desire, whether sensical or otherwise. The voice, after all, is a demand on the body. Although we may know the story of Dora, we have not heard it quite like Cixous tells it: a woman who lingers in contradiction. Here Mallarmé’s musings on the potentiality of the word come to mind:

With several words the line of verse constructs a completely new word, foreign to the language and a part, it seems, of an incantation; and thus it perfects the separation of the word: denying, in a sovereign gesture, any chance—any descriptive sense which has lingered in spite of the artful renewal both in meaning and sonority; and so you feel the surprise of never having heard any such fragment of speech, while, at the same time, your recollection of the object named bathes in a new atmosphere. (Mallarmé, p. 53)

The crux of neurosis is its uncanny moment enabling the subject to both capture and be captured by that which new yet all too familiar. Such a moment is one of crisis for the subject who, whilst knowing who they are not, asks ‘who am I’? The neurosis of Cixous’s Dora is no exception. Yet it is also (following Freud) a form of

day-dreaming. There is a scene in which Dora literally wanders around her own question, *what does it mean to be woman?*

DORA

Who is abandoning me? Who was it?

Who is betraying whom in this affair?

Who is in whose place?

Dora's complicity in her father's affair with Frau K taunts her as she struggles to ask the right question, when she already half knows the answer. Her repetition of 'who' so dominates her question that it might just as well be invisible in so far as it revolves around the subjects she is stuck with and who make up her lived experiences. Here the word 'Who' being neither possessed nor possessing, speaks to the impossibility of Dora's reckoning with herself as *Spiel*, Freud's pleasure play or imaginative writing which allow for the representation of partial fantasy. Freud wrote about the process of creative writing as one in which *Spiel* and writing are contrasting ways in which to envisage realities (*Spiel*, play, being carried out by *Schauspieler*, players).

Cixous's play portrays how Dora is implicated in the imaginative worlds of other players: notably, her Father, Herr K and Freud. Freud's insistence on unintended proverbial humour,

FREUD

Where there's smoke, there's fire...

is intended by Cixous more as common sense logic than keen psychoanalytic insight. Here Freud is pitched as the tongue-in-cheek, text-book, old fashioned name-of-the-Father, the one closest to God and dating back to before the French Revolution! Freud had insisted that we should never stop playing (around) with words because then pleasure truly stops. So the proverbs come thick and fast ... especially when Dora is laying on the couch, opening and closing her purse,

FREUD

When the lips are silent, fingertips chatter...

Although the absence of her Mother strikes at the heart of Dora's generic 'Who', she is represented by a lost object designed to be opened and closed. While the activity of opening and closing serves as a metonymy in motion for both Cixous's Dora and Dora's Mother, it is also tasked as potentially tantalizing violence,

DORA (recalling a dream)

There is a door in Vienna

[...]

He grasped me, he held me against the door

[...]

There is someone behind the door

But is it him behind the door?

You never know...

[...]

FRAU K (to Dora)

Don't close yourself!

And here Freud provides the logic,

FREUD

Naturally it cannot be a matter of indifference whether a girl is 'opened' or 'closed'

The inherent horror Dora feels is revealed in one of her dreams,

DORA

I have no doubt that he intends to force open the door...

How simple everything is.

It is either Him or Me.

That's the law.

FREUD

We all know what key opens the door in this case.

To appreciate the very utterance which horrifies Dora, that Herr K's wife means nothing to him, implying that woman is necessarily representative as nothing to man,⁹ let us trace the thread of Dora's wish. Or rather it this Cixous's wish for Dora?

In *Portrait of Dora*, Cixous plays with the voice, ensuring that Dora gets the last word but not before she is almost recast as a subject who necessarily shifts in subject position—the task of psychoanalysis—and instead reimagined as one who takes up the passage of the act. Cixous's *Spiel* about Dora gives us more than just a reiteration of her question regarding what it means to be a woman in that it also provides insight into how *Spiel* mobilises the signifier towards self-authorisation. Here Cixous agrees with Lacan: Dora's analysis lasts as long as necessary but not a moment longer. Freud is honest about his miss-step regarding Dora's desire, he never was subject-supposed-to-know about it. And Dora is honest about her desire that transmission of it should not to be hijacked by the Masters discourse. So although she flees the scene pretty quickly she does not flee psychoanalysis. That

is, she subverts one discourse (the name-of-the-Father's law) for another (the Analyst's discourse). She is practicing self-authorisation in the most radical way possible whilst also playing around with the experience of transference. She further reveals to Freud that his desire as a psychoanalyst is not pure, thereby requiring him to take up the ethical dimension of seriously, radically listening so that fantasy can fall and *jouissance* be managed. Here Freud needs a dose of know-how rather than knowledge. Moreover he has no choice but to tolerate Dora making a demand which he does not understand, rather than reducing her to the status of another little other. This is the courage of psychoanalysis, as Leguil points out:

In psychoanalysis, it is a question of 'recognising in desire the subject's truth'. In this sense, there is a price to pay in order to gain access to this truth of desire. It supposes a decision of the subject, that of not yielding on this desire which, nevertheless, he does not manage to circumscribe clearly. Access to the truth of desire supposes a certain courage, because there where it is a question of desire, it is also a question of sacrifice. A share of drive *jouissance* is thus to be sacrificed for access to the truth of desire, a truth that is not given but torn off when the subject grants an unconditional value to desire. It only happens if the subject consents to detach himself from a certain relation to goods and to *jouissance*. This operation supposes a separation, a yielding, an extraction of what Lacan called, taking up Shakespeare, 'the pound of flesh'. (Leguil, n.p.)

What Freud ends up realizing is that psychoanalysis is a place where people go to work on the singularity of their desire. Together the analyst and analysand undertake apparently impossible, sometimes intolerable but always courageous work and they assume that the flow of transmission can be counted on. This is absolutely not the case with the Masters discourse which has no idea what to do with analytic transference in which there is an inability or unwillingness to pay with one's very being.¹⁰ For the Master there is investment in civility but not so with psychoanalysis, which is a site of necessary resistance and perhaps even revolt, so that in the uptake of true speech there is a change in subject position. If the Master stands in for civility then psychoanalysis stands in for discontent. Cixous implies this when scrutinizing the conditions of patriarchy; for her, psychoanalysis can undermine and reterritorialize the stability of patriarchy as a political condition. To put any condition under proper scrutiny one needs to sacrifice recognition from the big Other and be willing to take up a different desire. Cixous's portrait of the hysteric who is Dora undertakes the psychoanalytic task precisely an act of *écriture féminine*: it drains whatever unconscious forces are bothering Dora into linguistic representations in the Symbolic. But that is all it does and nothing more. It does not allow any shift in subject position either for the reader or for the Hysteric. One has to be on the couch for such proper transformation to take place.¹¹

However Cixous does treat the Hysteric with the greatest humility, by listening to Dora in the way perhaps she should have been radically listened to by Freud. This is not listening by flattery but rather a way into serious listening to the truth of

desire. In this way, Dora galvanises Freud's theory and mission of analysis as being both terminable and interminable. It never finishes and is always beginning. It never promises (much to the Hysteric's chagrin) 'a discourse of freedom' either from the symptom or absolute knowledge, as Lacan contends in *Seminar III*. Cixous writes that women are given the choice of castration or decapitation (1981) here we can say that either way they get to keep at least one thing and in so doing enable focus on the more urgent question of what constitutes woman traversing social, symbolic and cultural oppositions. Lacking lack has a certain freedom—one doesn't necessarily have to miss lack (of lack) in order to recognise its absence. Here Cixous maintains that we must take such traversal of oppositions at its word—everything depends on language, particularly the seizing of desire as a fiction of 'being'. Freud however, by failing even to register what a woman wants left the door open on feminine desire as a political question which demands something of the body.

What then does Cixous do? She plays with the voice of sexual difference, Dora's in particular, as one which can tame ambitious fantasies and from which one can speak in order to act in a singular, even heroic way. The task of reauthoring through the politics of Dora is one which Cixous takes up as a question of how psychoanalysis, via the complex of hysteria, is a form of political resistance. Because of its compulsive determination often unchecked prior to analysis, Hysteria is the perfect condition into which different ideations can manifest. As we know from Freud's analysis of Dora and as Cixous repeatedly points out, the Hysterical complex rests upon contradictions and irreconcilable insistences which manifest as anxiety, grief and psychic pain. These are not ideas as such but sensations which precondition the setting of an idea. Hence the transformational quality of Hysteria: Dora unconsciously wrote out her Mother in an effort to carve a space for herself. However, Cixous doesn't indulge the seemingly interminable injunction of complexes for their own sake. Rather she asks what *do* complexes stand in the name of and what *should* they stand in the name of. For her, the Hysterical complex is a political platform on which to express resistance to patriarchal structures and to refuse such structures as naturalized given tendencies. She (re)creates Dora as a political figure, one who eventually goes her own way, beyond the bounds of censorship and masculine command, one who is a feminine textual body, "always endless, without ending: there is no closure, it doesn't stop..." (Cixous, "Castration", p. 174).¹² Cixous was astutely aware that interpretation needs to be kept at bay because it feeds the symptom and prevents the pleasure of the voice being signified as a political fact. Here Cixous upends essentialism and its pointless promises: women authors don't have to write as men and women protagonists don't have to desire as men. Furthermore, when it comes to written identities, women should not be written off in the writing world as justification for textual anonymity or exclusion. The task of *écriture féminine* should be cautious around suturing. Rather women should speak of what writing will do ("Castration", p. 875). Perhaps it is at this juncture we could change the subject and ask Cixous, what happened to Dora's Mother as

also a player of *féminine* contradiction—~~woman~~/woman, one who is split off—as a remainder also worth preserving?

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Notes

1. Translation: *This is playing with fire;*

informal. to put sth [something] at risk;

lit/fig. the life is not a game;

a game of fate or chance.

2. To take this question a bit further, how can we cure Dora's indifference to her Mother's obedience to the patriarchal conditions of bourgeois Vienna?

3. As Lacan says, "Desire, a function central to all human experience, is the desire for nothing nameable. And at the same time this desire lies at the origin of every variety of animation." (Lacan, *Sem. II*, p. 223).

4. Strangely and provocatively, it is the anti-psychoanalytic thinker Foucault (1977) who picks up on this when reflecting that the poet, Mallarmé was constantly rewriting (out-writing) himself, to bring himself to reason. Mallarmé pursued language's potentially unifying nature as also fragmented. In *The Order of Things* (1966 [1994]) Foucault offers that in response to Nietzsche's question, 'who is speaking?' Mallarmé attempts, especially in *ecce homo* a de-authoring out of the discourse of literature—the word itself is too precarious, fragile and enigmatic to fully capture the author (and thus the reader). The best outcome for the field of literature lies in capturing the author's intentions within coexisting and competing discourses. We can think similarly about the category 'woman', an enigma unfolding upon itself and which appears obedient to symbolic discourses. However as Cixous reminds us, something remains and cannot be muted in the process of (re/de)authoring. The political category of woman-author is always repeating, never fully formed and establishes a consistency between the Imaginary (the body) and the Symbolic (the gaze) from which *jouissance* can spring.

5. Such is the direct hysterical charge by Cixous to Freud:

DORA:

Qu'est-ce que vous voulez me faire dire? (*Dora*, pp. 57-58)

[What do you want me to say?]

6. It is worth considering the ambiguity of this phrase as it concerns Dora's situatedness as divided subjects. Dora exists as a remainder of her Mother; a mother who is not seen by Dora. Yet at the same time, Dora occupies a space (remains) where she desires to be seen by Frau K.

7. It is worth noting that the bejewelled case Dora dreamt about actually belonged to her Mother.
8. We could say that Cixous is fantasizing what Dora might have said had she instead of Freud been her analyst. Moreover, Cixous is imagining how she would listen to Dora, the very function and desire of psychoanalysis as Lacan points out: "What defines an analyst? I have said it. I have always said right from the start. An analysis is what one expects from an analyst. But this 'what one expects from an analyst'—we would obviously have to try to understand what it means. What one expects from a psychoanalyst is to get his knowledge to function in terms of truth. This is why he limits himself to a half-saying. This has consequences." (*Sem. XVII*, p. 53).
9. Here a most interesting inversion occurs since Dora's Mother has also no status of woman for her.
10. The Analyst's Discourse by contract must pay with their being. It is notable that Dora did exactly what she was unconsciously meant to do at the end of analysis: she tossed the analyst away like trash (much like she did to her Mother who was so symbolized that she ended up vanishing). That the analyst is refused in such a way is a manoeuvre Lacan speaks about in his "Italian Note" when he articulates that the end of analysis is marked by a certain horror *par excellence* as the horror of knowledge. (Lacan, "Note").
11. It is worth quoting Freud here: "Firstly, we do not understand why transference is so much more intense with subjects in analysis than it is with other such people who are not being analysed; and secondly, it remains a puzzle why in analysis transference emerges as the most powerful resistance to the treatment, whereas outside analysis it must be regarded as the vehicle of cure and the condition of success. For our experience has shown us—and the fact can be confirmed as often as we please—that if a patient's associations fail the stoppage can invariably be removed by an assurance that he is being dominated at the moment by an association which is concerned with the doctor himself or with something connected with him. Thus transference to the doctor is suitable for resistance to the treatment only in so far as it is a negative transference or a positive transference of repressed erotic impulses." (Freud, "Dynamics", p. 314).
12. It is worth noting that there has been quite a bit of pushback to Cixous's position. In particular I refer to Sarah French who maintains that Cixous's rereading of Dora is far from political and subversive, and moreover hysteria cannot be justified as a political position let alone a utopic feminine one (French).

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JULIAN BROWNE

LADY IN WAITING

My reading of Lacan's *Seminar 13, The Object of Psychoanalysis*, as is usually the case for me in reading Lacan, a troubled one.¹ I used a method which was recommended to me, and has borne fruit previously, which is to read, reread and reread, taking detailed notes each time. Despite my taking this route in my research, I found I could not penetrate the text, as if I were simply skimming over the surface of it. In addition to this sense of exclusion, I had the persistent thought that I *should* know how to find a way in, and that I should be already in the process of writing my presentation for a deadline which was looming. These were thus questions of impossibility, knowing and time. I had nothing, the task seemed impossible and time was running out. I took this experience to supervision, without my usual careful preparation. In other words, I came to supervision with nothing other than what I didn't have, which was the barren attempt to know the text. "There is no love", said my supervisor in response to my dilemma. Her statement, which addressed the question of love rather than knowledge, opened the way to something that I was already aware of, but which was occluded in my fruitless attempts to know. I realized that, rather than finding a way in, the seminar had found its way into me. An *incorporation* if you like. This incorporation came in the form of associations from my life which had arrived unbidden whilst reading, which I had promptly disregarded. These memories had been ignored in my struggles to understand the text, or to 'make sense' of something. This attempt to make sense could be said to belong to the 'order of knowledge,' in the form of knowledge which comes pre-packaged. I had engaged in an act of forgetting, under the command of knowing, that only this phrase "no love", said in the context of arriving at supervision with what I didn't have, produced a remembering which was fruitful. And further, the remembering brought a presence with it which was new, rather than a re-finding of something lost. I would name this presence something unforgotten rather than remembered.

In the process of beginning to write the presentation via these associations rather than via a preformed knowledge, I realized that my initial and failed attempt at writing via an understanding of the text was to write as if I wasn't there, to somehow capture a knowledge using an unseen I. This is reminiscent of the unseen eye of science. In other words, I was attempting to arrive at the moment of my presen-

tation with everything stitched up in terms of knowledge. Thus, it was only in the inclusion of myself, or more precisely that which inhabits me that is not my own, where something had room to move and could begin to flow.

Which brings me to one of my ‘un-forgettings,’ a fragment of card on which my father had written a poem I had found some years ago. This poem had returned to me as I read Lacan’s lessons, and yet this returning gift I had put aside as I attempted to understand what was in front of me. It had become a forgotten penetration. My father had died about five weeks earlier, at age 93, whilst in hospital being treated for an infection. Whilst his death had been shocking to me, and I knew I was in grief, I could still sense with dread something there waiting for me. It was only as I wrote my experience of reading Lacan’s seminar into my writing that at last this dreadful thing arrived. It came in the form of a terrible gaping hole or chasm in the place where my father once was. An unsymboliseable realisation producing a horror of nothingness and a flood of tears and anguish. And yet this anguish and nothingness became a place that produced something. A productive place had occurred in the very act of writing myself into my writing, by way of associations that had brought back my forgettings.

Here is his poem, which works a question of truth and knowledge.

He writes:

*I go through old photos
They point and say that was you in your heyday
Full of energy and knowledge, giving out with the word
Pure Hubris, construction
There are your two beautiful children
Your beautiful wife
All love and joy
What trickster came
Like the snake in the garden I walk on my belly for the rest of my days
Was it ever me
Were they them

Just make joy and beauty
What more can the gods ask of us*

My parents’ separation when I was nine is a knowledge that is hidden in the beauty of those family photos my father refers to. The surfaces of the pictures, which are beautiful surfaces, point and say “that was you” and “there are your” implying a subject that is whole and possessed, and yet also in the image of that subject lies a trickster. The trickster is, as I read it, what points to what is not there in a surface of beauty and joy, a beautiful surface in which a forgetting occurs. It points to the

disappearance of the subject in the very act of capturing the image of the subject. It is what is there *as not there*, what fades in the very moment of its capture. My father writes, “was it ever me, were they them.” The subject disappears from its own beauty, a beautiful surface in a moment of fading.

The moment of representation produces a *pas de sujet*, something which in the act of representation points ineffably to what is not there. This is the divided subject between the being of knowledge and the being of truth, where a knowledge of what appears as missing becomes masked by a fetishized (non)presence. The first error, as Lacan names it, is one of biology in taking the penis as the phallus. Lacan takes the *pas-de* in *pas-de* penis and transfers it to the *pas-de* savoir. To quote from “Science and Truth”, Lacan’s first lesson in *The Object of Psychoanalysis*:

Let us, on the other hand, recognise the subject’s efficacy in the *gnomon* he erects, a *gnomon* that constantly indicates truth’s site to him.²

A *gnomon* is a sundial, a vertical shaft erected for the shafts of light, which records via its shadow the movement of celestial bodies. Gno, in *gnomon*, is from the root to know. And, as Lacan says, the knower knows they are a knower whether they know something or not. In my father’s poem, the trickster presents the *gnomon* as the truth, producing an error, whereas the *gnomon* points to the truth as disappearance. As in the beautiful photos, so too the writer who fades in the very moment of representing his disappointment. *Was it ever me*.

Which brings me to another association whilst reading the seminar. A family portrait again, another beautiful surface which Lacan makes use of in his seminar. My first encounter with Diego Velázquez’s *Las Meninas* was during a trip to Spain in my early twenties. Its enormous scale, the depth of the colours, the realism and the light stunned me at the time, however what transfixed me was the effect it had on me as a viewer in the act of viewing. My experience is one of hunting, my eye roving for somewhere to settle, and yet being unable to rest. This continual movement, the inability to simply ‘take in’ the scene is contrasted with other paintings such as landscapes with a clear single vanishing point and single perspective designed in such a way as to allow the eye to settle in a classical harmony. On a first pass, *Las Meninas* appears as a family portrait, but one is immediately struck by the very direct gaze of the painter depicted. In other portraits where a subject may be looking directly out of the scene at the vanishing point of the viewer’s eye looking in, that seemingly direct look is assumed to be a theoretical point of the painter’s eye composing the scene, an immobile viewing point of a representation, shielding the viewer from the intensity and anxiety that a direct gaze may produce. In that more settled experience, one is more or less aware of the surface of the canvas, that this is a painting one is looking at. A representation. But in the case of *Las Meninas* there is a painter gazing out with brush poised in the act of representing the very point at which the eye looking at the surface of the painting occupies, which makes this viewing eye a *seen eye*, an object of representation that is in the act of attempting to take in a representation. This makes of *Las Meninas*, as many includ-

ing Lacan and Foucault have noted, a representation of representation, twisted in upon itself. This is what Lacan calls a “trap for the eye.” There are as many theories about *Las Meninas* as there are those who have produced a theory, and yet, much like theories on hysteria, *Las Meninas* is what remains outside those attempts to capture it.

Las Meninas, which translates as “Ladies in Waiting”, was commissioned by Philip IV and completed in 1654, the Cartesian moment and the invention of modern western science. It depicts in its structure what falls away in the very act of representation. The act of representation cannot capture it all, leaving the not-all which falls out of representation. As Lacan writes, the Cartesian I, in “I think”, thinks “therefore I am.” The Cartesian “therefore I am” fails to fully represent. These two I’s are a duplicity between being as nothing and the being that thinking gives rise to. This relationship is a division, which is the very foundation of the subject. Any judgement that is made of this subject, any representation, cannot be made by an objective or unseen eye as it must take as its beginning the very duplicity of the subject attempting to represent it. There is a complete dissociation between these two I’s, or two perspectives. As Lacan says, the scene of representation contains within it a look, which is a look without an eye, looking back at the subject in the act of representation. This is the very subject implicated in both the being prior to thinking, and the being thought. These two beings produce a torsion, the Moebius strip on which one side is stamped knowledge and the other truth.

Lacan prescribes as reading for the group in attendance at his seminar, the first chapter of Michel Foucault’s *The Order of Things*, *Las Meninas*, which I also took as prescribed reading. I take a quote from the last paragraph of this chapter.

Perhaps there exists, in this painting by Velázquez, the representation as it were, of Classical representation, and the definition of the space it opens up to us. And, indeed, representation undertakes to represent itself here in all its elements, with its images, the eyes to which its offered, the faces it makes visible, the gestures that call it into being. But there, in the midst of this dispersion which it is simultaneously grouping together and spreading out before us, indicated compellingly from every side, is an essential void: the necessary disappearance of that which is its foundation—of the person it resembles and the person in whose eyes it is only a resemblance. This very subject—which is the same - has been elided. And representation, freed finally from the relation that was impeding it, can offer itself as representation in its pure form.³

At the very point of the invention of modern Western science, the Cartesian ‘I’ cannot carry itself over to the other ‘I’ of therefore I am. What is foundational fades in a necessary disappearance. In *Las Meninas*, Velázquez represents himself painting this gap, gazing out and painting the very point of torsion produced between these two ‘I’s.

It is science that sutures this gap, the place of torsion. Studying psychology many years ago, I was taught to write “the writer” instead of the first person ‘I’. “The writer” is written into the text as an invisible point of observation of a world, which is manipulated under certain repeatable and controlled conditions. I write in my lab reports, “the writer observed.” This is psychology’s tilt at science, at an object which is repeatable and verifiable. This writer has no body, other than a body of knowledge. The body is dis-placed. There is no body which lacks, only a gap in a body of knowledge that will be filled eventually. The *pas-de* penis to *pas-de savoir*. In this suturing, the writer’s observation is not an independent variable, it does not change the world. It is an unblinking, unmoved and unmoving eye, an observation free of a world which includes the observer. This is a ritual or incantation that produces an unseen eye, which was a spell I was attempting to weave in my attempt to know the text. “The writer” performs an experiment and subsequently reports from this unseen perspective, which is named the laboratory. In the etymology of laboratory, we have labour and we have a “room set aside.” The repeated labour of science’s suturing is the very place *Las Meninas* is structured to look directly at.

In lesson 14 of *The Object of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan says:

The power of mathematics, the frenetic pace of our science reposes on nothing other than the suture of the subject, from the thinness of this scar, and after all, in speaking about a scar of this suture, you must not believe that I am using a term that a mathematician would reject...⁴

Science reposes on *nothing other*. Repose is an interesting word to use in relation to the frenetic pace of science. Repose is resting, but it is also to be situated in a particular place. Lacan highlights here something that inhabits a single point or place of rest and yet proceeds at a frenetic pace, a pace which has a certain delirium. It conjures an image of a frenetic suturing, a means by which the frenetic pace of knowledge continues to suture the subject of science. A delirium of *nothing other*, which put another way is of sameness rather than difference. This suturing does not close the gap, but is rather an eternal closing of the gap. Science proposes an object which is not yet known but knowable, which produces a kind of mania at the point of the suture, “the frenetic pace” as Lacan calls it. Religion places God in that gap, the God of the gaps. Science frenetically, reliably, repeatedly, closes the gap.

Lacan says in “Science and Truth”:

...the fact is that science, if one looks at it closely, has no memory. Once constituted, it forgets the circuitous path by which it came into being; otherwise stated, it forgets a dimension of truth that psychoanalysis seriously puts to work.⁵

The science which came into being, as Lacan puts it, is the very being of the Cartesian subject, which is a subject sustained in the labour of forgetting. This science is the very putting to work, the labour, of an act of forgetting. As is said, those who forget are condemned to repeat, and repeatability is one of the rules of the scientific

method. This is a repeated forgetting which allows one to stay in place and yet proceed at a frenetic pace. The way that science reposes on this thinness of this scar could be thought of as a kind of ‘re-mainia,’ which has no end, and so no beginning either. Lacan on the other hand proposes that psychoanalysis, a psychoanalysis which relies on the sutured subject of science, is an infinite adjournment of psychoanalysis as science. The subject supposed to know, the being of knowledge in the form of the analyst, is aligned with the symptom of the sutured subject, listening in a kind of laboratory of deferment. This being is *Las Meninas* or a perpetual Lady in Waiting, waiting for the not-all which falls from the representation of the Cartesian subject. The psychoanalytic clinic engages this Cartesian being as witness to the act of eliding a truth, a truth which Lacan says psychoanalysis seriously puts to work at the site of the thinness of the suture of this scar. There is a thinness to this scar, which we might name as a ‘thing-ness,’ a scar of the trace of das Ding.

And what object do we find glowing at the centre of *Las Meninas* but the Infanta. This is the idealized image of a king who marries his niece in an attempt to live forever, a king who keeps it in the family. As the king’s line fades, that fading is masked with a shining thing. Its shining is generated by the idealizing scopophilic lens encircling it. In *Las Meninas*, unlike Velázquez’s other depictions of the Infanta, she is both a gap and that screen which elides the gap, both nothing and everything. She is, to borrow from Luce Irigaray’s *This Sex Which is Not One*, “A hole in the scopophilic lens.”⁶ This is the point of the emptying of the Other’s gaze leaving the subject’s gaze, no longer supposed, alone with itself. The gaze encircles an absence where something is erected memorializing a lost thing.

Lacan names the transfer of the object at the end of analysis as a rendezvous and a recognition. The recognition is not the image reflected in the mirror from the single perspective of the idealized ‘I’ of being, but the strange anamorphic object one must view from elsewhere. It is an object from elsewhere, *alien but also in human*. In human, and thus at the point of this rendezvous recognized as alien-in-human. The ambiguity of the belonging of this inhuman object is an ambiguity produced by the distance between the *objet a* and the I, or in the case of *Las Meninas*, the distance of the painter from the canvas. In that distance we find the lady in waiting, which we might think of as a listening that is not “lady-like” but born of an absence which does not “get to the point.” It is a listening with *an-other* ear as Luce Irigaray puts it.⁷ Perhaps this other ear is a wild front ear, a frontier always just out of reach.

Notes

1. This writing is an edited version of a 2023 presentation at the Freudian School of Melbourne which was a response to three lessons in Lacan’s 1965-66 seminar *The Object of Psychoanalysis*.

2. Jacques Lacan, “Science and Truth”, *Écrits: the First Complete Edition in English*, translated by Bruce Fink, H elouise Fink and Russell Grigg (New York: Norton, 2006), p. 745.

3. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 18.
4. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Object of Psychoanalysis, Book XIII (1965-66)*, translated by Cormac Gallagher, unpublished. Available at www.lacaninireland.com.
5. Lacan, "Science and Truth", p. 738.
6. Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, translated by Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 26.
7. Irigaray, p. 29.

MIKKO TUHKANEN

NOTHING IN COMMON

Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Jacques Lacan

The human subject is prone to all manner of ingenuity in order to flee the truth that speaks in her symptoms. Before psychoanalysis, this was understood by philosophy, which has repeatedly set as its task the dispelling of illusions, the demand for the individual's awakening. Cartesian doubt was to secure the border between dreams and reality; Kant wanted to stir thinkers from the "dogmatic slumber" of an insufficiently critical *weltanschauung*; Husserlian phenomenology sought to guide "the waking ego" by "bracketing" commonsense reality. Beginning with dream analysis, psychoanalysis has assumed such ethics of awakening as its own orientation. Jacques Lacan, as Roberto Harari writes, "has always maintained that his motto, his task, and his determination have been to bring about the awakening of the speaking beings" (p. 74). As in Husserl, the oneiric world whose ground needs undermining is that of everyday reality: "Now, it is clear that what precedes the awakening is the state of sleep—obviously, the state of sleep we are in when we are awake, for we live in a state bordering collective sleep in which the truths characteristic of each of us remain lethargic" (p. 74). The primary ethical task of psychoanalysis is to deprive humankind of dreamworlds' delusive comfort: it is only by interrupting our sleep that we can glimpse the truth of our being.

It is in the context of such ethical imperative—of "wanting to wake men up from their dreams" (Lacan, "Direction", p. 521)—that we should read Lacan's claim, in *Seminar XX*, that masculine desire entails "the jouissance of the idiot [*la jouissance de l'idiot*]" (p. 81 / p. 103; see also p. 94). Via some etymological punning, Lacan is, I think, teasing us with an allusion to an ancient text. *Idios*, which Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott translate as "personal", "private", "separate", "distinct", "peculiar", or "strange" (p. 326), is famously used by Heraclitus to distinguish between the worlds of wakefulness and sleep:

The world of the waking is one and shared, but the sleeping turn aside each into his private world. (Fragment VI; Kahn, p. 31)

Heraclitus compares the sleeper's solitary *idios kosmos* to the *koinos kosmos* of a "common", "shared", "public" world.¹ Many philosophers have followed him in insisting that shared waking experiences must be distinguished from the deceptive idiosyncrasies of sleep and oneiric life. Lacan evokes this history in characterizing masculine jouissance as "idiotic." Masculine desire is the desire of the dreamer, paralyzed in his relation to the *objet a*, the fascinating semblant in the mirror.² Here emerges the center around which Lacan seeks to reorient our onto-ethics. What is it that we share such that can be taken as our joint frame of reference, our common ground? How do we avoid the idiocy of imaginary games and affirm a common good? How can what Aristotle calls *to koinon agathon* (*Politica*, III.6-7 [pp. 1184-86]) be made available in the modern world?

"There is no more basic question in political thinking", Simon Goldhill writes, "than what is shared, what is 'common,' the 'common good,' the ties that bind us" (p. 248). Psychoanalysis shares the question of *koinon* with two thinkers whose work I will explore here: James Baldwin and, as Baldwin's interlocutor, Richard Wright. Throughout their careers, Baldwin and Wright sought that which might remain of the shared good in the modern world, which they, like many other African-diasporic intellectuals and artists, saw marked at its origin by the tragic error of our flight from freedom and the consequent convolutions of bad faith. If we have been told that the common (*koinon*) that grounds communities (*koinônia*) undergoes a radical reorganization when the presumably steady traditions of feudal societies disappear into the alienation inherent in merchant capitalism and then industrial labor, representatives of the diasporic intellectual tradition where we find Baldwin and Wright argue that "modern life", in all of its malaise, "begins with slavery" (Morrison, p. 178). Such accounts point out that the historical shifts precipitated by the rise of Lutheran inwardness and the eradication of feudal communities in the sixteenth century were simultaneous with the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade and the first wave of European colonialism. If the modern era is frequently considered to have precipitated our stirring from the *idios kosmos* of traditions—what Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, suggestively for us, call "the idiocy of rural life" (p. 477)—to the shared values of reason and individualism, observers like Baldwin and Wright argue that this awakening only gave way to another dream, another delusion. The modern subject could not afford to remain fully awake to the ethical ramifications of the events that oriented the era at its origin. Contaminated from the beginning, diasporic modernity has consequently failed to provide the hard ground on which *to koinon agathon* could be established. Instead, we moderns have long been sleepwalkers, enveloped in our unshareable dreams, unable to reach beyond our monadic confinement.

With the alarm clock of its famous opening, Wright's debut novel, *Native Son* (1940), attempts to break through to diasporic modernity's somnambulists and establish the common ground that would allow us to recognize and negotiate the pathologies symptomized in the crime that the novel's protagonist feels compelled to commit. The Aristotelian question of *to koinon agathon* is explicitly addressed when,

toward the end of the novel, Bigger Thomas fleetingly realizes that, in manipulating his enemies' perceptions after Mary Dalton's disappearance, he has but affirmed inauthentic existence. Sitting in his cell, he envisions a world where he could share the "common and good" with others across varied differences (p. 362). Bigger's condition is a characteristically modern one in that it is marked by this radical lack of connection. Deprived of anything shared, he is, as his lawyer says, "confoundingly alone," without a "common vision" or "common hope" or "common path" (*Native*, p. 401). Writing his novel in the late 1930s, Wright suggests that in the twentieth century the questions of *koinon* and *koinônia* are more crucial than ever: deprived of any *koinos kosmos*, individuals like Bigger will save their lives from the nightmare of modern isolation by turning to fascism, its promise of a binding operation that will compensate for the modern subject's radical solitude.³ Like Wright, Baldwin and Lacan write in the shadow of the horrors that by mid-twentieth century had been revealed about the dialectic of Enlightenment; it is the specter of the totalitarian nightmare from which Europe is barely awakening that in large part motivate their work.

If *Native Son's* opening boasts of one of twentieth-century literature's most famous scenes of awakening, Baldwin too mobilizes the trope in several of his texts. Largely continuing Wright's analysis of diasporic modernity's failure of wakefulness, he calls the set of experiences he sees waiting for us in the waking world "real life", an existential mode entirely unavailable to anyone inhabiting the world of mirrors where Bigger, like an idiot, enjoys his games. Bigger is the dreamer who, inhabiting *idios kosmos*, finds himself compelled to wage "a permanent 'it's you or me' form of war", a battle whose outcome will be, in fact, "neither you nor me" (Lacan, "Freudian", p. 356). As much as Lacan here describes the deadly repetitions of violence elicited by one's imaginary semblant, Baldwin is concerned to calculate the cost of our having identified, in lust and rage, with the double that we find in diasporic modernity's mirror.

Like Wright and Baldwin, who seek the modes of commonness available in diasporic modernity, Lacan, at a crucial turning point in his career, makes it his task to rethink Aristotelian ethics based on the Freudian revolution. If Lacanian psychoanalysis allows for the possibility of a shared experience, any wakeful togetherness must proceed from the feminine side. Yet the proposition of feminine *koinon* is complicated by the ontological impossibility of the sexual relation, the most central of tenets in Lacan's thought. Before he impugns the desiring movement on the masculine side as an idiot's venture,⁴ the project of thinking sexual difference emerges as a central concern for Lacan in his seminar of 1959-60, whose title announces a new emphasis in his teaching: from here on out, it is *the ethics of psychoanalysis* that will take center stage in his work. Like many thinkers before him, he turns to Sophocles' play *Antigone* for its ethical lessons, particularly as these concern the question of the common good. As Goldhill writes, "understanding *to koinon* is the most pressing imperative of [*Antigone's*] interrogation of family and politics" (p. 246). Yet the task is tricky, for many of Sophocles' heroes are, in

Heraclitus' terms, idiots. Commentators have often noted that Antigone's obstinate disregard of the shared good of the *polis* approaches the solipsistic madness of an oneiric state. In her stubbornness, which from the start foretells her fate, she is, as Lacan puts it, characterized by a "special solitude", a "separat[ion] ... from the structure" (*Sem. VII*, p. 271)—the lack of relation that Heraclitus identifies in the *idios kosmos* of slumber. She is not alone in this amidst Sophoclean characters. Lacan points to Ajax, who, after a murderous rampage, "awakens from his craziness, is overcome with shame, and goes and kills himself in a corner" (*Sem. VII*, p. 271). No commonsense appeal can reach Ajax in the psychotic nightmare of his rage. Yet if Antigone, a hothead like Ajax, lives in her own dream, it is a world paradoxically organized by the call of the *koinon*, the very word, spoken by her, that opens the play.

Lacan's commentary on *Antigone* has been tackled by numerous scholars; particularly in the 1990s, the sessions on Sophocles in *Seminar VII* functioned as something of a pivot on which scholarship shifted from its earlier focus on the "imaginary" and "symbolic" aspects of Lacan's theorization to considering his exploration of "the real" of human experience.⁵ I add to these readings by bringing Lacan's ethics into conversation with Wright's and (particularly) Baldwin's analyses of the deadly discontent that marks mid-century Europe and the United States. I propose that the oeuvres' mutual gravitational pull across different cultural contexts allows us to tease out the ways in which Lacan and Baldwin explore the issue of *koinon*, which they show to have accrued an unprecedented urgency because of what the events in Europe have demonstrated about the condition of Western modernity. As such, Wright's, Baldwin's, and Lacan's oeuvres figure as bodies in what Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno would call a "constellation", an assemblage whose various components, although not tending toward a synthesis, draw out from each other aspects that might otherwise remain implicit or unactualized. As a methodology, the construction of constellations taps into, as Martin Jay writes, "the value of jarring juxtapositions rather than the sublation of negations into positive mediations" (p. xvi). The constellation of Baldwin/Lacan highlights in the work of the two thinkers the question of the common, which, as Jennifer Gaffney as well as Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval have, in different ways, demonstrated, remains a crucial ethico-political issue in twentieth- and twenty-first-century modernity.

Wand of Fear: Richard Wright

Native Son's narrative unfolds as a series of tragicomic accidents and misunderstandings bred by deeply ingrained racial ideologies. No sooner is Bigger Thomas employed as a chauffeur by the white, liberal Daltons than he accidentally kills Mary, the daughter of the family. To keep her from revealing his presence, he suffocates the drunk girl with a pillow when her blind mother chances upon the pair in the girl's darkened bedroom. Having decapitated and incinerated her body, he craftily frames Mary's communist boyfriend for her disappearance, but is exposed

when her remains are discovered. After a brief escape, he is caught, tried, and, at the end of the narrative, sentenced to death.

In his courtroom speech, the lawyer Boris Max sketches a history of Western modernity with which he seeks to explain modern life's inconsistencies, symptomized, as he says, in the "fear" and "guilt" (or "fear-guilt" [*Native*, p. 390]) of which Bigger's crime and the reaction it has elicited are but the latest manifestation. According to the lawyer, at its moment of emergence, Western modernity was contaminated by something he calls "a first wrong," that is, the establishment of a slave economy of an unprecedented scale (p. 387). The unacknowledged ramifications of this historical event haunt modern American life, endowing it with a sense of unreality. Max's effort in explicating his client's life is to precipitate a collective awakening: "I say, Your Honor, that the mere act of understanding Bigger Thomas will be a thawing out of icebound impulses, a dragging of the sprawling forms of dread out of the night of fear into the light of reason, an unveiling of the unconscious ritual of death in which we, like sleep-walkers, have participated so dream-like and thoughtlessly" (p. 383). He admonishes his listeners to leave behind the deadly dream-logic that they, dwelling in the darkness of guilt and fear, have acted out like so many somnambulists.

Wright elaborates the argument he assigns to Max—that the original sin of slavery, supplementing modernity's emergence, has distorted life into oneiric delusions—in a short text published five years after *Native Son*. In the introduction to St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton's *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (1945), he posits that Europeans committed a *tragic error* as they, awoken from the traditions of feudalism—"the slumberous feudal world" (p. xxv)—faced what he suggests, echoing many existentialist thinkers, was the abyss of freedom. Their mistake consisted of the enslavement of Africans in an effort to secure their futures in the suddenly unpredictable world of change and becoming. The error subsequently necessitated convoluted rationalizations, designed to placate Europeans' consciences about enslavement, that radically undermined the promise of reason at the very point of the modern world's emergence. If modernity is marked by reason, then Wright suggests that we have never been modern, for our contamination by irrationality occurred at the era's origin. This ambivalence is symptomized in the debut novel. While *Native Son* is often thought to be urging the awakening of its audiences to the hidden realities of life in twentieth-century United States, it evokes the "unreality" of modern life to the extent that some readers have considered it a dream narrative (see JanMohamed, pp. 27, 77-79, 96, 275).

While Wright's novel opens with the ringing of the alarm clock in the Thomases' kitchenette, a perhaps more important awakening occurs at the beginning of its second part as Bigger Thomas opens his eyes on the morning after Mary Dalton's death. Oddly under-analyzed in Wright scholarship, this moment amounts to the kind of awakening that various traditions of thought have not only identified as an ethical imperative but also suggested is a near-impossibility. The difficulty is indicated by the fact that, although "wide awake", Bigger is unable to fully surface

from sleep; he remains submerged, not quite asleep, not quite awake, conscious but unable to resume his place in the waking world. He “sees” and “hears”, but fails to synthesize the various “unrelated” sensory experiences into “reality and meaning”:

He saw the room and saw snow falling past the window; but his mind formed no image of any of these. They simply existed, unrelated to each other; the snow and the daylight and the soft sound of breathing cast a strange spell upon him, a spell that waited for the wand of fear to touch it and endow it with reality and meaning. He lay in bed, only a few seconds from deep sleep, caught in a deadlock of impulses, unable to rise to the land of the living. (p. 97)

Suspended between realms, he cannot find his way back to the life he knows, but is, instead, enveloped in the haze of “a strange spell.” Yet this proprioceptive disorientation may in fact be the dazed bafflement of a person coming to. Laying on his bed, bereft of that which he recognizes as his waking life, Bigger is on the cusp of understanding that what he has taken for “reality” has in fact been the product of a conjuring trick, a magic spell woven by a “wand of fear.” He waits for this wand to do its customary work and yield “reality and meaning” to his existence. It turns out that the world the novel’s previous part (called “Fear”) has detailed has been the result of such magic and that the odd “spell” that paralyzes Bigger upon awakening is but his laborious surfacing from this oneiric reality. Bigger’s panicked inability to find his bearings in a world that he would recognize is that of the sleepwalker, suddenly awake, in the midst of an unfamiliar environment. He feels what Mari Ruti, in her discussion of Lacanian ethics, calls “a rare experiential nudge—an awakening to life that ruptures the coordinates of what we have hitherto understood to be life” (p. 36).

Such scenes of reality’s disintegration are familiar as descriptions of the modern individual’s emergence: one becomes free to become oneself, but at the cost of having all criteria by which the authenticity of experience can be guaranteed evaporate. The scene of awakening suggests that an authentic universality can be achieved only by a risky unraveling of all extant modes of being, the loss of whatever one thought holds the world together. Bigger discovers that the components of his world have become “unrelated to each other.” Such experience of unrelatedness—the individual’s, as well as that of the world’s constituent parts—is the condition of modern *koinon*.

Had Lacan read *Native Son*, he might have designated the moment of Bigger’s awakening with a term he borrows from Aristotle’s *Physics*: *tuché*. Aristotle identifies two modes of chance, *automaton* and *tuché*, which Lacan connects, respectively, with the symbolic order and the real. While *automaton* evinces the pressure of the signifier in the subject—one might think of naturalist novels as stories of worlds monopolized by this mode of chance—*tuché* designates a moment when the real disorients the structure: it constitutes “an encounter with the real” (*Sem. XI*, pp. 52–55). But we must understand this not as an intrusion of an outside into the symbolic

order, but as an internal failure, a “short circuit” (as Slavoj Žižek might say) created by the system itself. Bigger’s awakening to the ruse of symbolic reality results not from his transgression of its laws, but, on the contrary, from his full obeisance to the law’s characterization of his being; he slips from the law’s grasp because he has fully enacted his symbolic role as a Black criminal. Conceptualized thus, the real is not pure externality but a product of symbolic operations. Such paradoxical relationship between the symbolic and the real necessitates not only Lacan’s turn to topology, but also his coinage “*extimité*” to describe the inside/outside torsion of the human world.⁶

Bigger rapidly overcomes the dislocation of his awakening and, feeling empowered, learns to exert his mastery of the situation. He deploys the lure of his Blackness to throw the investigators off the scent. Utilizing what Lacan in “The Mirror Stage” calls the “paranoiac knowledge” structuring imaginary relations (p. 76), he is able to fool his surroundings for a while by anticipating, through identification, the actions of the investigators and journalists digging into Mary’s disappearance. He manipulates others’ misrecognitions to his advantage: the detective Britten cannot imagine that a dumb Black boy could orchestrate a kidnapping; Mr. Dalton has averted his gaze from the problem and, instead, relies for his salvation on the good works of giving ping-pong tables to the poor; Jan is blinded by his idealized vision of Black folk as communists’ natural allies. While Bigger, like the Minister in Edgar Allan Poe’s tale, realizes that the winning strategy consists of one’s “acting like an idiot [*faire l’idiot*]” (Lacan, “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter,’” p. 43 / p. 59),⁷ the player simultaneously courts the risk of the idiocy that Lacan, in *Seminar XX*, assigns to masculine desire, the risk of his capture in the tight dialectic of a game of masks. And, indeed, as soon as Bigger is released from the imaginary trap of “fear”, he is “captivated by [another] dyadic relationship” (“Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter,’” p. 22). Hardly has he occupied the role of Poe’s Auguste Dupin, who, from behind his green glasses, can surreptitiously observe the crime scene, before the world gets clued onto his deception. Immobilized by the magic of his own conjuring, he finds himself, like the sorcerer’s apprentice, “under a strange spell, possessed by a force which he hated, but which he had to obey” (*Native*, p. 172). Not long after he has the experience of having woken up to his self after the crime, he is gripped by another oneiric terror: “Events were like the details of a tortured dream, happening without a cause” (p. 199). When he finally gives up the game, he feels “tense inside”, “as though he had been compelled to hold himself in a certain awkward posture for a long time and then when he had the chance to relax he could not” (p. 232). Like the corporeal mimicry Roger Caillois discusses in an essay that influenced Lacan’s theory of subject formation, his game of deception “has caught the sorcerer in his own trap” (Caillois, p. 98).⁸

In psychoanalytic terms, the resolute swiftness with which Bigger maps the “new world” (*Native*, p. 241) that opens before him constitutes his ethical failure. He asserts control with an eagerness that psychoanalysis warns us against. Lacan advises analysts in training to resist entering into a “relationship of understand-

ing” (“Situation”, p. 394) with their patients, for such understanding constitutes but an “inconsistent mirage” (*Sem. III*, p. 7). Relationships of keen understanding are likely to be ones of imaginary misrecognition; they entail the kind of identification and mastery that characterize the practices of American ego psychology. “The speed of comprehension”, as Harari paraphrases Lacan’s clinical advice, “leaves us fascinated with reality” (p. 99), the very reality that Lacan suggests needs to be dispelled like a dream. If Bigger’s world before the killing, its “reality and meaning”, turns out to have been a fearful illusion, after the *tuché* of his crime he, unable to *take his time*, becomes immobilized—paralytically *fascinated*—in front of another mirror, enveloped by another dreamworld.

Real Life/Real Death: James Baldwin

For James Baldwin, Bigger Thomas is indelibly sutured into the dialectic of “fear”, unable to imagine a life beyond a simple reversal of the white world’s violence, beyond a momentarily successful counter-incantation to what the Nation of Islam spokespersons call white supremacy’s “tricknology.”⁹ Notwithstanding the blink of an eye in which he experiences his world’s total disintegration upon awakening after Mary’s death, Bigger never emerges from the dream of terror that organizes his life before the killing; he merely reverses, and then only momentarily, the terms of the contract that have stipulated his fate (the title of *Native Son*’s third and final part). He remains, as Baldwin writes, in “a deadly, timeless battle” (“Everybody’s”, p. 18). As such, Wright’s vision anticipates that of the Nation of Islam, in which Baldwin sees the mere continuation of white supremacy’s oneiric logic: “The dream, the sentiment is old”, he writes of NOI’s ideology, “only the color is new” (*Fire*, p. 319). Whether with Bigger’s epiphany or the Nation of Islam, the agents of one’s coming-to-consciousness may but extend the spell where one is paralyzed by the sight of the enemy in the mirror. Contrary to appearances, the dream continues unbroken.

Nowhere does Baldwin note the minimal opening that Bigger’s awakening on the morning after Mary’s death constitutes; yet he goes on to offer the nightmare’s dispelling as a paradigmatic moment of an ethical realization. With its titular reference to Wright’s novel, his essay “Notes of a Native Son” (1955) recalls the teenage Baldwin’s first encounter with an explicit, Southern-style racism as he is working on a construction site in New Jersey.¹⁰ One night, after a series of racist humiliations, he is gripped by what he calls a “rage in [the] blood”, a murderousness with which, Baldwin writes, every Black person in the United States is familiar (“Notes”, p. 70). Enveloped by an oneiric sense of unreality (“an optical illusion, or a nightmare”, p. 70), he walks into a restaurant that he knows to be segregated, waits to be served, and, when a waitress refuses to seat him, throws a glass of water at her. Instead of hitting her, the glass breaks a mirror behind the counter, at which point the young man awakens:

with that sound, my frozen blood abruptly thawed, I returned from wherever I had been, I *saw*, for the first time, the restaurant, the people with their mouths open, already, as it seemed to me, rising as one man, and I realized what I had done, and where I was, and I was frightened. (pp. 71-72)

Baldwin echoes Wright in this description. The moment of his “frozen blood abruptly thaw[ing]” amounts to the kind of awakening that Boris Max tells the court must take place in the nation, “a thawing out of icebound impulses” (*Native*, p. 383), allegorized in the icy city across which Bigger flees. Afterwards, as Baldwin replays the events, the scene returns to him in the form of the repetition compulsion that frequently attends traumas’ aftermaths:

I lived it over and over and over again, the way one relives an automobile accident after it has happened and one finds oneself alone and safe. I could not get over two facts, both equally difficult for the imagination to grasp, and one was that I could have been murdered. But the other was that I had been ready to commit murder. I saw nothing very clearly but I did see this: that my life, my *real* life, was in danger, and not from anything other people might do but from the hatred I carried in my own heart. (p. 72)

Although autobiographical, the scene should be read as a retelling of Bigger’s deadly encounter with Mary Dalton and her blind mother. The glass of water misses not only the waitress but, more importantly, the true object of the young man’s anger: not unlike the tragic Okonkwo in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958), in his rage Baldwin almost commits the hamartia of killing the messenger, the “frightened” waitress who speaks to him with “a note of apology in her voice”, as if “repeat[ing] lines] she ha[s] learned ... somewhere.” This is how, Baldwin suggests, the tragedy of American race relations perpetuates itself: blinded by rage, fascinated by the contingent embodiment of an impersonal history, the young man is on the cusp of joining the unwitting performers of diasporic modernity’s tragic scripts. As Baldwin repeatedly tells us, his adoptive father unflinchingly excels in such misdirected, rageful performances; Bigger Thomas similarly embodies the paradigmatic victim/perpetrator of the hopeless dialectic that is about to engulf the narrator of “Notes of a Native Son.” The server is a Mary Dalton, a well-meaning but clueless messenger from beyond enemy lines, unable to fully understand the role she plays for the Black man. Everyone acts out, more or less unknowingly, the choreographies that Wright deems to have been established to adapt to the error committed at the modern era’s emergence.

Importantly, Baldwin makes a point of noting that the awakening in the restaurant was to the jeopardy not primarily of his physical survival but of what he calls his “*real* life.” *Real* life will have been lost whether the young man survives the confrontation or not; it is a mode of living beyond the scripts that position him and the waitress as doppelgängers and mortal enemies, a world of potential of which Bigger gets an inkling amidst the confusion of his sudden awakening after the killing that the young Baldwin narrowly avoids repeating. *Real* life is always in danger

of being lost in the paranoid politics of otherness that allows Bigger the delusion of agency while, simultaneously, sealing his doom. Bigger never escapes what Baldwin at a later moment calls “*real death*”, echoing, italics and all, his phrase from “Notes of a Native Son.” In a 1970 interview in *Essence*, he recalls his escape to France: “I arrived [in Paris] with \$40, scared to death, not knowing what I was going to do, but knowing that whatever was going to happen here would not be worse than what was certainly going to happen in America. Here I was in danger of death; but in America it was not a danger; it was certainty. Not just physical death, I mean *real death*” (“Conversation”, p. 24, emphasis in original).¹¹ “*Real death*” threatens to abolish “*real life*”; it is this annihilation that Baldwin flees to Europe. He may be alluding to his own expatriate experience when, in the late novel *Just above My Head* (1979), he describes Arthur Montana’s time in Paris. Having escaped his native country, where “all his senses were always alert for danger” (p. 925), Arthur (Baldwin’s middle name) finds himself “luxuriously wide awake” (p. 943) in the French capital. Rather than, as we tend to think, designating an alertness to danger, “wakefulness” names one’s availability to the world’s surprises, a “luxury.”

As the echoes of *Native Son* in Baldwin’s restaurant scene suggest, Bigger Thomas is eagerly embracing his *real death*. Particularly after Abdul JanMohamed’s reading of Wright’s oeuvre in *The Death-Bound-Subject: Richard Wright’s Archaeology of Death* (2005), we are likely to link this *real death* to the concept of “social” or “symbolic” death. Turning to Orlando Patterson’s and Lacan’s rereadings of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, JanMohamed argues that the slave’s “social death”, a characteristic Patterson identifies in numerous slave economies, has continued to determine African American life in twentieth-century United States, where racialized subjects have been “formed, from infancy on, by the imminent and ubiquitous threat of death” (p. 2). Such lives are marked by the aporia that Patterson, referring to Hegel, assigns the slave: in order to live, the subject must accept his (social) death, a condition that leaves him nothing to lose but his biological life. Yet his literal acceptance of this life can also precipitate a revolutionary reversal: the subject can make the suicidal choice of identifying with and acting out the murderous fantasies that have constituted his subjectivity. JanMohamed persuasively argues that we should read Wright’s oeuvre as the author’s career-long analysis of the death-bound condition from various angles.¹²

Yet what Baldwin means by *real death* must be distinguished from the concept of symbolic death that JanMohamed distils from Wright, Patterson, and Lacan. The revolutionary potential that Lacanians see in “social death” emerges when the subject, in an “insane” gesture, embraces the law that stipulates her death. In his ethics, Baldwin, on the other hand, seems to exclude the “subjective destitution” or “choice of death” that many Lacanians have elevated into the ethical act *par excellence*. Not that he is unfamiliar with such strategies. He writes in 1951: “there exists among the intolerably degraded the perverse and powerful desire to force into the arena of the actual those fantastic crimes of which they have been accused, of achieving their vengeance and their own destruction through making

the nightmare real” (“Many”, p. 29). But while he occasionally recognizes the disruptive potential available to anyone who would suicidally turn social death into an “answer of the real”, he refuses the politics that JanMohamed considers Wright to have consistently explored and embraced.

Instead, the failed *realness* of American life has produced “a nation of sleepwalkers,” as Baldwin has one of his characters say (*Just*, p. 543). These are people who, like the “sleep-walkers” Boris Max sees somnambulating the streets of Chicago, spend their days under, and “are terrified of waking from”, the spell of their “radiant dream” (Baldwin, “Lockridge”, p. 591) or, as Baldwin rephrases, “radiant stupor” (*Evidence*, p. 42). Echoing Freud’s point about the atemporality of the unconscious, Baldwin suggests that, like all oneiric worlds, American life fails to be organized by time. Most Americans, he writes, “have yet to discover ... that time is real” (“They”, p. 637). Sealed in *idios kosmos*, the modern subject lives outside shared time. Bigger is a figure for such atemporal solitude. He is the modern being who, as the story often goes, emerged into its haunted life after the eradication of the shared experiences of tradition, religion, and family in the world’s reorganization according to the labor demands of industrialized, secular modernity. In his cell, Bigger imagines the world as a prison of solitary confinement: “he saw a black sprawling prison full of tiny black cells in which people lived; each cell had its stone jar of water and a crust of bread and no one could go from cell to cell and there were screams and curses and yells of suffering and nobody heard them, for the walls were thick and darkness was everywhere. Why were there so many cells in the world?” (p. 361). Joining independent clauses with *and*’s, and omitting the grammatically necessary commas, Wright deploys in the passage the polysyndeton that he without fail uses to write dream sequences in his texts.¹³ It is the failure of *koinon*—the confinement of each person in his prison cell—that makes modern life a dreamworld of unshareable existence.

Without a social link binding him to others, Bigger, in his dreamy solitude, becomes susceptible to the seductions of fascism, its promise, as the term’s etymology suggests, of bound togetherness. The movements of predatory nationalism he reads about in newspapers seem to offer the solution to the “riddle” that has relentlessly “tantalized” him (*Native*, p. 17). Yearning to “band himself” with others, but unable to find “a common binding and a common life” amidst Black people, he turns to news of totalitarian depredations from Germany, Italy, and Japan: “He felt that some day there would be a black man who would whip the black people into a tight band and together they would act and end fear and shame” (pp. 114, 115). Calling the work of *koinon* “binding”, Wright echoes Freud, for whom sustainable life requires the mechanism of *Bindung* on which Eros operates.¹⁴ The individual’s chronic unboundness in diasporic modernity—in Freud’s terms, his fatal attachment to Thanatos—renders him susceptible to the seductions of totalitarianism, the luring call of fascism to which Bigger eagerly responds.

Idios/Koinon: Jacques Lacan

Like Wright's and Baldwin's, Jacques Lacan's invocation of *koinon*, in *Seminar VII*, is in large part a response to the specter of fascism. Lacan was not the first to discern in Sophocles's tragedy a suitable allegory of the catastrophe in 1930s Europe. If Jean Anouilh's *Antigone* (1944) has seemed to some commentators, including Lacan, to make a fascist out of its heroine,¹⁵ it is because of her disregard of all common good beyond her duty to blood. When Creon (who, in Anouilh's adaptation, is much more conciliatory than in Sophocles' original [Fleming, p. 177]) asks for whom she commits her crime, she answers: "For nobody. For myself" (Anouilh, p. 33). That which once rendered her a thoroughly ambivalent character for the scripts of the Resistance—her haughty refusal of all compromise, all futurity, all politics—has made of her an ethical figure *par excellence* for contemporary Lacanians.¹⁶ She is often spoken of as risking "subjective destitution", the kind of withdrawal from the symbolic field in which Lacanians have seen the possibility of radical politics.

The entire drama of *Antigone* revolves around competing claims of the common. Despite the heroine's radical isolation, her "solitude relative to others" (Lacan, *Sem. VII*, p. 272), the play begins with her appeal to *koinon*. Speaking to her sister, Ismene, she wonders about the evil that will befall them because of their cursed lineage:

ᾧ κοινὸν ἀυτάδελφον Ἰσμῆνης κάρα,
 ἄρ' οἴσθ' ὅτι Ζεὺς τῶν ἀπ' Οἰδίπου κακῶν—
 ἄ, ποῖον οὐχὶ νῶν ἔτι ζώσαιν τελεῖ (p. 4)

My own sister Ismene, linked to myself, are you aware that Zeus ... ah, which of the evils that come from Oedipus is he not accomplishing while we still live? (p. 5, ellipsis in original)

The theme of *koinon* is emphasized by the odd redundancy, often noted by scholars and agonized over by translators, of the two words that follow the opening vocative: κοινὸν ἀυτάδελφον. Addressing her sister not only with *koinon* but also with *autadelphos*, Antigone points to the intimate kinship they share through their dead mother's womb. She calls her sister, literally, "the common same-wombed one", indicating the "strange commonness" or "excessive sameness" that marks Oedipus's incestuous family line (P. A. Miller, pp. 87, 88)—an uncanny *koinon* whose ethical call overrides for Antigone the shared good of the *polis*.

As stand-ins for the *oikos* and the *polis*, Antigone and Creon guarantee the tragedy's unfolding in their inability to find common ground: his inflexibility in demanding that the traitorous Polynices be left unburied matches her stubborn insistence on treating her brother's body with the care one reserves for human remains. The juxtaposition of his appeal to *to koinon agathon* and hers to shared flesh has led commentators, most notably Hegel, to position the two characters on diametrically opposing sides, whose synthesis leads to a satisfactory ethical solution. For Hegel, Antigone and Creon represent the conflict between the city and the home, the pub-

lic and the private, the male and the female. He argues that both characters remain ethically wanting insofar as their claims cannot accommodate those of the opposing side, thereby rendering *Sittlichkeit* impossible. While Lacan, too, observes that Creon “exists to promote the good of all” (*Sem. VII*, p. 258), his reading departs from Hegel’s in that, without any attempt at a conciliatory gesture of accommodation between the two parties, it unequivocally focuses on Antigone’s desire, rendering Creon a minor figure in the drama. Indeed, with his focus on her relationship to Polynices (rather than her conflict with Creon), Lacan seems to insist on a stage in the dialectic from which Hegel, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, has us move on. Hegel, too, finds the singular attachment between Antigone and Polynices important, yet for him it provides merely a prelude for a stage in the spirit’s journey that will be left behind as one moves toward the ethical community.

In his reading, Lacan is particularly drawn to a moment that a number of nineteenth-century commentators, most famously Goethe, found incongruous enough to wager that the lines in question will be proven supposititious.¹⁷ The moment that “carries with it the suggestion of a scandal” (*Sem. VII*, p. 256) is one where Antigone locates Polynices’ importance, for which she will go to her grave, in his unrepeatable singularity. She justifies her commitment to him on the grounds that, since he is her only brother from deceased parents, there never will be another one like him; the connection is irreplaceable. It is this idiosyncrasy that stipulates Antigone’s choice of the familial link, with a crazed passion not unlike Ajax’s, over the common good of the *polis*. As against Creon’s insistence that the traitor’s body not be buried but be left to the scavenging dogs and birds, Antigone “affirms the unique value of [Polynices’] being without reference to any content, to whatever good or evil Polynices may have done or to whatever he may be subjected to” (*Sem. VII*, p. 279). She remains attached to him not because of his deeds or accomplishments, but because of an “essence” beyond any attributes that may have made him recognizable to the world. That which she shares with her brother is the unshareable.

For Lacan, there is no moving on from here to the more “mature” stage where Antigone’s particularity would find its balance in the universality Creon represents and where the immediacy of the pagan world would expand into the breathing space of Christian modernity. Instead, what renders Antigone’s passive resistance primary for Lacan is its grounding in the simultaneity of her appeal to *koinon* and that which is strictly singular, unshareable—the quality of *idios* in her relation to Polynices. In her unyieldingness, she figures the nonadaptive singularity that, as Cecilia Sjöholm writes, forms the core of Lacanian ethics: “from a Lacanian perspective, ethics can never be thought according to a social structure of normativity: the ethical moment refers to an impossibility, the kernel of a hard resistance that refuses to dissolve in *any* social or ethical order” (p. 134). As we can gauge from his unrelenting critique of postwar ego psychology, Baldwin similarly prioritizes in his ethics the nonadaptive and the untimely.

The eradication of all *koinon* in diasporic modernity renders Bigger vulnerable to totalitarianism, the kind of “fascination” with “charismatic” leadership that Gus-

tave Le Bon and Freud diagnosed in group dynamics.¹⁸ Fascism fascinates because—as Hannah Arendt, too, will propose—the modern subject is lonely, radically isolated, without any model on which to imagine *to koinon agathon*.¹⁹ With Bigger as his case study, Wright asks: Is it too late to think being-together otherwise than in terms of the fascistic bond? Is there a way to negotiate the unbinding force of modernity without turning one’s unraveling into murderousness? Baldwin and Lacan respond that, to stall the colonization of *to koinon agathon* by the fascist imaginary, modern onto-ethics must trouble common ideals with that which remains strictly inassimilable to projects of togetherness, of collective *Bindung*, as they have been conceptualized so far.

Notwithstanding all divergences, incompatibilities, and indifference, Lacan’s and Baldwin’s ethical projects, as a constellation, thus meet at this specific point. Both constitute efforts to reconfigure *to koinon agathon*, the potential for shared lives, in the stark light of what the events of the 1930s and 40s had revealed of modernity’s constitutive terrors. Equally critical of the notion of the fully adaptive subject promoted by ego psychology,²⁰ Baldwin and Lacan suggest that the *koinon* of a common world must be thought in conjunction with singularity, with an unshareable *idios*. Echoing Wright, Baldwin suggests that Western modernity, which must always be understood as diasporic modernity, constitutes an awakening where one dream (the premodern) was supplanted by another (bad faith). It is only by reinventing modernity’s promise of singularity that the dream can be dispelled. For both Lacan and Baldwin, this *idios* is lived in the human subject’s proximity to what Sophocles calls οὐδὲν: nothingness.

Nothing

That what Lacan calls “the absolute individual” (*Sem. VII*, p. 278) emerges in proximity to death—the common unshareable—is suggested by his reading of *Antigone*’s “ode to man”, which Sophocles inserts between the messenger’s news about the breach of Creon’s commands and Antigone’s subsequent arrest.²¹ The chorus begins the hymn by extolling the creativity that informs all human endeavors, the persistence with which “man” triumphs in life. Yet, in a moment that Lacan finds crucial to the whole drama, the celebration is interrupted by a passing note that identifies in death the limit of human ingenuity:

παντοπόρος ἄπυρος ἐπ’ οὐδὲν ἔρχεται
 τὸ μέλλον· Ἄιδα μόνον
 φεῦξιν οὐκ ἐπάξεται·
 νόσων δ’ ἀμηχάνων φυγὰς

[Man] meets nothing in the future without resource; only from Hades shall he apply no means of flight; and he has contrived escape from desperate maladies. (Sophocles, p. 37)

Translators, including Hugh Lloyd-Jones, have heard in the chorus's commentary a celebration of the human ability to resourcefully tackle everything that the future might bring—everything, that is, except death. Lacan irritably notes that this observation sounds “a little too petty bourgeois” for someone of Sophocles' penetrating insight to make (*Sem. VII*, p. 275). He asks that, instead of indulging such inanities, we paraphrase the lines as follows: man “advances toward nothing that is likely to happen, he advances and he is παντοπόρος, ‘artful,’ but he is ἄπορος, always ‘screwed’” (p. 275). The human subject craftily negotiates various dire straits, but it is in sailing toward the inescapable “nothing” (οὐδὲν) that he finds himself, unavoidably, ἄπορος, a term that Lacan connects to “aporia” or, a little less elegantly, to one's being “screwed” [*couillonné*]” (p.275 / p. 321). (Dennis Porter's translation observes a decorous distance from the term by enveloping it in quotation marks, which do not appear in the French original.) If our being is marked by the way in which we are all, ultimately, fucked, Lacan suggests that translators have consistently missed—perhaps, repressed—the true significance of the subsequent lines by misreading the prepositions Sophocles uses. He argues that, rather than an “escape from” illness, the Greek νόσων δ' ἀμηχάνων φυγὰς must be translated as man's “escape *into* impossible sicknesses” (p. 275). The human subject is without recourse when faced with the netherworld (Αἰδης); this intractable limit precipitates what Freud, some two and a half millennia after Sophocles, will call “flight into illness” (“Fragment”, p. 75n). If we have assumed that Freud pathologizes the neurotic's dodging of reality, Lacan proposes that such sparring with—not “reality” but—the real is in fact, in its “artfulness”, an ethical condition. “[Man] hasn't managed to come to terms with death”, Lacan says, “but he invents marvelous gimmicks in the form of sicknesses he himself fabricates” (p. 275). This self-debilitation as an avoidance of dealing with nothingness constitutes “one of mankind's essential dimensions” (p. 275).

In Lacan's retranslation, the passage's implications for psychoanalytic ethics are clear. Our being *is* the symptom that emerges in the proximity of nothingness. Freud calls this “the painful riddle of death” (*Future*, p. 195), which religion, undoubtedly one of humankind's “marvelous gimmicks”, comes to address. If this, ultimately, is the “riddle” that haunts Bigger Thomas, fascism tempts him like the “impossible sickness” that Lacan finds delineated in *Antigone*. Promising eternal life in *Völkischkeit*, fascism binds the solitary subject into the “tight band” that Bigger envisions as the way out of diasporic modernity's alienation (*Native*, p. 115). James Penney writes: “Only by recognizing the inviolable limit signified by death, Lacan contends, may the subject avoid the temptation of such an erroneous, fleshed-out universalism, one which causes him to do evil in the name of the Good” (p. 167). The universalism in question is Creon's. For Lacan, Creon's demand for an unequivocally shared *koinon* constitutes but an effort to escape desire's singularity and, as such, the nothing (οὐδὲν) that is the unshareable common of human existence; it is Creon, rather than Antigone, who is the fascist of the play, Lacan proposes.

Like Freud and Wright, Baldwin assigns the work of “binding” to the human subject circling around a nothing.²² It is this operation that, as he writes in the early essay “Everybody’s Protest Novel” (1949), keeps us from the yawning abyss in our being:

Society is held together by our need; we bind it together with legend, myth, coercion, fearing that without it we will be hurled into that void, within which, lie the earth before the Word was spoken, the foundations of society are hidden. From this void—ourselves—it is the function of society to protect us; but it is only this void, our unknown selves, demanding, forever, a new act of creation, which can save us—“from the evil that is in the world.” With the same motion, at the same time, it is this toward which we endlessly struggle and from which, endlessly, we struggle to escape. (pp. 16-17)

Protest novels, such as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and (as Baldwin provocatively suggests) *Native Son*, may assign us a secure place in the common world, yet they do so at the cost of bolstering the Manichean structures whose symptoms they are meant to address. They save us from the void yet also annihilate *real* life. Merely reversing the assumptions propping the tragic scripts that momentarily seize control of the young Baldwin in New Jersey, they do not provide antidotes to the loneliness that renders the modern subject vulnerable to fascism. Rather, they leave us in the grip of the nightmare, in thrall of such imaginary constructions as what Baldwin, writing only a few years after the end of WWII, calls “*Herrenvolk*” (“Everybody’s”, p. 18). That in this process we, like Bigger, are bound to (become) fascists is similarly indicated by the unidentified quotation Baldwin inserts into the passage. The line “the evil that is in the world” comes from Albert Camus’s *The Plague* (1947), the narrative about an Algerian town infected by *la peste*, in which readers had immediately discerned an allegory about the pestiferousness of totalitarianism (*la peste brune*, named after the brown shirts of the *Sturmabteilung*).²³

For Lacan, the unshareability of being can be unfolded either in the masculine or the feminine mode. The *idios* of masculine desire is lived, for example, in the intricate choreographies of diasporic modernity’s tragicomedies that Wright illustrates. Here any experience of *koinon* consists of the subject’s sparring with his fascinating *doppelgängers*. It may also happen that the idiot finds willing accomplices who, donning the masks of his semblants, help sustain the dream of desirous complementarity. Luce Irigaray calls this kind of participation by women in the phallogocentric economy “mimicry” (*le mimétisme*) (p. 220). The African American tradition, too, has a term for such choreographed encounters where one subject has the capacity to compel the other to take on the roles scripted by the hegemonic order of desire: here, it is called “acting.”²⁴ In acting, the double-conscious subject plays up to the other’s desire, most often for the purposes of survival, but sometimes also for the pleasures of tricksterism. While acting can be used for possibly emancipatory ends (as Charles Chesnut’s “The Passing of Grandison” [1899] shows), for Wright and Baldwin such modes of survival merely feed the terrors of Western modernity.

“Acting” bequeaths the players a strange immortality as the protesting mind commits itself to “a deadly, timeless battle” (Baldwin, “Everybody’s”, p. 18). Like the Lacanian infant, riveted to his semblant, the younger Baldwin finds himself momentarily frozen in front of the mirror in the New Jersey diner. Lacan nevertheless implies that it is possible to relinquish the imaginary enthrallment that, in his terminology, feeds masculine jouissance. One might even speak of a *choice*: “one is not obliged, when one is male, to situate oneself on the side of $\forall \chi \Phi \chi$ [that is, the masculine side]. One can also situate oneself on the side of the not-whole” (*Sem. XX*, p. 76). *Other* enjoyments can be cultivated by tilting the subject toward the void.

Twentieth-century philosophy, and most famously existentialism, has tended to identify this void-nothing with finitude. So, it seems, does psychoanalysis. In his exposition on the Lacanian real, Charles Shepherdson writes: “Death ... involves a peculiar link between the symbolic and the real, presenting us with a sort of hole or void in the structure of meaning—a void that is not a deficiency, but virtually the opposite, an absolute condition of meaning” (*Lacan*, p. 3). Yet, as a reader of Shepherdson’s insight would know, sex always supplements death in psychoanalysis: the presumed proximity of Lacan and Heidegger is modified when we note, with Joan Copjec and Alenka Zupančič, that in psychoanalytic thought the subject’s *being-toward-death* is rewritten in the form of her *being-toward-sex*.²⁵ The void-nothing *sexuates the subject*. As Copjec has repeatedly reminded us,²⁶ “sex(uation)” cannot be reduced to what much of feminist theory calls “gender(ing)”; psychoanalytic thought refuses to disambiguate “sex.” This is the point of Lacan’s seemingly gratuitous vulgarity in his *Antigone* commentary: in the proximity of οὐδὲν the subject is, and has always been, *couillonné*. It bears repeating: each of us is fucked. In this precise sense, sex and death is all Lacan ever speaks about, and he names them in the same breath. Only masculine jouissance can pretend to escape such mortal bottoming.

As Copjec explains, at stake in Lacan’s supplementation of finitude with sex is a reconfiguration of the concept of “the common”:

If sexuality is a phenomenon of the subject’s displacement, its failure to coincide with itself, and this swerve is essential to the very definition of the subject, we could say that it is common to all subjects, without exception.... Perhaps the most significant agenda behind Lacan’s gently mocking phrase [of “being-toward-sex”] is the forging of a new understanding of the common, one that in preserving the asymmetry of the different ways it is approached preserves the common itself, that is, preserves it full stop. (“Sexual Difference”, p. 204, p. 206)

Two modes of being-toward-nothing, and consequently two modes of the common, present themselves. Whereas *Native Son* describes the operations of the masculine-sexuated dreamworld that Bigger thinks he can manipulate by playing (like) an

idiot, it is in the *idios kosmos* of the not-all, figured in Antigone, that resides the potential that Lacan calls “the absolute individual.”

Lacan and Baldwin indicate that, if the subject is *symptomized into existence*, we let the symptom become chronic at our peril. Lacan suggests this with his famously ambiguous stipulation that one neither *give up on* nor *give into* his desire (*cédé sur son désir*) (*Sem. VII*, p. 319 / p. 368). In the speculative onto-ethics that he begins to delineate in “Everybody’s Protest Novel”, Baldwin offers us a similarly double demand. He suggests that, by approaching and escaping from the void, we court “something resolutely indefinable, unpredictable”; undoing the ossified forms that root totalitarianism, “we can find at once ourselves and the power that will free us from ourselves” (“Everybody’s”, p. 13). Lacan and Baldwin suggest that, with some effort, one may be able to sustain, for a little while longer, the minimal opening that shakes Bigger after Mary’s death, without having it immediately close, in the “temporal pulsation” (*Sem. XI*, p. 143) typical of the unconscious. It is possible to cultivate what Sophocles calls Antigone’s “self-willed passion” (p. 85) as a potential access to the *real* life whose alarm bells repeatedly jolt us out of our atemporal dreamworlds.

Notes

1. Ben Tyrer, too, links Lacan’s terminology in *Seminar XX* to Heraclitus, p.138.
2. On the concept of the semblant, which I will leave unexplored here, see DeGabriele, Herron, and Peláez, eds.
3. “Fascism” and “binding” are etymologically related: the early Italian fascists, and then Mussolini, adopted from ancient Rome the symbol of *fasces/fascio*, comprised of a “[b]undle of rods or sticks, bound together with an ax”, to signal their strength-in-unity (de Grand). See also Weingart, pp. 19-20.
4. The most detailed account of the logic can be found in Chiesa esp. ch. 4.
5. For succinct mappings of this turn, see Dean p. 36ff.; and Mellard.
6. For an early, and in its clarity still useful, account of the real, see Shepherdson, “Intimate”; and the essay’s revised version in Shepherdson, *Lacan*, pp. 1-49. On *extimité*, see also J.-A. Miller; and Guéguen, pp. 269-71.
7. On this dynamic, see also Lacan, *Seminar II*, pp. 180-81.
8. See Lacan’s utilization of Caillois’s work in “Mirror”, p. 77 and *Seminar XI*, pp. 73-74, pp. 99-100. On “paranoid knowledge” in *Native Son*, see also Tuhkanen, “Grimace.”
9. Baldwin evokes this term: *Fire*, p. 325.
10. The following borrows from my earlier discussion of the scene from “Notes of a Native Son”: Tuhkanen, “Losing.”
11. The dialogue is reprinted in Baldwin, *Conversations*, pp. 83-92.
12. Apart from JanMohamed, Merrill Cole, in “Nat Turner’s Thing”, reads examples of African American writing in the context of Patterson’s and Lacan’s theories of social death.

13. For passages in Wright where dreams are narrated in polysyndetons, see *Native*, pp. 126-27, pp. 165-66; *Man Who Lived*, pp. 79-80; *Savage*, pp. 170-71; *Long*, pp. 25, 75, 144-45, 253-54. Wright echoes Freud, who argues in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) that “dream-work” does away with the contrastive conjunctions that organize our waking thought. Thus, whenever the analysand articulates her dream-thoughts in terms of such logic, the analyst should “treat the two apparent alternatives as of equal validity and link them together with an ‘and’” (pp. 422, 427, 428).
14. For discussion of *Ent/bindung* in Freud, see Borch-Jacobsen, *Freudian*, pp. 127-239 and “Primal”; Laplanche and Pontalis, pp. 50-52; and Livingstone Smith.
15. See Lacan, *Seminar VII*, p. 250. For an account of the multivalent reception, and an argument for the ultimately fascist resonances, of Anouilh’s adaptation, see Fleming.
16. Of the numerous commentaries on Lacan’s reading of *Antigone*, I have found the most illuminating Joan Copjec’s (*Imagine*, ch. 1), James Penney’s (ch. 5), and Marc De Kesel’s (ch. 8).
17. On the debate between Hegel, Goethe, and others on the lines’ possible spuriousness, see Leonard pp. 141-42; and Douzinas pp. 1352-54.
18. See Le Bon, pp. 31, 130-36; Freud, *Group*, pp. 102, 108, 133. On “charisma”, see Weber, p. 374ff. On charisma and fascism, see Costa, Eatwell, and Larsen; and Kallis. On charisma’s role as a constituent of “fascination”, see Baumbach, pp. 33-34, 57-59, 103-04.
19. See Arendt; and Gaffney, chs. 3-5.
20. On Lacan and ego psychology, see Zeitlin. On Baldwin and ego psychology, see Tuhkanen, “Baldwin.”
21. See Sophocles, pp. 35-37; and Lacan, *Seminar VII*, pp. 274-76. For a skillful commentary on Lacan’s interpretation of the ode, see Penney, pp. 165-67.
22. I have elsewhere, and with different emphases, explored the shared idiom of “binding” in Freud and Baldwin: Tuhkanen, “Binding.”
23. Baldwin’s quotation comes from the opening of chapter 8 of Stuart Gilbert’s translation: “The evil that is in the world always comes of ignorance, and good intentions may do as much harm as malevolence, if they lack understanding” (Camus, p. 110). For a recent assessment of the intertwined themes of colonialism and fascism in Camus’s novel, see Raza Kolb ch. 4. As she writes, “*The Plague* ... speaks not only to what happened in the Second World War, but also to the epidemics of colonialism, which ... begin to reveal themselves as continuous with the pathological nationalism of the Third Reich” (p. 168).
24. Wright finds the same dynamics played out in the colonial world, too: see “Psychological”, pp. 17-20.
25. See Copjec’s discussion of Lacan’s modified Heideggerianism in “Sexual Difference”, pp. 205- 6. Copjec engages Zupančič’s commentary on Lacan’s neologism, pp. 20, 55.
26. See Copjec, *Read*, ch. 8; “Fable”; “Sexual Compact”; and (overlapping with the previous) “Sexual Difference.”

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