

**SUFFERING AND SURVIVAL:  
CONSIDERING TRAUMA, TRAUMA STUDIES AND LIVING ON**

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## ABSTRACT

Referring to the academic phenomenon of ‘Trauma Studies’, this thesis argues that if it is possible to ‘speak about and speak through’ trauma (Caruth, 1996), such a *double* operation can only occur through a writing which, paradoxically, touches on what exceeds it. To structure this argument, the thesis proposes a distinction between ‘Trauma Studies’ – as a discipline or field of academic study – and a *trauma study*; the latter being a writing (on) trauma which suffers and survives *as* an inscription of the traumatic event, an event which nevertheless remains irreducible to the text ‘as such’. Moreover, by referring to Jacques Derrida’s consideration of the term ‘*survivre*’, a quasi-originary textual dimension which ‘survives’ or ‘lives on’ the border between life and death, I suggest that if a trauma study is to ‘take place’, it must affirm this essentially ‘spectral’ dimension as its very condition.

Following Derrida’s suggestion that *all* events are in a sense traumatic, I further argue that a trauma study must write (on) the traumatic event in terms of the force and potentiality of the future – what I refer to as the ‘might’ of what remains to come. This thesis, therefore, considers a trauma study in terms of ‘living on’, a textual dimension which suffers and survives the ‘might’ of what remains to come. Chapter One reads Chris Marker’s film *La Jetée*, Chapter Two Roland Barthes’s reading of Stendhal, and Chapter Three considers Hélène Cixous’s *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*. These chapters read how a trauma study remains a possibility of the *im*-possible, an *experimental* writing which survives or lives on the precarious border between experience and study. The thesis concludes by suggesting that, in order to write (on) what remains traumatic, the (im)possibility of a trauma study is determined by a certain *feminine* ‘might’.

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## INTRODUCTION

‘So the loss of son or brother, or of property, or anything else of the kind, will hold the least terrors for the good man.’

‘He will be least affected by them.’

‘So when any catastrophe of the kind overtakes him, he will lament it less and bear it more calmly than others.’

‘He will.’

‘Then we should be quite right to cut out from our poetry lamentations by famous men. We can give them to the less reputable women characters or to the bad men, so that those whom we say we are bringing up as Guardians of our state will be ashamed to imitate them.’

‘You are quite right.’

*Plato.*<sup>1</sup>

### *Writing (on) trauma*

The word ‘trauma’ comes from the Greek ‘*τράυμα*’, which means ‘wound’, and is usually experienced as a painful marking of the body. The notion of trauma has featured extensively in many intellectual traditions; in terms of western aesthetics this can be traced at least from the work of Plato (with the notion of trauma or suffering having no place in his phallogocentrically ideal state, constitution, or ‘Republic’). Though trauma is currently the preserve of discourses/disciplines such as psychoanalysis and psychology, the study of trauma has also found a home in the modern humanities. This particular consideration of trauma, referred to as the discipline or field of ‘Trauma Studies’, has manifested itself most clearly in the (comparative) literature departments of the North American university.

Trauma Studies divides many as to its place in the university, the term ‘trauma’ recalling for many the impasse of ‘identity politics’, as well as the all too easily appropriable ‘survivor narrative’, a narrative which might found a certain claim to

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<sup>1</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2007), pt.III, bk.III, §1, 387e-388a (p.79).

moral, political and/or subjective agency.<sup>2</sup> Deriving in part from the Yale School of the mid 1970s, and thus a certain amalgamation of literary theory, psychoanalysis and deconstruction, the now seminal work on trauma by Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Felman – which emerged from the late 1980s – asks how intellectual culture and practice might engage with catastrophic history. In terms of Trauma Studies, then, Caruth’s first book, *Unclaimed Experience*, is central. In it Caruth reads Freud’s *Moses and Monotheism*, a text which identifies a traumatic departure as the mark of both the impossibility and possibility of Jewish history:

In [Freud’s] rethinking of Jewish beginnings [...] the future is no longer continuous with the past but is united with it through a profound discontinuity. The exodus from Egypt, which shapes the meaning of the Jewish past, is a departure that is both a radical break and the establishment of a history.<sup>3</sup>

With his supplementary claim that the Hebrews murdered the Egyptian Moses who led them to freedom, Freud suggests that a traumatic event also marks the origin of Jewish monotheism. It is, therefore, a traumatic event which both ruptures Jewish history, and marks its beginnings. As Caruth states, ‘[t]he most significant moment in Jewish history is thus, according to Freud, not the [Hebrew’s] literal return to freedom, but the repression of a murder and its effects.’<sup>4</sup> What it is necessary to point out here is that what is at once a creation myth both of and for the Jewish people, is read by Freud as the after-effect of a traumatic past. According to Freud, the deferred action of these traumatic events is both acknowledged and denied with every affirmation of Jewish monotheism. In turn, Caruth suggests that ‘the central question, by which Freud finally inquires into the relation between history and its political outcome, is: What does it mean, precisely, for history to be the history of a trauma?’<sup>5</sup>

The possibility that Jewish monotheism may be both driven by, as well as that which generates, this traumatic effect, enables Freud to read the history of the Jewish people through the prism of psychoanalysis. Doing this also allows him to align the traumatic

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<sup>2</sup> See: John Mowitt, ‘Trauma Envy’, *Cultural Critique*, no.46: *Trauma and Its Cultural Aftereffects*, (Autumn, 2000), pp.272-297.

<sup>3</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience – Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p.14.

<sup>4</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p.14.

<sup>5</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p.15.



history of a people with the traumatic history of the individual through the notion of a deferred action or belated effect of trauma (what he refers to as ‘*Nachträglichkeit*’). Theorizing the implications of deferred action, Freud suggests that traumatic excitation is experienced by the ego only after the event, during a similar but subsequent experience. The experience of traumatic excitation, then, is *first of all* an effect of deferral and delay, always-already folded into a secondary or supplementary experience. The deferred action of traumatic memory means that, though imposed *upon* the individual, what is experienced as traumatic will be partly informed by an unprocessed previous experience, as well as being too overwhelming, and thus await its affective discharge via a subsequent and similar experience.

One of Freud’s early engagements with the deferred action of traumatic memory is his recounting of the ‘Emma’ case in the ‘Project for a Scientific Psychology’:

Emma is subject at the present time to a compulsion of not being able to go into shops *alone*. As a reason for this, [she produced] a memory [*Erinnerung*] from the time when she was twelve years old (shortly after puberty). She went into a shop to buy something, saw the two shop-assistants (one of whom she can remember) laughing together, and ran away in some kind of affect of fright. In connection with this, she was led to recall that the two of them were laughing at her clothes and that one of them had pleased her sexually.<sup>6</sup>

Freud suggests that Emma’s reluctance to go into shops alone is due to a ‘*proton pseudos*’, an originary – yet ‘false’ – event which a supplementary experience will charge with traumatic affect. There is no accurate memory of this ‘originary’ event, only its impression as the mark or wound of what remains to come. Freud suggests that Emma’s ‘*proton pseudos*’ would be the experience of going into a shop aged eight and being sexually assaulted by the shopkeeper, an earlier memory ‘which she denies having had in mind at the moment of Scene 1 [the scene at age twelve]’, but only recalls belatedly. Freud refers to this earlier event as a *proton pseudos* not because it didn’t occur, but because Emma had not yet taken cognizance of it, nor experienced it as traumatic affect. As Freud states, it is only through deferred action that what has

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<sup>6</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘Project for a Scientific Psychology’ [1895], *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol.I (London: Vintage, 2001), p.353; ‘Entwurf einer Psychologie’, *Gesammelte Werke: Nachtragsband Texte aus den Jahren 1885-1938* (Frankfurt am Main, Fischer, 1999), p.445.

occurred can be experienced as traumatic, and a memory of this traumatic experience repressed: ‘We invariably find that a memory is repressed which has only become a trauma by *deferred action* [nachträglich].’<sup>7</sup>

Neither of the scenes in the shop – neither at age eight nor at age twelve – can be comprehended in their entirety. The former occurs without the affective force that the latter will trigger, whilst the latter experience is in part that of an affective force inherited from the former. In effect, the movement of deferred action rends both events from any full comprehension. Both of these events occur, or are marked, but only *happen* later. Of course, this also means that the first scene is the processing of an affective force from an even earlier event, and the latter scene is also the mark of what remains to come. Indeed, the logic of *Nachträglichkeit* suggests even the very earliest of traumatic events inform our experiences long after the fact, and that anything resembling their full traumatic force remains in a certain sense ‘to come’. Moreover, and as Freud’s relating of the traumatic history of a people with that of the individual in *Moses and Monotheism* perhaps demonstrates, the inherent incalculability of the event – in that one cannot account for it on the basis of fully experiencing it at the instant of its occurrence – renders it impossible to definitively assign the cause or origin of what nevertheless creates a certain traumatic effect. This incalculable experience of the traumatic event means that trauma is *suffered* as the force and potential of what remains to come.

As the temporal aporia which structures both Freud’s speculation on the formation of Jewish monotheistic religion, and his conceptualisation of the traumatized individual, *Nachträglichkeit* can be seen as the hinge upon which the study of trauma sways undecidably between psychoanalysis, literary theory and deconstruction. As the mechanism of deferral and delay with which traumatic memory is inscribed, *Nachträglichkeit* also concerns a *writing* of trauma. As Jacques Derrida has often demonstrated, however, the effects of delay and deferral are at work in all writing, and thus the notion of *Nachträglichkeit* also marks a point at which the text can be seen as a structuring dimension of traumatic experience. In his essay ‘*Différance*’, Derrida refers to *Nachträglichkeit* when demonstrating how the notion of the trace cannot be thought

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<sup>7</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘Project for a Scientific Psychology’, p.356; ‘Entwurf einer Psychologie’, p.448.

‘on the basis of the present’.<sup>8</sup> It is this *supplementary* play of the trace which ‘maintains our relationship with that which we necessarily misconstrue, and which exceeds the alternative of presence and absence’; thus ‘there are no “conscious” traces’, and the unconscious can only be thought of as a weave of differences which ‘sends out delegates, representatives, proxies; but without any chance that the giver of proxies might “exist”.’<sup>9</sup> In terms of traumatic experience, this would suggest that there can be no ‘conscious’ experience of the event, and that what is thought of as its deferred action – or inscription – is rather the supplementary delegate, representative, or proxy of an event which cannot be said to ‘exist’ as such, but which remains irreducible to, or in excess of, its trace. As *Nachträglichkeit* functions according to the logic of deferred action, traumatic experience can be thought of in terms of the – paradoxical – return of what nevertheless *remains to come*, a ghost of/from the future.

Marking a confluence between the structural movement of the text and the experience of a traumatic event, Freud’s notion of *Nachträglichkeit* suggests that the study of trauma has a particular relation to deconstructive reading practices, in that when Freud describes the deferred action of a traumatic event he recalls the incalculable, supplementary and spectral textuality with which deconstruction engages. As Derrida suggests that the concepts of *Nachträglichkeit* and *Verspätung* [delay] ‘govern the whole of Freud’s thought and determine all his other concepts’<sup>10</sup>, the relation between deconstruction and psychoanalysis might provoke a writing on, and of, trauma in which the experience of violent and disabling affect is not grounded on a metaphysics of presence and absence, or life and death, but is considered in terms of a textuality which problematizes those oppositions.

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<sup>8</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘*Différance*’, *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp.1-27 (p.21); ‘*La Différance*’, *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1972), pp.1-29 (p.22).

<sup>9</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘*Différance*’, pp.20-21; ‘*La Différance*’, pp.21-22. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida also refers to Freud’s notion of *Nachträglichkeit* as he deconstructs Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics*. Here he states that Freud’s term suggests a temporality which ‘cannot be that which lends itself to a phenomenology of consciousness or of presence and one may indeed wonder by what right all that is in question here should still be called time, now, anterior present delay, etc.’, see: Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p.67; *De La Grammatologie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967), p.98.

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Freud and the Scene of Writing’, trans. Alan Bass, *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp.246-91 (p.255); ‘Freud et la scène de l’écriture’, *L’écriture et la différence* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967), pp.293-340 (p.303).

Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* is undoubtedly an attempt to engage with trauma at the level of the text. It is as if she reads the enigma of Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* to be that a certain traumatic after-effect lives on through its writing, a writing the full impact of which has yet to be understood; an uncanny telegraphing of or from what remains to come. There remains, then, a necessity to keep returning to the texts which attempt to write (on) trauma. Although Caruth does not follow this logic through in her text, she begins to approach this unconventional thinking of trauma when she states that the texts which she will address in *Unclaimed Experience* 'both speak about and speak through the profound story of traumatic experience.'<sup>11</sup> It is no coincidence, then, that in an impassioned defence of Caruth's work in 2002, Shoshana Felman chooses to highlight this double gesture of speaking about and speaking through trauma.<sup>12</sup> In a footnote to her text *The Juridical Unconscious*, Felman takes up Ruth Leys' attack on Caruth's work for being littered with aporia, omissions, gaps and faults, as well as Leys' resistance to Caruth's reading of a 'literal' instance of trauma as that which cannot be experienced as such, but which nevertheless returns in the texts which address it. Felman's retort likens Leys' consideration of the 'literal' to that of the police in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Purloined Letter*: 'If Ruth Leys fails to see or grasp the nature of the letter and the nature of the signifier's literality in Caruth's text, it is because she looks for it positivistically and literal-mindedly, as the police precisely do in Poe's tale.'<sup>13</sup> In Poe's tale it is a certain excess the police do not recognize. As his protagonist, Dupin, states: 'Perhaps the mystery is a little *too* plain [... a] little *too* self-evident.'<sup>14</sup> The police cannot acknowledge what exceeds their regular tactics for searching, as meticulous as they are. There is an order of excess which marks the scene, a scene marked by what is yet to arrive *à la lettre*.<sup>15</sup>

In a sense Leys finds the notion of a literal inscription of trauma – as the marker of what is yet to be experienced – as something uncomfortably or uncannily ambiguous, as something which marks or ghosts an excess which may never return *as such*. As Felman

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<sup>11</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p.4 (my emphasis).

<sup>12</sup> See: Shoshana Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious* (London: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp.173-182 (fn.3).

<sup>13</sup> Shoshana Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious*, pp.179-180.

<sup>14</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Purloined Letter', in: *Edgar Allan Poe: The Complete Stories* (New York: Everyman's Library, 2002), pp.684-701 (p.685).

<sup>15</sup> To contextualise this text in terms of psychoanalysis and deconstruction see: John P. Muller & William J. Richardson (eds.), *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida, and Psychoanalytic Reading* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

notes, omissions and gaps in Caruth's text are 'persistently detected' and 'triumphantly restored [by Leys] through an obsessively positivistic, self-congratulatory gesture of filling in the gaps', though, as with the police in Poe's text, 'the letter (at once traumatizing and encapsulating the significance of trauma) is not found.'<sup>16</sup> For Felman, Leys' critique marks a 'barrenness of insight [...a] lack of human depth'; in contrast, Caruth's text has a certain 'vitality and force.'<sup>17</sup> Felman sees, then, a certain life to Caruth's text, a vitality and force – the *might* of the future perhaps – which is marked by the very gaps, omissions and aporia which confound Leys. It is as if Caruth's readings are themselves wounded by the events described in the texts it considers, that the text marks, suffers and endures the traumatic event as an experience of what nevertheless remains in excess of it. Felman's footnote is a re-affirmation of Caruth's text, itself a collage and re-articulation of its enigmatic, irreducible, incalculable formulations. In a sense, then, Felman is trying to sustain these impossible figures or phrases against the staid academic rivalry and institutionalisation of trauma as demonstrated by Leys: 'I venture to propose that it is precisely the vitality and force of Caruth's vision, and, more generally, the radicality of trauma itself – the way in which (precisely) the event of trauma destabilizes the security of knowledge and strikes at the foundation of the institutional prerogatives of what is known – that is experienced as a threat and needs thus to be tamed, contained and censored.'<sup>18</sup>

Of course, Caruth's – and indeed Felman's – work on trauma is overdetermined with institutional politics, in that it cannot escape attempts to reduce it to the bandwagon that it has undoubtedly given rise to. Jumping on that bandwagon might then be seen to stabilize or secure one's position within an academic field or university department. Moreover, as Caruth and Felman's work on trauma is indebted to a certain legacy of the Yale School, the accusations against de Man's wartime collaboration – and in turn against the role of deconstruction in the North American humanities – must certainly have overdetermined their texts. Indeed, this anxiety can be read in Caruth's text:

Recent literary criticism has shown an increasing concern that the epistemological problems raised by poststructuralist criticism necessarily lead to political and ethical paralysis. The possibility that reference is

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<sup>16</sup> Shoshana Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious*, p.180.

<sup>17</sup> Shoshana Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious*, p.177; p.181.

<sup>18</sup> Shoshana Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious*, p.181.

indirect, and that consequently we may not have direct access to others', or even our own, histories, seems to imply the impossibility of access to other cultures and hence of any means of making political or ethical judgements.<sup>19</sup>

As if to defend deconstruction against what is a massively misguided accusation against it, the 'concern' that deconstruction renders all ethical, political and epistemological decision impossible provokes Caruth's proposal for an engagement with trauma:

To such an argument I would like to contrast a phenomenon that not only arises in the reading of literary or philosophical texts but emerges most prominently within the wider historical and political realms, that is, the peculiar and paradoxical experience of trauma.<sup>20</sup>

On the one hand this can be read as a problematic and unnecessary defence of deconstruction. On the other hand, Caruth's work on trauma is also an affirmation of the necessity of deconstruction if we are to learn how to write (on) trauma as the mark or wound of what cannot be experienced *as such*. What Felman will reaffirm several years after the fact as the 'vitality and force' of Caruth's text, is perhaps what Caruth is alluding to in her suggestion of an engagement with trauma as defence against misguided accusations against deconstruction. Though Caruth's positioning of her work on trauma in relation to an accusation against deconstruction might seem to be a problematic attempt to return the possibility of ethical and political decision to poststructuralist literary studies, Caruth is also affirming that it is at a certain level of the text that the possibility of addressing history as the *experience* of what remains to come – whilst avoiding the reduction of this future to the status of a definitive, or pre-programmed knowledge – is approached. In the same way that Caruth reads the traumatic departures in Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* to be overdetermined by his own traumatic departure from Nazi occupied Vienna, what this writing might promise – both Freud's and Caruth's – is not a return to certainty and knowledge, but rather the possibility that both life and writing begin (again) with a textuality which always-already suffers the *might* – the force and potentiality – of the future.

Considering some of the implications of the essentially paradoxical formulation of writing (on) trauma (as both the study and experience of what remains to come) will be

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<sup>19</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p.10.

<sup>20</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p.11.

the central concern for this thesis. As a knot which will tie these implications together, as well as a guiding thread for the thesis, I want to make a distinction between ‘Trauma Studies’ – as a discipline or field of academic study – and a *trauma study*; the latter being that which would suffer and survive trauma as the impression or inscription of what remains to come. A trauma study, divided from the beginning by the mark or wound of the future, would destabilize any attempt to consolidate or capitalize upon trauma through academic and non-academic encounters. Intervening at a point when ‘Trauma Studies’ is being put to work as an academic discipline, as the institutionalization of a trend, this thesis attempts to affirm an essential relation between trauma and textuality, in turn arguing that a *trauma study* is the very thing which makes it impossible to circumscribe or situate a field or discipline of Trauma Studies once and for all.

### *The ‘might’ of suffering and survival*

In ‘Typewriter Ribbon’, an essay given at a conference ‘à propos’ Paul de Man’s *Aesthetic Ideology*, Derrida suggests a certain unconventional notion of ‘trauma’, one which links it to the ‘event’. Derrida is considering de Man’s readings of Rousseau’s *Confessions*, and a particular event which informs them: the theft of a ribbon committed when Rousseau was sixteen, the blame for which he allows to be assigned to the woman to whom he wanted to give the ribbon, Marion. As Derrida states:

this theft, which is [...] confessed in Book 2 of the *Confessions*, was, by Rousseau’s own admission, a determining event, a structuring theft, a wound, a trauma, an endless scarring, the repeated access to the experience of guilt and to the writing of the *Confessions*.<sup>21</sup>

As that which drives Rousseau’s subsequent attempts at confession, Derrida stresses that the ‘eventness of the event’ must somehow insist ‘on the arbitrary, fortuitous,

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<sup>21</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2)’, trans. Peggy Kamuf, in *Without Alibi*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp.71-160 (p.82). Derrida has indirectly worked on the notion of trauma in several texts, see for example: Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (eds.), *Sovereignities in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005); Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr., and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986); Jacques Derrida, ‘Circumfession’, trans. Geoffrey Bennington in: Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (London: The University of Chicago Press: 1993); Jacques Derrida, ‘Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides’, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas in: Giovanna Borradori (ed), *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp.85-136; Jacques Derrida, ‘Let us not Forget – Psychoanalysis’, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bolwby, *Oxford Literary Review*, vol.12, nos. 1-2 (1990), pp. 3-7.

contingent, aleatory, unforeseeable'.<sup>22</sup> If the event – in this case, the theft – is to retain its possibility as a singular occurrence, as well as the possibility of confessing to it, absolving oneself of its effects, or of writing (on) it as such, it should also remain impossible or unforeseeable, the very thing which cannot be reduced once and for all to its inscription. Referring to de Man, Derrida suggests he

associates this feeling of arbitrariness with the experience of threat, cruelty, suffering in dismemberment, decapitation, disfiguration, or castration (the abundance of whose figures he isolates in Rousseau).<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, de Man writes that this arbitrary threat 'more than warrants the anxiety with which Rousseau acknowledges the lethal quality of writing', as writing 'always includes the moment of dispossession in favour of the arbitrary power of the play of the signifier'.<sup>24</sup> The threat of arbitrary detachment, the detachment from a text one might attempt to author, would make any intention to confess one's guilt – or innocence – a precarious act from the beginning.

De Man, then, reads an anxiety in Rousseau, an anxiety concerning the power of what de Man refers to as a 'textual event' – that which may decapitate, dismember or castrate the author at any moment, a writing which may be cut from the control of the author, indeed a writing which cuts or interrupts the author. For de Man, the text's capacity to welcome the unforeseeable, its 'arbitrary power of the signifier', is the very possibility of deconstruction, the potential of the text to exceed the intentions or desires of the author or authority as such. As Derrida states, de Man 'wishes to describe what it is in deconstruction-dissemination, in what "is disseminated", he says, as "textual event" and as anacoluthon "throughout the entire text", that operates independently of and beyond any desire.'<sup>25</sup> For de Man, 'deconstruction-dissemination' occurs or happens despite or beyond any intention or desire on the part of the author; the text castrates the author, and it is this disconnection from any authority figure which conditions the possibility of deconstruction.

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<sup>22</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Typewriter Ribbon', pp.158-59.

<sup>23</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Typewriter Ribbon', p.158.

<sup>24</sup> Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figurative Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 296; cited by Derrida in: 'Typewriter Ribbon', p.159.

<sup>25</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Typewriter Ribbon', p.159.



For Derrida, the notion of a ‘textual event’ being ‘independent of any subject or any desire’ has ‘something irrefutable about it’:

If, on the one hand, the event supposes surprise, contingency, or the arbitrary [...], it also supposes, on the other hand, this exteriority of this irreducibility to desire. And therefore it supposes that which makes it radically inappropriable, nonreappropriable, radically resistant to the logic of the proper. What I have elsewhere called *exappropriation* concerns this work of the inappropriable in desire and in the process of appropriation.<sup>26</sup>

Though de Man sees such a ‘process that takes place independently of any desire’<sup>27</sup> to mark the possibility of deconstruction, Derrida suggests there remains another conclusion to be read in the text’s capacity to touch on what cannot be appropriated. This other conclusion would maintain a relation between desire and nondesire, a space where ‘nondesire haunts every desire and there is between desire and nondesire an abyssal attraction rather than a simple exteriority of opposition or exclusion.’<sup>28</sup> Rather than de Man’s reading of deconstruction as that which concerns a ‘textual event’ – or play of the signifier – which is independent of desire, Derrida asks if we might instead think of the ‘radically inappropriable, nonreappropriable, radically resistant’ element of the text as taking place in an ‘abyssal attraction’ between desire and nondesire.

In terms of the subject of desire and the subject of experience (both the ‘subject’ who desires or experiences, as well as the subject or topic of ‘desire’ and ‘experience’), and in terms of the possibility of the unforeseeable which the text might welcome, this provokes ‘another consequence that no doubt goes beyond what de Man himself says or would say.’<sup>29</sup> Derrida suggests this further consequence would be that ‘[b]y reason of this unforeseeability, this irreducible and inappropriable exteriority for the subject of experience, every event as such would be *traumatic*.’<sup>30</sup> It is the suggestion that every event must in some way be traumatic that I want to explore with this thesis. Derrida’s suggestion proposes a notion of trauma which is beyond its more conventional reception; if the event as such is traumatic, this would include even ‘an event

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<sup>26</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Typewriter Ribbon’, p.159.

<sup>27</sup> Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading*, p.298; cited by Derrida in: ‘Typewriter Ribbon’, p.159.

<sup>28</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Typewriter Ribbon’, p.159.

<sup>29</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Typewriter Ribbon’, p.159.

<sup>30</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Typewriter Ribbon’, p.159.

experienced as a “happy” one’.<sup>31</sup> Derrida is aware of the problems in which such an unconventional notion of trauma and the traumatic might result, but he also suggests the necessity of thinking the unconventional in light of the burgeoning academic and non-academic appropriation of trauma:

This does, I concede, confer on the word “trauma” a generality that is as fearsome as it is extenuating. But perhaps we have a double consequence that must be drawn in the face of the speculative inflation to which the word is today subject. Understood in this sense, trauma is that which makes precarious any distinction between the point of view of the subject and what is produced independently of desire. It makes precarious even the use and the sense of all these words.<sup>32</sup>

Derrida’s suggestion extends a ‘fearsome’ generality to the term ‘trauma’. It is the event ‘as such’ which is traumatic; traumatism is the condition of the event’s ‘happening’: ‘An event is traumatic or it does not happen, does not arrive [*Un événement est traumatique ou il n’arrive pas*].’<sup>33</sup> At the same time, trauma renders precarious the distinction between the subject (of desire and experience) and the unforeseeable event. What might be desired or experienced as desire might also be wholly other to desire; thus it is the border between desire as what one might want to happen or arrive (*arriver*), and nondesire – or what remains beyond a logic of desire – which is uncertain here.

Derrida suggests that on the precarious border between desire and nondesire ‘even the use and the sense of all these words’ are rendered unstable. The suggestion that an ‘event is traumatic or it does not happen’ makes it impossible to reduce the event to the subject’s point of view, or, that the subject’s point of view – their intention, or what they might experience or desire – is impossible to define in terms of an event which might disrupt that experience or desire in advance. Of course, this also makes the very notion of the ‘subject’ – as a unified entity *organised* by its experiences and desires – precarious. For Derrida then, the event

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<sup>31</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Typewriter Ribbon’, p.159.

<sup>32</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Typewriter Ribbon’, p.159.

<sup>33</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Typewriter Ribbon’, p.159; ‘Le ruban de machine à écrire: Limited Ink II’, *Papier Machine* (Paris: Galilée, 2001), pp.33-157 (p.146). The French verb ‘*arriver*’ means ‘to arrive’, ‘to happen’ and ‘to occur’; the (im)possibility of arrival is an enduring and important notion for deconstruction, I take it up in relation to trauma throughout this thesis.

injures desire, whether or not desire desires or does not desire what happens. It is that which, within desire, constitutes it as possible and insists there while resisting it, as the impossible: some outside, irreducibly, as some nondesire, some death, and something inorganic, the becoming possible of the impossible *as* im-possible. Inappropriability of the other.<sup>34</sup>

The event always ‘injures’ or *wounds* desire. The event occurs ‘within desire’, whether it is desired or not, but it remains an ‘outside’, wholly other to desire, ‘some nondesire, some death, and something inorganic.’ Irreducible to the organism, to the organic or *organised* body of the subject, to their ‘point of view’, the beyond desire ‘within desire’ makes desire possible whilst resisting it. This element of nondesire within desire, the wholly inappropriable which makes desire possible *and* resists it, remains the very possibility of the future for Derrida. It is the possibility that something *might* happen, an element of potentiality, of difference or *différance* which is folded into everything which might seem pre-programmed, predictable, appropriable or calculable.<sup>35</sup>

This is how Derrida can say that the event ‘injures’ desire, ‘whether or not desire desires or does not desire what happens.’ The event wounds desire as the mark of what cannot be desired in advance. The event is thus a threat, to desire, to the notion of the present or the past, and to the notion of the subject; hence ‘the event is traumatic or it does not happen’. Moreover, if the event must remain somehow unforeseeable, then it must

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<sup>34</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Typewriter Ribbon’, pp.159-60.

<sup>35</sup> In ‘The Truth That Wounds’, from *Sovereignties in Question*, Derrida states that ‘The signature of a poem, like that of any text, is a wound. What opens, what does not heal, the hiatus, is indeed a mouth that speaks there where it is wounded [...] Even when one recognizes – and this is my case – that on the side of the poem there is a wounded mouth, speaking, one still always risks suturing it, closing it. Hence the duty of the reader-interpreter is to write while letting the other speak, or so as to let the other speak’ (pp.166-67). In thinking of the wound in terms of a trauma, it is possible to suggest that each text is signed in terms of a traumatic event, the mark of what does not heal, which opens onto what remains to come. The task of the ‘reader-interpreter’, and perhaps that of anyone who attempts to countersign the text in terms of a trauma study, would be to write on this text in such a way as to keep that trauma/wound open, to let the other speak. As Derrida suggests, however, this attempt would always risk foreclosing on this trauma. See Chapter One of this thesis on the essentially unstable platform from which one might conduct a trauma study, and Chapter Two on the risk involved in awaiting what is promised in the text.

In speaking of the mouth as a wound that does not heal, Derrida is referring to his essay ‘Rams’, and to his reading of a poem from Celan’s *Atemwende* in which he states that ‘These lips form around a speaking mouth that, even when it keeps silent, appeals to the other without condition, in the language of a hospitality that can no longer be subject to a decision [...] the poem hails or blesses, bears (*trägt*) the other, I mean “you” – as one might bear the grief of mourning or else bear a child’: *Sovereignties in Question*, pp.152-53. That the poem ‘bears’ (*trägt*) the other as in mourning and/or as in having a child links a certain notion of suffering and mourning with a certain feminine writing. I take up this association at several points in this thesis, particularly in Chapter Three. Moreover, as *trägt* is also borne in the middle of Freud’s *Nachträglichkeit*, it introduces this specifically feminine ‘bearing’ of the other to the notion of trauma. Again, I take up this feminine ‘bearing’, suffering or marking of trauma in Chapter Three.

always come from an *unpredictable* future, thus what will be, or more (and less) precisely, what *might* be traumatic, must also come from the future. In a dialogue with Giovanna Borradori, ostensibly concerned with the event referred to as ‘9/11’, but more generally the notion of global terror, Derrida discusses this unconventional chronology of trauma:

The ordeal of the event has as its tragic correlate not what is presently happening or what has happened in the past but the precursory signs of what threatens to happen. It is the future that determines the unappropriability of the event, not the present or the past. Or at least, if it is the present or the past, it is only insofar as it bears on its body the terrible sign of what might or perhaps will take place, which will be *worse than anything that has ever taken place*.<sup>36</sup>

It is not the present or the past which determines the traumatic event, or if it is, the present or the past must somehow bear the ‘terrible sign’ (perhaps a mark or wound) of an uncertain potentiality of the future, of ‘what *might* or *perhaps* will take place [my emphasis]’. On the one hand, the event always comes from the future as wholly unforeseeable and singular. On the other hand, such a future has *already* left its mark. What is wholly unforeseeable and singular, and what must therefore come from an unforeseeable future, could also be the repetition of something that has already happened. The condition of the future – the wholly unpredictable and singular event to come – is also a consideration of what *might* have already occurred. Again, a paradoxical chronology infiltrates the notion of the event: it is that which might have occurred, as well as being what is yet to happen, thus both a repetition *and* a singularity.

When Derrida speaks of the ‘worst’ here, he is on the one hand speaking in the context of the aftermath of ‘9/11’, but on the other hand, as he will go on to explain, he is referring to a logic that has been apparent since at least the ‘Cold War’. A traumatic event would suggest that the worst remains to come, but the present or the past somehow bears the wound of this worst to come, and thus the worst to come might also be the paradoxical or *mechanical return* of what has not yet happened. Such a contradictory logic would complicate the work of mourning:

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<sup>36</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides’, pp.96-7.

Imagine that the Americans and, through them, the entire world, had been told: what has just happened, the spectacular destruction of the two towers, the theatrical but invisible deaths of thousands of people in just a few seconds, is an awful thing, a terrible crime, a pain without measure, but it's all over, it won't happen again, there will never again be anything as awful as or more awful than that. I assume that mourning would have been possible in a relatively short period of time. Whether to our chagrin or to our delight, things would have quickly returned to their normal course in ordinary history. [...] But this is not what happened. There is traumatism with no possible work of mourning when the evil comes from the possibility to come of the worst, from the repetition to come – though worse.<sup>37</sup>

The work of mourning is complicated when traumatism remains to come; we cannot “get over” what has not yet happened. But this also suggests the possibility of an ‘impossible’ work of mourning. As noted above, the injurious event remains an outside within desire, it is the ‘becoming possible of the impossible *as im-possible*’.<sup>38</sup> Derrida hyphenates the word ‘impossible’ to render what he terms a ‘non-negative im-possible.’<sup>39</sup> This would be an ‘im-possibility’ which survives the opposition between possibility and impossibility. Rather than the possibility of a completed work of mourning, or alternatively, an infinite melancholy, Derrida’s suggestion that the worst remains to come seems to call for an im-possible mourning, an im-possible mourning for what remains to come, and thus a certain im-possible vigilance towards the future. The traumatic event, either a ‘happy’ one or ‘the worst’, marks the *might* of the future – as both force and potentiality; a ‘might’ inscribed *on the body* of what we term ‘present’ or ‘past’. What we think of as present or past, therefore, would paradoxically be marked by the after-effects (the wounds) of an event which remains to come. Such wounds would remain open, open towards the future as the possibility of the im-possible.

When Derrida speaks of a ‘body’ he is referring to that which might ‘bear’ such an uncertain future. In a sense this presupposes a more conventional notion of the event, that which is registered as a singular experience by a certain organic or organised body:

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<sup>37</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides’, p.97.

<sup>38</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Typewriter Ribbon’, p.160.

<sup>39</sup> See: Jacques Derrida, ‘Psychoanalysis Searches the States of Its Soul: The Impossible Beyond of a Sovereign Cruelty’, trans. Peggy Kamuf, in *Without Alibi*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp.238-280 (p.276). The French text in: René Major (ed), *États généraux de la psychanalyse, juillet 2000* (Paris: Aubier, 2003), pp.177-228 (p.223-24). I discuss this notion in more detail in Chapter Two, and return to it *passim*.

It is difficult [...] to conceive of a living being *to* whom or *through* whom something happens without an affection getting *inscribed* in a sensible, aesthetic manner right on some body or some organic matter.

Why *organic*? Because there is no thinking of the event, it seems, without some sensitivity, without an *aesthetic* affect and some presumption of living organicity.<sup>40</sup>

And yet, as suggested above, the event may also be a repetition; what may be wholly singular and incalculable might also be the duplicate or return of what has already occurred. We are concerned here with the structure of memory and/or the archive. In order to think or recall what may have already occurred, the body must bear its repetition to come. The body, therefore, provides the organic matter upon which the *might* of the event is inscribed, but it must also operate as a certain inorganic archival technology, an archival-mechanism capable of reproducing or recalling the event in its unique singularity. The body and the event are inextricably entwined here. A body which could bear the *repetition* of a ‘unique’ event must suffer the ‘might’ of an event which has both already occurred and is yet to come. Such a body/event would live on as an im-possible interconnection of matter and potentiality, of organic aesthetic sensitivity and inorganic mechanical reproduction – an im-possible figure:

the new figure of an event-machine would no longer be even a figure. It would resemble nothing, not even what we call, in a still familiar way, a monster. But it would therefore be, by virtue of this very novelty, an event, the only and the first possible event, because im-possible.<sup>41</sup>

The body is marked by an unforeseeable ‘to come’, the body bears the scars of the ‘to come’ as the coming of the event as such, even the ‘happy’ event. Thus we are dealing with a paradoxical body, a body which is hospitable to both the organic and the inorganic (mechanical), a body/event which is haunted by the *might* of what remains to come.

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This thesis sets out to explore the relation between writing, trauma, and a ‘body’ which suffers and survives. As noted above, this involves making a distinction between

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<sup>40</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Typewriter Ribbon’, p.72.

<sup>41</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Typewriter Ribbon’, p.73.

Trauma Studies and a ‘trauma study’. The thesis will consider this distinction through the following themes:

- ***The spectrality of trauma:*** Trauma is from the beginning a double operation; it is inscribed on the body as the mark of what remains to come. Trauma, therefore, can be thought of as divided from the beginning, a ghost effect as the mark of what is never present ‘as such’ – a memory of the future. Trauma is generated through the ‘abyssal attraction’ between desire and non-desire, intention and the unforeseeable. That which is wholly undesirable, non-appropriable and wholly incalculable haunts intention and desire as the possibility or *might* of the traumatic event. Spectrality is a key figure for deconstruction as it describes the inability to reduce the text to the conditions of presence and absence, or figures predicated upon that binary opposition. As the notions of presence and absence are irreducible to themselves – that is, *always-already* structured by the other – spectrality describes a paradoxically ‘essential’ textual dimension. Moreover, spectrality recalls the supplementary and textual structure of Freud’s *Nachträglichkeit*. Such an ‘essential’ textual dimension is, therefore, a key figure for questions concerning the possibility of writing (on) trauma.
- ***A suffering of ‘might’:*** If the event as such is traumatic, then the body which is marked by what remains to come always-already suffers the potentiality and force, or the *might* of the future. Again, the notion of suffering can be read as a double operation. The Latin *sufferre* is comprised of the prefix *suf-* (sub-), which is a taking up or away from – to subduce or subduct – so as to subsist or even subvert, whilst *ferre* means ‘to bear’.<sup>42</sup> *Sufferre* would thus allude to a taking up or enduring of a present state in order to substitute, subvert or overturn it for the future. Suffering is thus both passive and active; the passive bearing or enduring of a mark or wound in order to actively subvert or substitute that state for one to come. Thus to suffer would be to both passively and actively bear the *might* of the future.

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<sup>42</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary* online; accessed 10\_04\_10.

- **Survival as ‘living on’:** To suffer would be to survive the wound for the sake of a future ‘to come’. A traditional notion of survival would perhaps be the notion of living on *after* an event, of surviving it. But by following Derrida’s use of the term, it is possible to consider survival or ‘living on’ as the *promise* of the future. Such a future would not bring an end to the work of mourning, where the past would be survived in order to live fully in the present. Rather, survival as ‘living on’ would be the endurance, bearing or suffering of the mark or wound as the very possibility of the future. Although I discuss this notion of survival in more detail in Chapter One, a late interview in *Le Monde* stresses the importance of the term for Derrida: ‘[a]ll the concepts that have helped me in my work, and notably that of the trace or of the spectral, were related to this “surviving” [“survivre”] as a structural and rigorously original dimension.’<sup>43</sup> For Derrida, ‘living on’ is a quasi-originary textuality, a textual dimension which survives the opposition between life and death as the condition of possibility for both.
- **Historical and structural trauma:** An enduring question, not least for the notion of trauma, is how to think the relation between the historical and the structural. Again, this is a question of the inorganic and organic, the machine and the event, or how to ‘think together the machine and the event, a machinelike repetition and what happens? What happens to what? To whom?’<sup>44</sup> How to think together the ‘who’ and the ‘what’ remains an intriguing question for Derrida.<sup>45</sup> In terms of the subject of trauma this would be the question of how to think the relation between the traumatic *historical* event as what happens to the individual as their particular experience, and – in terms of the individual as theorized by psychoanalysis – the *structural* trauma of events which mark the formation of the psyche.<sup>46</sup> The traumatic event would thus mark the entwining of the ‘who’ and the ‘what’, the particular and general. The body would suffer and be

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<sup>43</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). The French text: *Apprendre à vivre enfin: Entretien avec Jean Birnbaum* (Paris: Éditions Galilée/Le Monde, 2005), p.26.

<sup>44</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Typewriter Ribbon’, p.105.

<sup>45</sup> See his ‘improvised’ thoughts concerning love in: Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Koffmann (dir.), *Derrida* (Zeitgeist Films Ltd: 2003), ch.8.

<sup>46</sup> ‘The series of losses which mark and by which subjectivity is formed: birth, loss of the breast, castration and loss of the loved object, as well as the primal scene, and/or seduction.’ See: Griselda Pollock ‘Art/Trauma/Representation’ in: Mark Dawson (ed.), *Inscr(i/y)ptions, Parallax*, issue 50, vol.15, no.1 (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, January-March 2009), pp.40-54 (p.43).



marked by the experience of a *particular* traumatic event, but subjectivity as theorized by psychoanalysis would be a *general* structure, infinitely repeatable and thus retaining a certain mechanicity. The body which suffers and survives the ‘might’ of the future would, therefore, bear or endure a ‘machinelike repetition and what happens’.

**Chapter One** reads Chris Marker’s 1962 film *La Jetée*. Marker’s film concerns the story of a man who, as a child, witnesses a traumatic event. That event was his own murder, the trauma of which is both marked and deferred by the image of a woman seen moments before. From the film’s opening scene, then, this image haunts the man as the mark or wound of what remains to come (his death). Patrick Ffrench suggests that ‘[f]rom the start, [*La Jetée*’s] narrative programmes the death of the protagonist as the encounter with a memory in the form of an image which is as if inflicted upon him.’<sup>47</sup> Chapter One argues that the film also resists this pre-programmed future. In both its structure and its narrative, *La Jetée* suffers the mark of the future as what remains irreducible to a conventional narrative or plot, as well as conventional structures of film (*La Jetée* is constructed by filming ‘still’ images). Considering both its plot and its structure, this chapter suggests that *La Jetée* *experiences* the traumatic event as that which inscribes *and* exceeds it. Chapter One explores this ‘essential’ dimension of the film in terms of the paradoxical structure of the traumatic event as elaborated above. As the image of woman is a central theme of the film, indeed, that which marks it from the beginning, this chapter also explores the relation between the traumatic event and questions of sexual difference.

As *La Jetée* shares many aesthetic and thematic motifs with the work of Alfred Hitchcock, and in particular his film *Vertigo*, Chapter One’s consideration of *La Jetée* takes in Hitchcock’s film, and the critical readings of it, in order to suggest a certain ghostly incorporation of Marker and Hitchcock’s texts – each film in the other. This extension of each into the other is a recurring theme in this chapter, a structural motif which I develop by concentrating on a particular scene which occurs in both films: a scene involving the cross-section of a Sequoia tree. Reading Derrida’s comments on film, and his notion of a theoretical ‘jetty’, as well as his consideration of survival, or

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<sup>47</sup> Patrick Ffrench, ‘The Memory of the Image in Chris Marker’s *La Jetée*’ in: *French Studies*, vol. LIX, no. 1 (2005), pp. 31-77 (p.32).

living on, allows me to discuss these scenes as sites where the films are marked by what remains to come. Moreover, by referring to Tom Cohen's 'spectrographic' reading of Hitchcock in his two volume *Hitchcock's Cryptonymies*, I suggest the Sequoia scenes can be thought in terms of Hitchcockian 'signature effect', a mark which suffers or survives the *might* of the other, or the mark of an irreducible future. In turn, Chapter One reads an essential 'living on' or incorporation of the other to be the very condition of the *La Jetée*, as well as the possibility of reading it in terms of a trauma study.

Thinking the notion of the traumatic event in terms of a (textual) body marked by what remains 'to come', suggests the centrality of a certain imminence. **Chapter Two** reads the notion of imminence in terms of how the text inscribes the *promise* of what remains to come. It situates this in terms of a trauma study by considering the work of Roland Barthes, and more precisely, how his later work attempts to affirm what remains wholly other, without reducing that otherness to the platitudes of literary/critical theory and analysis. I focus on Barthes's late essay on Stendhal, a text overdetermined by the loss of Barthes's mother. In this essay Barthes describes the 'romanesque lie' of Stendhal's later novels, a lie 'which would be – miraculously – both the detour of truth and the finally triumphant expression of his Italian passion'.<sup>48</sup> I argue, therefore, that Barthes is describing how the novel manages to express or write (on) an event which remains to come, to happen, or to arrive as such. In order to figure this relation between expression and imminence, Chapter Two argues that Barthes takes up and re-reads the notion of the imaginary, and that it is through this re-reading of the imaginary that both Barthes's and Stendhal's writing can be thought of in terms of a trauma study. This chapter suggests that, in his re-reading of the imaginary, Barthes describes a position from which to await the otherness of the event without pre-programming its thinking or reception, a place from which what must remain imminent can also be expressed, or written (on).

A central term for Chapter Two is 'transference'. It might be useful, therefore, to give a brief resume of this enigmatic notion. Laplanche and Pontalis state that '[a]s a rule what psycho-analysts mean by the unqualified use of the term 'transference' is transference

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<sup>48</sup> Roland Barthes, 'One Always Fails in Speaking of What One Loves', from *The Rustle of Language* trans. Richard Howard, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1986), pp.296-305 (p.305); 'On échoue toujours à parler de ce qu'on aime', *Tel Quel*, no.85, automne 1980; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.V (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002), pp.906-914 (p.914).

during treatment.’<sup>49</sup> In psychoanalytic treatment the relation between analysand and analyst mirrors an earlier relation for the analysand and, through counter-transference, for the analyst. This occurs to such a degree that ‘infantile prototypes re-emerge and are experienced with a strong sense of immediacy.’<sup>50</sup> The analytic situation provokes the transference of unconscious affect from an earlier relationship to a current one. What it is important to note here is that transference also seems to be structured by a certain deferred action. In terms of how this thesis considers writing on, and the writing of, trauma, it is with transference that the ‘effects’ of what remains to come are reactivated, where a body inscribed by what returns from the future will suffer those essentially spectral returns. Transference, then, is an operation in which the body *experiences* what nevertheless remains wholly other. Chapter Two reads how Barthes follows Stendhal’s transference search for a loved and lost other in his relation to the figure of ‘Italy’, and how what began as a naïve search for the loved and lost object in his early travel journals, becomes a writing whose ‘triumphant’ expression of ‘Italian’ passion is structured by the return of what must nevertheless remain imminent.

Whilst Chapter Two focuses on the notion of imminence, *Chapter Three* reads Hélène Cixous’s *Le jour où je n’étais pas là* in order to consider the notion of *arrivance*. *Arrivance* is a term Derrida explores in *H.C. pour la vie, c’est à dire...*, a text which reads Cixous’s work. In this text Derrida refers to the way in which Cixous ‘makes/lets come’ the *arrivance* of the *arrivant*. Whilst the *arrivant* refers to the wholly other ‘to come’, Derrida uses *arrivance* to describe the coming of what remains ‘to come’; the tracing, expression and experience of what remains imminent. Reading *Totem and Taboo*, Derrida considers Freud’s fleeting reference to ‘animatism’ [*Belebtheit*], a pre-animistic general theory of life. Akin to the notion of *survivre*, Derrida reads *Belebtheit* as an originary ‘livingness’ which survives the opposition between life and death. It is as an affirmation of such a dimension that Derrida considers Cixous’s texts as having the power to make/let arrive – indeed, give life to – what remains irreducible to knowledge (I refer to this as a certain *arrivance*).

Derrida reads Cixous’s texts as the *experience* of an irreducible otherness, an excess of the text which, paradoxically, her writing makes/lets arrive. For him, Cixous’s writing

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<sup>49</sup> Jean Laplanche & Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, p.455.

<sup>50</sup> Jean Laplanche & Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, p.455.

*experiments* with this experience in the most intimate of analyses, to such an extent that what appears to be the most vivid of experiences is also the most serious of studies. With its reading of *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, then, Chapter Three considers the traumatic event in terms of a writing which is both its experience *and* its study. Derrida describes a certain power of Cixous's texts to effect such a paradoxical or aporetic manoeuvre. He reads her uncanny ability to make/let the other come as a certain 'might' or '*puisse*'. Though *passim* in this thesis, Chapter Three considers the notion of 'might' – as the force and potential of what remains to come – in most detail. In terms of a trauma study, this chapter suggests that *Le jour où je n'étais pas là* is the active/passive making/letting happen of the traumatic event, that this 'essentially' ambiguous 'might' makes what *might* arrive, arrive. I argue that this incalculable entwinement of activity and passivity means the text suffers and survives as the making/letting come of what remains 'to come'. It is with this essentially unstable structure that Cixous's text demonstrates how a trauma study must remain the possibility of the *im*-possible. Chapter Three concludes with the suggestion that the inscription of what remains to come, the making/letting arrive of what remains to arrive 'as such', or the *arrivance* of the *arrivant*, requires the might of a certain *feminine* writing, the irreducible power Cixous generates through what Derrida refers to as the 'writing of her language'.<sup>51</sup>

As experiments in the '*im*-possible', I will argue that the texts considered in this thesis are written both 'on and through trauma'. Traumatically unstable, both an experience and the study of what remains irreducible to them, such texts affirm a writing which survives the binaries of life/death, study/experience, and fiction/theory. Such an experimental writing would be marked or wounded by the *might* of the traumatic event. Inscribed, traced, or spectralized by what remains to come, these texts suffer, survive or live on as memories of the future. As Derrida's unconventional suggestion that all events as such are traumatic, this thesis alludes to a certain unconventional notion of suffering and survival. By demonstrating how suffering and survival – or living on – is effected through a 'body' which bears the *might* of what must remain a wholly unforeseeable future, this thesis will argue that because there could be no definitive status of the traumatic event, or a body which experiences it, the inscription of trauma –

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<sup>51</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, trans. Laurent Milesi and Stefan Herbrechter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp.66-7; *H. C. Pour la vie, c'est à dire...* (Paris : Éditions Galilée, 2002), p.61.

as the wound of what remains to come – is divided from the beginning. A trauma study must affirm this force and potentiality of and from the future, this essentially spectral dimension, ensuring that we could never be done with thinking, studying and experiencing the traumatic event. Chapter One begins by taking this essentially unstable platform as its point of departure.

## 1.

**LA JETÉE:**

## SUFFERING AND SURVIVAL... 'AVEC UN PEU DE VERTIGE'

It is for me a question, rather, of what remains to be thought, done, lived, suffered, with or without bliss, but *without alibi*, beyond even what could be called a horizon and a task, thus beyond what remains not only necessary but possible.

Jacques Derrida<sup>1</sup>

And it 'starts' only with living on.

Jacques Derrida<sup>2</sup>

In Chris Marker's short film *La Jetée*,<sup>3</sup> the word '*jetée*' is perhaps most clearly associated with the long corridors which house the arrival and departure gates at airports, as it is on the observation deck of one of these satellite arms that the film both begins and ends.<sup>4</sup> A '*jetée*' is the French word for what English speakers might call a 'jetty', or perhaps a 'pier'. Stemming from the Old French '*getee*', which refers to 'the action of throwing', a '*jetée*' or 'jetty' can mean a form of harbour defense, that which negotiates with the stronger currents of the water in order to protect a particularly vulnerable part of the bank. As a fortified extension to the bank, a 'jetty' is often used as a supplementary shore, a space which is both essential to and in excess of the shore; both part of the shore and no longer the shore. But a 'jetty' can also *precede* itself; synonymous with an 'outwork', 'starling' or 'mole', a 'jetty' can refer to the timber or stone which protects its main structure – a pier for the pier, so to speak.<sup>5</sup> A '*jetée*' or 'jetty', therefore, might both supplement the coast (as that which extends it whilst keeping it in reserve) *and* – as an 'outwork' – *precede* and *protect* the protection: a

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Psychoanalysis Searches the States of Its Soul: The Impossible Beyond of a Sovereign Cruelty', trans. Peggy Kamuf, in *Without Alibi*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp.238-280 (p.275); 'L'impossible au-delà d'une souveraine cruauté' in: René Major (ed), *États généraux de la psychanalyse, juillet 2000* (Paris: Aubier, 2003), pp.177-228 (p.222).

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Border Lines', trans. James Hulbert, in *Deconstruction and Criticism* (London: The Continuum Publishing Company, 2004 [1979]), pp.62-142 (pp.82-3); 'Journal de Bord', in *Parages* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1986), pp.117-218 (pp.148-49).

<sup>3</sup> Chris Marker (dir.), *La Jetée* (Argos Films: 1983 [1962]).

<sup>4</sup> 'JETÉE n. f. [...] 2. (1970) Couloir aménagé en superstructure reliant l'aérogare à un satellite ou à un poste de stationnement d'avion.' *Le Nouveau Petit Robert de la langue française 2009* (Paris: Le Robert, 2009), p.1388.

<sup>5</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary* online; accessed 16/01/2010.

supplement of the supplement. A 'jetty' would both defend and extend the shore, through a consolidation which is at the same time a projection. Extending into sea and shore, whilst defending each from the other, this supplementary construction would make precarious the border between the spaces it purports to keep apart, as well as the status of those very spaces.

In an essay which reads *La Jetée* in terms of 'the memory of the image', Patrick Ffrench suggests that Marker's film might be seen to take place

as if between the beginning and end of a single sentence; it begins: 'Ceci est l'histoire d'un homme marqué par une image d'enfance [*This is the story of a man, marked by an image from his childhood*]', and ends with what we might imagine as a subordinate clause of this sentence, 'cet instant qu'il lui avait été donné de voir enfant, et qui n'avait pas cessé de l'obséder, c'était celui de sa propre mort [*this moment he had been granted to watch as a child, which had never ceased to obsess him, was the moment of his own death*]'.<sup>6</sup>

Ffrench is referring to the protagonist of the film, a man who, as a child, witnesses his own death. The film opens with the scene of the child witnessing the murder, and closes with the man realising that this murder was his own. For the duration of the film then, the man is marked, wounded or traumatised by an image of what has both occurred and is yet to happen; he is marked by an event which he has experienced, and yet remains to come. With this in mind, there seems to be a conflicting structure to the film, one which we can describe in grammatical terms. On the one hand the word '*jetée*' marks an unstable, double platform, extending into what remains beyond it, whilst protecting itself from that beyond: the man has both experienced and is yet to experience his own death, which is also not his own as he witnesses it as the child. On the other hand we have the conventional sentence structure which neatly brackets the film, a relatively stable platform from which the film takes off and to which it returns. *La Jetée*, therefore, resembles both an *avant-garde*, with its aesthetically sensitive and organic surface the impression of an unforeseeable future, as well as the mechanical, and indeed, capitalist, economy of expenditure and return. Both organic originality and

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<sup>6</sup> Patrick Ffrench, 'The Memory of the Image in Chris Marker's *La Jetée*' in: *French Studies*, vol. LIX, no. 1, pp. 31-77 (p.32). For the English translation of the film's voiceover the reader is referred to: Chris Marker, *La Jetée, ciné-roman* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), page numbers unspecified.

inorganic repetition, the film marks the return of the non-desire (an inappropriate otherness) which haunts every desiring, intentional or experiencing body.<sup>7</sup>

This chapter argues that it is the impossibility of resolving these two contradictory structures which allows for the possibility of a certain study of trauma, the study of an event of which there is an impression, but of that which also remains to come. Following Jacques Derrida's suggestion that the event must remain 'traumatic' for it to be possible at all, this chapter will demonstrate how *La Jetée* suffers the traumatic event as the impression of what remains to come, and in turn how it survives or lives on as the possibility of the impossible. Moreover, by suggesting that the suffering and survival of what remains to come is the very condition of a trauma study, this chapter will demonstrate that a trauma study must itself resemble the possibility of the impossible.

### 1.1 *An art/science/séance of the spectral*

Haunted by an inappropriate otherness, *La Jetée* is marked by what has never been present. This would suggest a ghostly return, but because it would be the return of what has never been fully lived or experienced in the present, or a past present, such a return would always come from the future. Before reading Marker's film in more detail, it is necessary to outline some of the reasons why this thesis begins with a chapter considering film, or more precisely, why a particular approach to film might help elucidate the structures, logics or dimensions with which we must engage if we are to think *La Jetée* in terms of that which is haunted by the future.

Derrida refers to the particular relation between film and the ghost in Ken McMullen's film *Ghost Dance*; he suggests that cinema – 'when it's not boring' – is the 'art of ghosts, a battle of phantoms', that cinema concerns 'the art of allowing ghosts to come back [*un art de laissez revenir du fantôme*].'<sup>8</sup> What it is important to note here is that Derrida is talking about a general spectral dimension with which film has a particularly important engagement. Cinema does not produce the spectral as such, but allows what is *already* spectral to return. Indeed, though discussing the art of cinema Derrida is also talking about the ghost in general. When asked if he believes in ghosts, Derrida states

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<sup>7</sup> The reader is referred to the Introduction of this thesis for a discussion of what Derrida refers to as an 'abyssal attraction' between desire and non-desire, as well as a preliminary reading of some of the themes this chapter will elaborate upon.

<sup>8</sup> Ken McMullen (dir.), *Ghost Dance* (Channel Four Films: 1983).



that the interviewer – and by implication the film – is ‘asking a ghost whether he believes in ghosts’.<sup>9</sup> Self and other entwine here: Derrida has been asked to play ‘himself [*mon propre rôle*]’ in *Ghost Dance* (a film intended to be at least partly ‘improvised’). He must, therefore, *believe* he is speaking in his own voice. Yet it is with this attempt to *play* himself that a ghost – a certain other – returns:

Since I’ve been asked to play myself, in a film which is more or less improvised, I feel as if I’m letting a ghost speak for me. Curiously, instead of playing myself, without knowing it, I let a ghost ventriloquize my words, or play my role [...].<sup>10</sup>

In believing that he is playing ‘himself’, Derrida lets – without knowing it – the other speak for him. Thus it is difficult to answer a question which asks a ghost if he believes in ghosts, as in believing one is actually being oneself, one lets the other speak. For Derrida, an art of cinema would be one which engaged with this enigmatic question(ing) of the ghost.

Another way to think film’s particular relation to a general spectral dimension is discussed in Robert Smith’s essay on deconstruction and film. One of the questions Smith is concerned with is ‘what is a camera recording when it is recording something supposedly present?’<sup>11</sup> He suggests that

whether the present gets recorded or not, its recordability belongs to it, a state of affairs which puts the present into relation with itself in the ‘future’. This can only mean that the present is divided from itself: in order to relate

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<sup>9</sup> Ken McMullen (dir.), *Ghost Dance* (Channel Four Films: 1983).

<sup>10</sup> Ken McMullen (dir.), *Ghost Dance* (Channel Four Films: 1983). As Derrida states in the film, his reference to a certain ghost effect is indebted to the psychoanalytical work of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok. Following Freud, they suggest that a failed work of mourning results in the incorporation of the love object, a process in which the subject encrypts the other as a radical exteriority, and where, as Derrida suggests, the other ‘can speak for themselves’, where the other ventriloquizes the subject it haunts. Derrida reads this crypt effect in more detail in: Jacques Derrida, ‘FORS: Les mots angles de Nicolas Abraham et Maria Torok’ in: Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *Cryptonymie : Le Verbier de L’homme aux loups* (Paris : Editions Aubier Flammarion, 1976), pp.7-73. The English translation by Barbara Johnson: ‘Fors: The English Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok’ in: *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, trans. Nicholas Rand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp.xi-xlviii. For a selection of Abraham and Torok’s essays in English see: Nicholas T. Rand (ed.) *The Shell and the Kernel, vol. 1* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984). For further work on Abraham and Torok see: Mark Dawson (ed.), *Inscr(i/y)ptions, Parallax*, issue 50, vol.15, no.1 (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, January-March 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Robert Smith, ‘Deconstruction and Film’ in: Nicholas Royle (ed.), *Deconstructions: A User’s Guide* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp.119-36 (p.122).

to itself over 'time' or whatever this strange new medium is, there must be a break, division, space, time, fissure for the present to relate to itself across.<sup>12</sup>

Thus the 'so-called present fails to be entirely present to itself; it is both deferred from itself and divided from itself into a 'future'.<sup>13</sup> Film, then, could be that which reveals this crisis in the state of presence. Indeed, as Smith points out, the very condition of recordability is the fact that the present could never be present to itself:

The present recorded by film not only is not present, that is, not fully present to itself, but becomes recordable only if it isn't... The present has to be something other than itself for film to be possible; film depends upon the non-identity of the present with itself.<sup>14</sup>

Derrida has discussed this essential division of the present in an interview with Bernard Stiegler.<sup>15</sup> In the context of discussing the possibility of a 'live' interview, as well as a particular case of tampering with what appeared to be 'live', Derrida makes a more general statement about the possibility of the recorded image being conditioned by the impossibility of ever reducing the present to itself:

We see, here, how our present divides itself: the living present is itself divided. From now on, it bears death within itself and reinscribes in its own immediacy what ought as it were to survive it. It divides itself, in its life, between its life and its afterlife, without which there would be no image, no recording. There would be no archive without this dehiscence, without this divisibility of the living present, which bears its specter within itself. Specter, which is also to say, *phantasma*, ghost [*revenant*] or possible image of the image.<sup>16</sup>

At work here is the same logic Derrida discusses in *Ghost Dance*: in order to 'play itself', so to speak, the present must be divided from the beginning. Such an essential division is the condition of a belief in the present, in the live, or in the living. Being haunted or marked by itself as other, bearing the mark of its own death, is the very thing which makes a belief in the living present possible.

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Smith, 'Deconstruction and Film', p.122.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Smith, 'Deconstruction and Film', p.122.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Smith, 'Deconstruction and Film', p.122.

<sup>15</sup> Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*, trans. Jennifer Bajorek (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*, p.51.

Smith demonstrates the notion of an ‘essentially’ spectral present with a reading of the film *Jurassic Park*, a film which is already concerned with the return of what people believed were long dead, the dinosaurs. Smith suggests that should a camera have been invented early enough, the dinosaurs would have been filmed: ‘Had a camera been trained on them they could and would have been recorded.’<sup>17</sup> Yet by following the suggestion that a certain spectrality is the condition of the recordable, ‘the recordability of dinosaurs implies they were never *fully* present.’<sup>18</sup> Although ‘they ‘existed’ in a certain sense’, it is a sense which gives ‘no reassurance as to their presence’:

If they were recordable they were non-self-identical and already divided from themselves, deferring themselves anachronistically across time. In a sense they were already cloned. For all its innovativeness *Jurassic Park* merely tells a story instantiating what was already true. Anachronism belonged to the dinosaur in its own time – just as it belongs to every ‘present’ thing.<sup>19</sup>

Smith’s choice of words is telling here. He states that *Jurassic Park* ‘instantiates’ what is already true. As Derrida discusses in his text *Demeure*, to testify to an ‘instant’ is an act essentially divided from itself. To record or archive a singular instant, which is in a sense to testify to it in a wholly singular fashion, is at the same time to universalise that instant, to make that singular moment repeatable for others. In discussing the paradoxical structure of testimony, Derrida describes how:

The irreplaceable must allow itself to be replaced on the spot. In saying: I swear to tell the truth, where I have been the only one to see or hear and where I am the only one who can attest to it, this is true to the extent that anyone who *in my place*, at that instant, would have seen or heard or touched the same thing and could repeat exemplarily, universally, the truth of my testimony.<sup>20</sup>

Of course, this structure is also that of the camera, that which records or testifies to a singular moment in order to make it available for others through a potentially infinite repetition.

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<sup>17</sup> Robert Smith, ‘Deconstruction and Film’, p.131.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Smith, ‘Deconstruction and Film’, p.131.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Smith, ‘Deconstruction and Film’, p.131.

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p.41.

Returning to Smith's argument, what 'belongs' to the dinosaurs, what is proper to them (the present as their 'own' time), or even the belief in this present and/or what is proper to it, is divided by its very instantiation. Hence it is impossible to say for definite that the dinosaurs were 'already cloned', and thus that '[f]or all its innovativeness *Jurassic Park* merely tells a story instantiating what was already true', as this 'merely' is our only possible encounter with this supposedly pre-filmic truth. The belief in the present demands as its condition that the present is haunted by what it is not, thus the other might always speak in place of the one who believes themselves present. Although this haunting is a general dimension, a spectrality as the condition for thinking or believing in the present, *Jurassic Park* is here the *particular* engagement with this general dimension *as that which makes it possible*. There is no access to a general spectral dimension without a particular engagement with it, and there is no general spectral dimension – as a universal truth – which pre-exists this particular engagement. As its art or technique, the particular and universal are irreducibly entwined in the film. Thus the 'merely' with which Smith describes *Jurassic Park* actually signifies the particular *art* of cinema as an *art* of the spectral, the very art which *produces* the '[a]nchronism [which Smith claims] *belonged* to the dinosaur in its *own* time – just as it *belongs* to every 'present' thing.'<sup>21</sup>

The art of cinema also suggests a curious interaction between what is considered conscious and unconscious; the spectrality of cinema means that it is impossible to be certain of what is conscious or unconscious at any particular moment. When one consciously believes they are playing themselves, they are also letting a certain unconscious other speak. Similarly, when a moment or scene seems to be concerned entirely with the present, there is also the possibility that at that moment the other has returned in its place. Cinema is an art which engages with this spectral dimension, a medium which allows the potential return of our *unconscious* ghosts. Such a return of the unconscious suggests a particular relation between film and psychoanalysis, a relation which Derrida describes in *Ghost Dance*:

All this, it seems to me, has to do with an exchange between the art of cinema, in its most original, unedited form [*plus inouï, plus inédit*], and an

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Smith, 'Deconstruction and Film', p.131 [my emphasis].

aspect of psychoanalysis [*quelque chose du psychanalyse*]. Cinema plus psychoanalysis equals the Science of Ghosts.<sup>22</sup>

At its most extraordinary, incredible, unheard-of, original level [*plus inouï, plus inédit*], an art of cinema forms an ‘exchange’ with an ‘aspect’ or ‘something’ [*quelque chose*] of psychoanalysis, an exchange which results in a ‘Science of Ghosts’. Derrida’s suggestion is enigmatic on several levels. Rather than the simple addition of cinema and psychoanalysis, this is an exchange between an ‘original’ dimension of cinema and a certain ‘something’ of psychoanalysis. It is as though Derrida is trying to leave space for that ‘something’ to return to his calculation, and, similarly, that an art of cinema would also leave space for that ‘something’, a ‘something’ which cannot be calculated, but which remains part of the equation. Moreover, in French the word ‘*science*’ is almost homophonic with ‘*séance*’. When Derrida talks of a ‘Science of Ghosts’, then, he also conjures a ghostly *séance*, a meeting or session of ghosts, or a performance *by* ghosts. As art, science and *séance*, an extraordinary and original dimension of cinema, and a certain ‘something’ of psychoanalysis, irreducibly intertwine here.

The enigmatic ‘something’ of psychoanalysis to which Derrida alludes might be read in terms of the very ‘thing’ psychoanalysis itself attempts to engage: the concept, or logic, of the unconscious. The ‘something’ which Derrida cannot name here, but which forms an exchange with an art of cinema, might be the unconscious *of* psychoanalysis, that indefinite ‘something’ of psychoanalysis which is marked in its interruption of the world, but which remains enigmatic. Derrida talks about the necessity – and paradox – of remembering what is perhaps irreducible to memory in ‘Let us not Forget – Psychoanalysis’, a brief text given as an introduction to a paper by René Major at a conference in 1988. In this text – again, something largely improvised – Derrida talks of psychoanalysis in terms of a trauma which interrupted philosophical discourse in the 60s and 70s, a time when psychoanalysis was ‘in fashion’, ‘when it had pushed philosophy far away from the centre, obliging philosophical discourse to reckon with a logic of the unconscious, at the risk of allowing its most basic certainties to be dislodged, at the risk of suffering the expropriation of its ground, its axioms, its norms and its language.’<sup>23</sup> In this sense psychoanalysis was a traumatic event which happened

<sup>22</sup> Ken McMullen (dir.), *Ghost Dance* (Channel Four Films: 1983).

<sup>23</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Let us not Forget – Psychoanalysis’, p.4.

to philosophical discourse, and which shook the supposedly secure reason upon which most of it was based – in a sense psychoanalysis made philosophy suffer.

In ‘Let us not Forget – Psychoanalysis’ Derrida is concerned with a certain climate of philosophy, one which supposes the traumatic interruption of psychoanalysis has been survived, where ‘people are starting to behave as though it was nothing at all, as though nothing had happened, as though taking into account the event of psychoanalysis, a logic of the unconscious, of “unconscious concepts”, even, were no longer *de rigueur*.’<sup>24</sup> He is concerned that there has been a restoration of reason, and of the ‘authority of consciousness, of the ego, of the reflexive cogito, of an ‘I think’ without pain or paradox.’<sup>25</sup> Moreover, such a restoration might also suggest it is legitimate to ‘accuse of obscurity or irrationalism anyone who complicates things a little by wondering about the reason of reason, about the history of the principle of reason or about the event – perhaps a traumatic one – constituted by something like psychoanalysis in reason’s relation to itself.’<sup>26</sup> Derrida is concerned that the current intellectual climate might believe the event of psychoanalysis, a certain traumatic aspect of psychoanalysis, has been survived and/or worked through.

With this in mind, might it be possible to think of that ‘something’ of psychoanalysis, that aspect of psychoanalysis which Derrida suggests forms an exchange with an art of cinema, as the very trauma psychoanalysis introduces to thinking, an unconscious aspect – or ‘something’ – of psychoanalysis which cannot be reduced to reason, even if that reason takes the form of ‘normal’ psychoanalytical theory? Thus a particular art/science/séance of ghosts – as an art/science/séance of cinema – negotiates with a ‘logic of the unconscious’. Cinema would here form an exchange with a traumatic and unconscious ‘aspect’ of psychoanalysis as an event which has occurred to thinking, but which remains to be thought or worked through. It might be possible, therefore, to think of ‘film’ as a particular exchange between cinema and psychoanalysis, whilst remaining reducible to neither. Film might thus resemble an art/science/séance of ghosts which allows the return of – or ‘lives on’ with – what remains in excess of it.

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<sup>24</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Let us not Forget – Psychoanalysis’, p.4.

<sup>25</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Let us not Forget – Psychoanalysis’, p.4.

<sup>26</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Let us not Forget – Psychoanalysis’, p.4.

### 1.2 A 'theoretical jetty'

Film might be a place at which reason is made to suffer, but this would be an unconventional suffering, one which occurs at a basic but extraordinary dimension, a dimension which bears or lives on with the traumatic event, the unconscious, or the other as that which is *allowed* to return. Film is thus a highly unstable platform from which to begin any kind of thesis or study. Neither psychoanalysis nor cinema 'as such', but an exchange between aspects of both, film is marked by the 'might' of the future, an impression of the force and potential of an other which is allowed to return *as that which* remains divided, and thus also to come. How might we describe this essentially spectral place, this place reducible to no place in particular? Well, perhaps as a 'jetty'.

In an essay given at a conference aimed at addressing the 'state' or 'states' of 'theory', particularly in relation to theory's place in the North American University, Derrida uses the word 'jetty' whilst referring to a general 'state' of theory: a wholly inappropriable 'field of forces' comprising 'libidinal forces, political-institutional or historical-socioeconomic forces, or concurrent forces of desire and power.'<sup>27</sup> In this field – or perhaps 'sea' of uncountable plural forces, Derrida suggests that not only is a 'state' of theory impossible to determine 'as such', but also that a table or taxonomy of the 'states' of theory is equally impossible. For him, there are only 'theoretical jetties', where the word 'jetty' would refer 'to the *force* of that *movement* which is not yet *subject*, *project*, or *object*, not even rejection, but in which takes place any production and any determination, which finds its possibility in the jetty – whether that production or determination be related to the subject, the object, the project, or the rejection.'<sup>28</sup> With the use of this word, Derrida allows us to think of a wholly – and necessarily – unstable notion of theory as that which is reducible to neither subject, project or object, but in which the productions and determinations which are related to such terms 'find their possibility'. I want to think of a 'trauma study' in terms of a 'theoretical jetty', with film (as an art/science/séance of ghosts), and in particular *La Jetée*, providing a particularly relevant example. Of course, this also suggests that a 'theoretical jetty' is

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<sup>27</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Some Statements and Truisms about Neologisms, Newisms, Postisms, Parasitisms, and Other Small Seismisms', trans. Anne Tomiche in: David Carroll (ed.), *The States of 'Theory': History, Art, and Critical Discourse* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp.63-94 (p.65). In this essay Derrida works on a certain confusion between a singular 'state', and plural 'states', of theory. Both terms might conjure notions of a *thetic* or geographical placing of the term, as well as the particularly unstable manifestation of 'theory' in the United 'States'.

<sup>28</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Some Statements and Truisms', p.65.

not confined to its more recognisable manifestations, as movements, schools or disciplines within the university for example.

For Derrida, a ‘theoretical jetty’ is ‘*a priori*, originally, in conflict and competition.’<sup>29</sup>

This is not ‘an *antagonistic* confrontation’ however, ‘for two correlative reasons’:

The first reason is that each *jetty*, far from being the part included in the whole, is only a theoretical jetty inasmuch as it claims to comprehend itself by comprehending all the others – by extending beyond their borders, exceeding them, inscribing them within itself. Each jetty is structured, constructed, designed in order to explain and account for all the other jetties (past, contemporary, and yet to come). And no jetty could escape from such a constitutive claim without ceasing to be what it is. This claim *is* the jetty, what the jetty is interested in and what makes it interesting [...]

The second reason, which is actually closely related to the first – why the competition cannot be a mere antagonistic confrontation and doesn’t allow any jetty to give rise to the reading of a table which would classify the totality of the theoretical potentialities – this second reason is that each species in this table constitutes its identity only by incorporating other identities – by contamination, parasitism, grafts, organ transplants, incorporation, etc...<sup>30</sup>

The jetty ‘is’ that which is designed to explain and account for all others, for every other theoretical jetty. And it *has* to make this claim in order to ‘be’ itself. At the same time the jetty ‘is’ itself *only because* it incorporates the others. It is possible to think this essentially paradoxical structure in terms of film; a film can only comprehend itself by comprehending all the others, it must affirm and account for all the others in order to circumscribe itself. In order to do this, however, the film must incorporate all the others, it must ‘inscrib[e] them within itself’; thus it must be haunted by all the others *as itself*, it is itself only because it incorporates the others as *its* ghosts. There is a certain suffering or living on here; the film – as a jetty – survives by bearing the mark or wound of the other. The film-jetty is itself *because* it is also the space where the other *might* return.

Derrida describes the paradoxical structure of the jetty as follows:

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<sup>29</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Some Statements and Truisms’, p.65.

<sup>30</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Some Statements and Truisms’, pp.65-66.



[...] each jetty is not both a part and the whole, a part for the whole, synecdoche and metonymy, indeed a part larger than the whole, but a jetty whose momentum, movement, and structure, both internal and internalizing, takes it beyond the whole and folds it back on the whole to comprehend it and speak before it. Consequently, each jetty claims to extend beyond the borders of the entire state and to reflect it, by means of a fold.<sup>31</sup>

The movement of each jetty takes it beyond the ‘state’ or status quo in order to ‘speak before it’; each jetty goes out beyond the whole in order to come before it, surpassing the whole *and* preceding it. This description of the jetty’s structure can be read in relation to *La Jetée*. As noted above, Marker’s text can be itself, return to itself (literally being bracketed ‘between the beginning and end of a single sentence’<sup>32</sup>), only because it extends beyond itself, because it surpasses itself (an extension grammatically performed by the word ‘jetty’, which can surpass itself – as ‘mole’ or ‘starling’ – in order to protect itself). Extending beyond itself in order to incorporate or inscribe the other *as itself*, the paradoxical structure of the jetty can be read on at least three levels in *La Jetée*: 1) the film’s historical and cultural context, 2) its structure/composition, 3) the plot/character of the film. As the very structure of the jetty defies the neat separation of these levels, however, the reader should note that each of these levels extends into and incorporates all the others.

### 1.3 *La Jetée* as ‘theoretical jetty’

Produced in 1962, *La Jetée* bears the impression of several historical events, as well as the possibility that the worst remains to come. As Catherine Lupton suggests, Marker’s text – set in a post-apocalyptic Paris – condenses many residual anxieties concerning contemporary France:

The atmosphere and uncertainty that accompanied the ending of the Algerian War, combined with outraged awareness of the use of torture by the French authorities during that conflict (any mention of which was rigorously censored in the French media until hostilities ceased), mingled in *La Jetée* with the memory of the Nazi concentration camps and the hovering threat of nuclear annihilation, which was to crystallize during the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Some Statements and Truisms’, p.67.

<sup>32</sup> Patrick Ffrench, ‘The Memory of the Image in Chris Marker’s *La Jetée*’, p.32.

<sup>33</sup> Catherine Lupton, *Chris Marker: Memories of the Future* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2005), p.88.

*La Jetée* is marked by a traumatic past, as well as an anxiety concerning the future; Cold War paranoid anticipation figured through an allusion to the Nazi concentration camps, an overdetermination which is in turn informed by the Algerian War. Recalling Derrida's reading of the traumatic event, *La Jetée* bears the marks or wounds of events which have happened, but remain to come, as well as the possibility that what remains to come might be 'the worst'. For Ffrench, *La Jetée*

carries a meaning or has a memory which relates profoundly to that historical moment [of 1962] and to the wider history of the twentieth century. To this extent *La Jetée*, Marker's sole fiction film, is much closer to the documentary than to fiction, and causes the structure of fiction to tremble through the interruption of the image as a vehicle of a historical memory.<sup>34</sup>

The notion that Marker's film 'carries' a meaning or memory which causes 'the structure of fiction to tremble', suggests that it is the image which wounds the film, a wound that the film then bears, even though it disrupts or renders its fictional status precarious. Indeed, the film's composition is central here: constructed by the filming of still images, it is as if the still interrupts the traditional movement of film, the result being a weave of still movement, or moving stillness. The still image, then, can be seen to interrupt the film itself, rendering a traditional structure of cinematic narrative precarious, as well as the border between fiction and documentary. Following Ffrench, the image has a historical memory that interrupts fiction, and yet the film is comprised solely of still images; we might thus reverse Ffrench's claim and suggest that the film extends beyond its fictional status into a non-fictional beyond, only to incorporate that non-fiction at the very heart of fiction.

The film takes place in a post-apocalyptic Paris, a historical/fictional Paris figured through events which have been experienced but not thought through, as well as the *might* of those which may be forecasted, but could never be calculated in advance. We are provided, therefore, with the *impression* of a disaster, the impression of a certain survival of the past *as* a projection of and into the future. *La Jetée*'s plot mirrors this

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<sup>34</sup> Patrick Ffrench, 'The Memory of the Image in Chris Marker's *La Jetée*', p.32. Ffrench is taking up Georges Didi-Huberman's work on Aby Warburg here, referring to Didi-Huberman's 'thesis which suggests that historicity or memory is inscribed in the image in complex ways for which standard modes of art-historical enquiry fail to account' (p.33). See: Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'Image Survivante: Histoire de l'art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2002).

complex condensation of past and future; survivors of what appears to have been a third world war now live underground, this is due to the pollution and desolation of what appears to be nuclear fallout. Out of the survivors, those who ‘believed themselves’ victors conduct time-travel experiments on those they have designated as prisoners.<sup>35</sup> The aim of these experiments is to find someone who is able to travel to a past or future and find the necessary resources for the recovery of the world: ‘food, medicine, sources of energy’. The plan, therefore, is to ‘summon the Past and Future to the aid of the Present’. For the victors/experimenters, time is ‘the only hope for survival’. Space is at this point ‘off-limits’ [*fermé*].

For the victors/experimenters, the future lies solely in the ability to appropriate another time, in the ability to determine the past or future to such an extent that a prisoner can be sent there in order to locate the resources for the future. This is a world in which space has been forsaken; above ground is off-limits, and those underground are confined to a claustrophobic warren of tunnels and bunkers. Yet as the key to the success of time-travel lies in finding ‘men given to very strong mental images’ – the assumption that if these ‘men’ were able to ‘conceive or to dream another time, perhaps they would be able to live in it’ – there remains a necessity for figuration, for the tracing – and therefore *spatio*-temporalization – not only of another time, but of time as other (as space). It would seem, therefore, that the victors/experimenters must send someone beyond time and beyond the present – into a non-specific spatial dimension – in order to survive *in* the present. The very possibility of the present – as a ‘now’ where space is ‘off-limits’ – is conditioned by the ability to extend beyond that present, and to inscribe another dimension – space as other – within itself. The ability to render a dimension beyond the present remains, therefore, vital to the experimenters’ project, and vital to the possibility of time-travel as the possibility of the future. To put this in terms of Derrida’s ‘theoretical jetty’, the experimenters’ *project* of determining the future is conditioned by the essentially unstable structure of the jetty, the ‘*force* of that *movement*

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<sup>35</sup> These scenes were filmed in a network of tunnels under the Palais de Chaillot which, as Ffrench points out, ‘hid a Resistance *reseau* [network] during the Occupation’: Patrick Ffrench, ‘The Memory of the Image in Chris Marker’s *La Jetée*’, p.36. The appropriation of this space of (the) Resistance by apparently German speaking prison guards in *La Jetée* again points to the incorporation of non-fiction at the heart of by Marker’s film.

which is not yet *subject*, *project*, or *object*, not even rejection, but in which takes place any production and any determination, which finds its possibility in the jetty'.<sup>36</sup>

In order to find someone capable of time-travel, the prisoners' dreams are spied upon, and a man who seems particularly attached to a certain dream is selected for further tests. This man is experimented upon day after day, and soon 'images begin to ooze, like confessions'. One of these images – an image of a woman's face – appears to have made a particularly strong impression on the man, and as he will come to realise, the enigmatic effect of this image is due to its relation to the traumatic event which he witnessed as a child. It is with this event that the film begins and ends, opening and closing scenes which are set on the observation deck at Orly airport (*'la grande jetée d'Orly'*). Here a child witnesses the murder of a man, a man who the child will come realise is himself, the man upon whom the experimenters are now working. The significance of the woman's image comes from the fact that, in the moments just before his witnessing of the murder, the child registers a woman standing nearby; thus an image of her face becomes a 'screen-memory' of the traumatic event.<sup>37</sup>

The image of the woman both masks and represents a 'madness to come': 'the sudden roar, the woman's gesture, the crumpling body, and the cries of the crowd on the pier blurred by fear.'<sup>38</sup> The horror of this event inflects the image of the woman with a particular '*might*', both the affective *force* of the murder and – as the image also defers that event – its *potential* as that which is yet to come. The prisoner, therefore, becomes obsessed with her image as it both translates and defers an event he is yet to comprehend: '*il ne devait comprendre que beaucoup plus tard la signification.*'<sup>39</sup> The prisoner's vivid dreams are an attempt, therefore, to gain knowledge of that traumatic

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<sup>36</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Some Statements and Truisms', p.65.

<sup>37</sup> 'A childhood memory characterised by both its unusual sharpness and by the apparent insignificance of its content. The analysis of such memories leads back to indelible childhood experiences and to unconscious phantasies. Like the symptom, the screen memory is a formation produced by a compromise between repressed elements and defence.' Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (London: Karnac Books, 2006), pp.410-11. Freud suggests three modalities of a screen-memory: 'retrogressive', 'displaced forward', and 'contemporary or contiguous'; the scene from *La Jetée* demonstrates the latter. See: Sigmund Freud, 'Childhood Memories and Screen Memories', *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, [1901], *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. VI (London: Vintage, 2001), pp.43-52. In terms of the screen-memory as a detail which marks the feminine for Freud, see: Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York: Methuen, 1987), pp.71-78.

<sup>38</sup> Chris Marker, *La Jetée, ciné-roman*, page number unspecified.

<sup>39</sup> Chris Marker, *La Jetée, ciné-roman*, page number unspecified.

event, to reconnect the image with the event which it marks, to finally understand the ‘madness’ which came after his registering of the woman. The traumatic event, and its screening by the image of the woman, thus begins ‘the story of a man, marked by an image from his childhood’.<sup>40</sup>

The man bears, or is wounded by, the impression of what remains to come; by bearing this wound he suffers or lives on with the *might* of the future. Moreover, it is through the strength of this image/wound that the victors find a prisoner capable of surviving the movement beyond the present; thus the man’s personal suffering is mirrored by that of what remains of humanity; with their experiments, the victors amplify this man’s suffering in order to find an energy source, an energy source which would secure the present by determining the future.<sup>41</sup> As experiments continue to be carried out on the prisoner, he finds himself recalling more and more images. As these impressions become stronger, he begins to assume the ability to travel through time, and to return to the period in which he first saw the woman: ‘A peacetime bedroom, a real bedroom. Real children. Real Birds. Real cats. Real graves. On the sixteenth day he is on the pier at Orly. Empty.’<sup>42</sup> This pier situates the event which has marked him since childhood. As an adult, the intense strength of that event, combined with the threat of his current surroundings, has triggered an attempt to reconnect with it. Moreover, as the image with which he is marked allows the return of that event, the man mirrors film in the sense of Derrida’s art/science/séance of ghosts, that is, he becomes a site which allows ghosts to return. It is with this return – both his to the pier and that of the event to him – that the prisoner begins his attempt to locate the woman of whose image he dreams; an attempt to understand the *might* with which that image is laden.

As he has now gained the capacity for time-travel, the experimenters send the prisoner into the future. Encountering a future humanoid race, the prisoner argues that ‘because humanity had survived, [this people of the future] could not refuse to its own past the means of its survival.’<sup>43</sup> His argument, or what the film describes as ‘sophistry in disguise’, is successful, and the prisoner returns with a power source capable of

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<sup>40</sup> Chris Marker, *La Jetée, ciné-roman*, page number unspecified.

<sup>41</sup> There is obviously a further reading to be made here concerning the battle to appropriate oil and gas supplies in order to secure the future. Unfortunately to address this argument here would be beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>42</sup> Chris Marker, *La Jetée, ciné-roman*, page number unspecified.

<sup>43</sup> Chris Marker, *La Jetée, ciné-roman*, page number unspecified.

restarting ‘human industry’. With his mission complete, the prisoner is certain he will be killed, yet, whilst waiting for this to happen, with ‘somewhere inside him, the memory of a twice-lived fragment of time’, the prisoner is himself visited by representatives from the future, people who offer to take him to the safety of that future:

They too travelled through Time, and more easily. Now they were there, ready to accept him as one of them. But he had a different request: rather than this pacified Future, he yearned for the world of his childhood, and this woman who perhaps was waiting for him.<sup>44</sup>

The man is granted his request; the people from the future allow him to return to the pier at Orly in an attempt to understand once and for all the image with which he is obsessed.

Again the man finds himself on the pier at Orly, and this time, at the end of it, he sees the woman whose image he has become obsessed with. He also senses a certain trembling, however, and ‘*avec un peu de vertige*’, has the uncanny feeling that it is at this moment that he might also encounter himself as a child, that he might be confronted by his self as other. Undeterred, he runs towards the woman, but as he does, he realises that one of the experimenters has followed him through time – and that this man is about to kill him:

Once again on the main pier at Orly, in the middle of this warm pre-war Sunday afternoon where he could now stay, he thought in a confused way [*avec un peu de vertige*] that the child he had been was due to be there too, watching the planes. But first of all he looked for the woman’s face, at the end of the pier. He ran toward her. And when he recognized the man who had trailed him since the underground camp, he understood there was no way to escape Time, and he knew that this moment he had been granted to watch as a child, which had never ceased to obsess him, was the moment of his own [*propre*] death.<sup>45</sup>

With this scene the film ends, at the moment it began, at the moment the man experiences the death he is *at the same time* witnessing as a boy.

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<sup>44</sup> Chris Marker, *La Jetée, ciné-roman*, page number unspecified.

<sup>45</sup> Chris Marker, *La Jetée, ciné-roman*, page number unspecified.

At his death the man understands the significance of the image he was marked with as a child, that the image of the woman marked and deferred the event of his own death. Yet it is also here that the film assumes its curious logic: it is only because the man *survives* his own death – that he witnesses it as a boy, and therefore that such a death cannot be ‘proper’ to him – that he can assume his own death at all. Again, we can think of this paradoxical structure as the structure of Derrida’s notion of the ‘jetty’: the man can only assume his own death by surviving or extending beyond that death in order to ‘speak before it’/*witness* it as the child. In order to assume both the man’s and plot’s destiny as their own death/end, both the man and the plot must survive themselves by extending into the other in order to enfold or incorporate that other as their very condition. Moreover, as the scene at Orly opens the film, this paradoxical structure is the place where the film ‘finds its possibility’, the possibility that it might return to where it began or come back to itself as itself. Of course, such an end, as a state, status or stasis, could never be assumed by the film or the man, because the final scene at Orly stages the event which triggers its beginning. The final scene, in order to be the final scene, must incorporate the first scene, and vice versa. In this ‘essentially’ doubled – or spectral – scene the man both dies, and, as boy, witnesses that death and lives on.<sup>46</sup>

#### 1.4 *Surviving life and death*

Derrida works on the notion of ‘*survivre*’ in an interview with *Le Monde* from 2005.<sup>47</sup> In this interview Derrida gives a particularly pertinent description of how a dimension of living on aligns an ‘essential’ force or movement of the text with the work of mourning:

I have always been interested in this theme of survival [*la survie*], the meaning of which is not to be added on to living and dying. It is originary: life is living on, life is survival [*la vie est survie*]. To survive in the usual sense of the term means to continue to live, but also to live after death. Concerning translation [*A propos de la traduction*; translation modified], [Walter] Benjamin emphasizes the distinction between *überleben*, on the

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<sup>46</sup> Of course, an ‘essential’ spectrality is a paradoxical phrase. The word ‘essence’ refers to ‘being’ as a property of the thing; ‘being’ as that which gives a thing its ‘essence’. An ‘essential’ spectrality, therefore, would make precarious the notions of being and having upon which the essential depended. If what ‘is’ is neither alive nor dead, neither present nor absent, it is impossible to say once and for all what is proper or ‘essential’ to that thing. For more on how the thesis will approach spectrality, the reader is referred to the Introduction of this thesis.

<sup>47</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). The French text: *Apprendre à vivre enfin: Entretien avec Jean Birnbaum* (Paris: Éditions Galilée/Le Monde, 2005).

one hand, surviving death, like a book that survives the death of its author, or a child that survives the death of his or her parents, and on the other, *fortleben*, living on [in English in the French text], continuing to live. All the concepts that have helped me in my work, and notably that of the trace or of the spectral, were related to this “surviving” [*survivre*] as a structural and rigorously original dimension. It is not derived from either living or dying [*Elle ne dérive ni du vivre ni du mourir*]. No more than what I call “originary mourning”, that is, a mourning that does not wait for the so-called “actual” [*effective*] death.<sup>48</sup>

Referencing Benjamin’s ‘The Task of the Translator’<sup>49</sup>, Derrida suggests that the usual sense of *survivre* is aligned with *überleben*, a survival which implies a living on *after* someone or something has been lost (here, the death of a text’s author, or the loss of someone’s parents). This definition requires a clear and determined concept of ‘after’; of a life which resumes. In contrast, living on is an ‘originary mourning’, a ‘structural’ dimension which derives from neither life nor death. Unlike a traditional notion of mourning, *survivre* does not come *after* death, but instead always-already bears it as the other. Resembling an ‘originary mourning’, ‘living on’ would not ‘wait for the so-called “actual” death’; rather, it would survive death *from the beginning*. Living on is – as an originary structure – irreducible to neither life nor death; it cannot be considered to come either before or after those concepts, but rather as that place of possibility from which any attempt to think those concepts would be derived.

Derrida works on ‘*survivre*’ in more detail in ‘Living On – Border Lines’<sup>50</sup>, here he considers the term in relation to the (im)possibility of translation. ‘Living On – Border Lines’ are in fact two texts running alongside each other – with ‘Living On’ sitting above ‘Border Lines’ [in French: ‘Journal de Bord’ – a kind of ship’s journal or log]. Taking up approximately the bottom fifth of the page, Derrida suggests that ‘Border Lines’ could be seen as, amongst other things, an extended translator’s note, a note considering the problems of how one might translate the text into English. Of course, the word ‘translation’ conjures several associations; as well as referring to the task of the translator – the representation of a text in another language (a description already problematic enough) – it also functions in the more general sense: that of the movement

<sup>48</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally*, p.26.

<sup>49</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘The Task of the Translator’, trans Harry Zorn in: Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp.70-82.

<sup>50</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Living On – Border Lines’, trans. James Hulbert, in *Deconstruction and Criticism* (London: The Continuum Publishing Company, 2004 [1979]), pp.62-142; *Parages* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1986), pp.117-218 (pp.148-49).



of effect/force/energy from one spatio-temporal position to another – in the sense of a dynamics, an economy, or a topography. Translation can also be thought of as an archival technique, the *recording* of a text in another language; we might say, therefore, that translation is an impression of the ‘original’ textual event, a marking of that event which it both experiences and defers. A translation, therefore, might also come *before* the ‘original’, that which extends into the ‘original’ in order to ‘speak before’ it, a body which bears the mark of that ‘original’ as what *might* remain untranslatable.<sup>51</sup>

‘Border Lines’ works on the notion of *survivre*, a term which is essential to the reading of *La Jetée* attempted in this chapter, as well as to this thesis in general. Derrida describes *survivre* in its relation to translation, but also as a fundamental dimension of the text, the very *condition* of its survival; he describes it here where the border between the translatable and untranslatable is made precarious:

A text lives only if it lives *on* [*sur-vit*], and it lives *on* only if it is *at once* translatable *and* untranslatable (always ‘at once...and...’: *ama*, at the ‘same’ time). Totally translatable, it disappears as a text, as writing, as a body of language [*corps de langue*]. Totally untranslatable, even within what is believed to be one language, it dies immediately. This triumphant translation is neither the life nor the death of the text, only or already its living *on* [*sa survie*] [...] The same thing will be said of what I call writing, mark, trace, and so on. It neither lives nor dies; it lives *on*. And it ‘starts’ only with living on [...].<sup>52</sup>

As the text/trace/mark ‘starts only with living on’, living on or *survivre* is a quasi-originary dimension, ‘quasi’ because it ‘lives on’ from the beginning, and therefore that this originary dimension must survive something which exceeds, or came before it. *Survivre* refers, then, to an ‘essentially’ spectral dimension, a dimension in which what ‘lives on’ must extend into or incorporate the other (here this other would be death) in order to ‘be itself’. What ‘lives on’, therefore, does so only because it survives its own death, a death which haunts it *from the beginning*. For Derrida, a text ‘lives’ only if it always-already survives any clear division between life and death. If the notion of *survivre* is to be aligned with the notion of an ‘after-life’ (as the ‘*sur*’ of ‘*survivre*’

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<sup>51</sup> Translation is a concept deeply embedded in religious thought, for example in the movement between earth and heaven, and therefore in the relation between life and death. That this movement can also be thought of in terms of transference recalls an association to psychoanalysis that is not unimportant. I refer to transference in relation to a certain religious promise in Chapter Two.

<sup>52</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Border Lines’, pp.82-3; ‘Journal de Bord’, pp.147-9.

might suggest), it would defy a certain temporal ossification of the ‘past’ – a past present – which an ‘after’ might presume, and allude to a certain notion of futurity which questions on the nature of the ‘hereafter’ might demand (whilst desisting from reducing this futurity to the certainty of a determinable eschatology; that is, in determining an after-life as the *telos* of a heaven or a hell). Although temporality, eschatology and resurrection remain at stake in the notion of *survivre*, they remain notions *to be thought* in relation to living on, a living on which, if it is to be thought of as life, must always-already extend into and incorporate its other – death. This demonstrates the spectrality of *survivre*, a textual dimension which demands that a certain (im)possibility of translation is both conditioned by, and the condition of, the text. As what could be thought of as the essentially unstable status of the text, such spectrality, or ‘living on’ [*survivre*], determines that a text is *at once* both translatable *and* untranslatable.

Derrida describes the movement of the text as that which lives on; if living on is spectral here, it is not because the text is written in an economy of life and death as opposing concepts, but because spectrality would be its ‘essential’ or quasi-originary structure. The text ‘lives’ as a movement of hyper/beyond/over-living – a ‘*sur*’-living. Such ‘life’ cannot be reduced to pure presence; rather, ‘living on’ would figure an *apparition* of life which, in order to appear alive, must also incorporate death.<sup>53</sup> For Derrida, if a text were *totally* translatable or *totally* untranslatable, it would not be a text. Totally translatable or untranslatable, a text would manifest only itself, perfectly and without remainder. Without its other, it would be completely imperceptible to anything or anyone, including itself. Total translatability would mean the complete absence of text, of itself as a ‘*body* of language’. Total untranslatability would result in a similar impossibility: ‘being’ totally untranslatable (a *pure* singularity or idiom) would in fact ‘be’ its impossibility to exist at all, the impossibility of it figuring itself. A totally untranslatable text would immediately die, or rather, never live long enough to exist. Indeed, to even *imagine* itself as untranslatable – to *figure* itself as existing in a single

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<sup>53</sup> It is interesting to note that the word ‘apparition’ includes a sense of being ‘in attendance’ – as in a servant waiting upon a master. But ‘attendance’ would also suggest an attention to the other, a deferral in favour of the other. Thus, ‘an apparition of life’ would be a living on which attended the other as the very *condition* of attention, attending as an *à-tendre* which stretched towards the other, incorporating the other, in order to watch over, listen to, or wait upon them.

language or form – would necessitate a certain marking or tracing, and it would therefore already be in the act of translation and have extended into its other.

Derrida refers to a translation which ‘lives on’ as a ‘triumphant translation’. On the one hand this might be read as a reference to the movement between ‘Border Lines’ and the text which it could be seen to live on: ‘Living On’. Both texts can be read as parasiting – or para-citing – each other; each living *on* the other with the possibility that such hospitality may not be returned. On the other hand, and perhaps as the more obvious association, the phrase ‘triumphant translation’ might allude to the text Derrida professes to read in ‘Living On’: Percy Bysshe Shelley’s *The Triumph of Life*. As is echoed by the movement between ‘Border Lines’ and ‘Living On’, Shelley’s *The Triumph of Life* is read by way of Maurice Blanchot’s *L’Arrêt de mort*, a movement which stages each text in a para-critical or para-critical, ‘super-imprinting’ or ‘super-imposing’ relation. Indeed, Derrida suggests these relations in ‘Border Lines’, and in doing so, questions the border between one text and the other:

[...] I wish to pose the question of the *bord*, the edge, the border, and the *bord de mer*, the shore. [...] The question of the borderline precedes, as it were, the determination of all the dividing lines that I have just mentioned: between a fantasy and a “reality”, an event and a non-event, a fiction and a reality, one corpus and another, and so forth. Here, from week to week in this pocket-calendar or these minutes [*procès-verbal*], I shall perhaps endeavour to create an effect of superimposing, of superimprinting one text on the other. Now, each of these two “triumphs” writes (on [*sur*]) textual superimprinting. What about this “on”, this “*sur*”, and its surface? An effect of superimposing: one procession is superimposed on the other, accompanying it without accompanying it.<sup>54</sup>

Derrida states that the ‘question of the borderline precedes [...] the determination of all the dividing lines’; thus any clear-cut division or decision on division is deferred in favour of a process or effect of ‘superimprinting’. Recalling his notion of the ‘jetty’, the ‘question of the borderline’ as that which precedes ‘determination’ would align it with the movement or force of the ‘jetty’, the place where determination ‘finds its possibility’. A textual *superimposition* would be a writing on – *sur* – the text which *superimposes* the two texts, one with the other – with each recalling the logic of the supplement for the other: each for the other both additional (*superfluous*) and essential.

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<sup>54</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Border Lines’, p. 67-8; ‘Journal de Bord’, pp.126-28.

As such, the edges of these texts extend into each other, incorporating each other as the movement in which they might find their very possibility.

Derrida speaks here of two ‘triumphs’, but to what each of these ‘triumphs’ refer is unclear. One might be the triumphant procession of the *procès-verbal* [where ‘to minute’ – to record proceedings by dividing minutely – might also mean ‘to minute’ in the sense of *passing by* ‘minute by minute’]. Such a triumphant recording would mark the ‘entrance [or procession] of a victorious commander’, the act to which the word ‘triumph’ historically refers.<sup>55</sup> ‘Border Lines’ – as *procès-verbal* – might then be thought of as the commanding procession of events, a victorious archive or record of what has happened or taken place. Yet there are *two* triumphs, *two* processions; this is the ‘double band or “double-bind” of double proceedings [*procession*],<sup>56</sup> which creates an ‘effect of superimposing: one procession is superimposed on the other, accompanying it without accompanying.’ The other ‘triumphant procession’ might be the question which ‘precedes’ determination, that which precedes as the possibility of proceeding: the question of the borderline.<sup>57</sup> The two superimposed ‘triumphs’ might resemble, therefore, both the *precession* of the borderline, and the recording of that precedence, the *procès-verbal*. Processions, proceedings, and procedures are superimposed here, all lining a rather precarious border as the place where determination might find its possibility.

As Derrida reads Blanchot’s *L’Arrêt de mort* (published in English translation as *Death Sentence*, but with the French title suggesting both a putting to death, and the arrest (halt) of death) with Shelley’s *The Triumph of Life*, both texts find their borders compromised by the other; each ‘lives on’ the other with the inherent risk that what they provide for, or receive from, the other may never be recouped or repaid. Indeed, as the majority of ‘Living On’ seems to concentrate on *L’Arrêt de mort* – that is, as it seems to put this text first – in a dizzying disseminatory performance, the return on the investment in – or the result of the wager on – Shelley’s text looks likely to be deferred

<sup>55</sup> All definitions taken from: *Oxford English Dictionary* online; accessed 16\_01\_10.

<sup>56</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Border Lines’, p.65; ‘Journal de Bord’, p.123.

<sup>57</sup> The impossibility of deciding upon this ‘double procession’ is of course overdetermined by questions concerning the *filioque* clause (the clause in the Western version of the Nicene creed which states that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the son as well as the father – a clause omitted from the Eastern orthodox church). Without the space to consider this in detail, we must bear it in mind through all that proceeds from Derrida’s text.

interminably.<sup>58</sup> Of course, this is Derrida's intention, and moreover, it could not be otherwise: in order to live on *as itself*, the text requires its para-cite. It must be possible for it to be re-cited or translated, summoned beyond itself, to survive *as itself*. In superimposing Shelley's text with Blanchot's, Derrida finds a text with which to write *on* the poem. He desists from considering it as the object of a discourse, or rendering it through an interpretation, and instead affirms its survival, he *re-cites* it through a text – or 'body of language' – which bears its impression, or its *might*. Shelley's poem, therefore, also remains 'to come'. Blanchot's text bears the impression of Shelley's poem as the mark or wound of the future, of what remains to be thought in or about the text.

It is necessary to stress, however, that any 'one' text is already in a movement of survival. The title of Shelley's poem again demonstrates this, in that *The Triumph of Life* could refer to both an overcoming of life *by* something, and life's overcoming *of* something. With the focus on the notion of 'life' here, we might presume that this 'something' is death, but this isn't assured, and for Derrida the 'triumphant translation' – the double-bind, or double procession of a triumphant translation – would live on or survive with this lack of assurance. In terms of this quasi-originary survival, the triumphant translation would think this 'death' as unthinkable, bear it as unbearable, or suffer it as insufferable. Such a 'death' would be the untranslatable remainder of a text which is rendered untranslatable *by the very act of translation*. In what could be termed 'surviving death', what dies, or what is 'lost in translation', would be impossible to determine *once and for all*; in surviving death the triumphant translation *keeps* death as its necessary – but irreducible – excess; it lives on only by suffering or surviving this *might* of death as the force and potentiality of what remains undetermined or incalculable. The title of Shelley's poem survives *as* this ambiguity: the 'triumph of life' becomes a 'surviving death', it survives the overcoming of life – that is, death – as a victory of life. At the same time the triumph of life is a triumph *over* life; thus life also kills life, life becomes that which is the end of life: death. The 'triumph of life' lives on, therefore, as both the surviving of death and the experience of death; both life and death are on the side of living on.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> A certain 'wager' – or '*règle très artificielle*' – was made by the scholars convened in *Deconstruction and Criticism* – Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartman and J. Hillis Miller – to all read Shelley's text; this was done in the hope that it would bring a certain order to their methodology, or present their '*propre travail!*' (See Derrida's comments at the start of 'Survivre' in *Parages*, pp.117-218 (p.118).

<sup>59</sup> The (im)possibility of life and death sharing the same side is taken up in more detail in Chapter Three.

Whichever reading of the title that we might decide upon must be able to survive its other, but only by maintaining or incorporating that other – living *on* that other – as the necessary condition of its semantic specificity (and therefore the impossibility of such specificity). Should any final decision be attempted here, it would always be conditioned by its other or alternative, and thus impossible to decide upon once and for all. Any attempt to negate this untranslatable remnant with an absolute verdict – the ‘jury’s decision’, to which Derrida will allude – would be compromised in advance. Derrida explains this in relation to Blanchot’s *L’Arrêt de mort*, a title which, as noted above, mirrors the same ambiguity as that of Shelley’s poem. He suggests that in deciding once and for all upon either meaning would presuppose a convention, a meeting, agreement or covenant:

The *arrêt de mort* as *verdict*: it is obvious, and the translators must take this into account, that in “everyday” language, in “normal” conversation, the expression *arrêt de mort* is unambiguous. It means “death sentence”. The syntax is clear: the *arrêt* is a verdict, a decision that has been *arrêtée*, decided, determined, and that itself decides and determines, and its relationship to the object of the preposition (*de mort*) is, of course, the same as in *condamnation à mort*. But “literary” convention, the suspension of “normal” contexts, the context of everyday conversational usage or of writing legitimized by law – starting with legislating writing or the body of laws that sets the norm for legal language itself – the functioning of the title, the transformation of its relationship to the context and of its referentiality [...]: all this forbids (prevents, inhibits, stops [*arrête*]) a translation of the title *L’arrêt de mort* by its “homonym” in everyday language or by “death sentence.” This translation, like any other, leaves something out, an untranslated remnant.<sup>60</sup>

The point here is that ‘normal’, ‘everyday’ and even ‘literary’ contexts could be seen as the determining, commanding, or legitimate context. Each could demand and command the unambiguous decision which would treat *L’Arrêt de mort* as ‘death sentence’ in ‘everyday’ language, or, in the case of ‘literary’ convention, *forbid* that *L’Arrêt de mort* is simply ‘death sentence’.

What it is important to maintain is that any convention or agreement is conditioned by the other, an other which they must extend into and incorporate to even suggest a

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<sup>60</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Border Lines’, pp.92-94; ‘Journal de Bord’, pp.161-63.

convention or agreement. The ‘jetty’, as a movement where determination might find its possibility, underlines and undermines all attempts to form a decision. The borders of the conventions which may attempt to surround the title – even in the use of the word ‘title’ – are always-already porous, they always-already extend into their other, and such an attempt to arrest the movement or play of the trace, as soon as a decision or verdict is attempted, also announces that a final verdict *is yet to come*. All this is to say that the essential spectrality of *L’Arrêt de mort* or *The Triumph of Life*, as the trace or marking of the other, is not an effect confined to the *conventions* of literature or the everyday, it is instead the possibility that the convention – or the agreement – is always written on the horizon of its interruption:

for “literature” and in general “parasitism”, the suspension of the “normal” context of everyday conversation or of “civilian” usage of the language, in short everything that makes it possible to move from “death sentence” to “suspension of death” in the French expression *arrêt de mort*, can always come about (*de facto* and *de jure*) in “everyday” usage of the language, in language and in discourse.<sup>61</sup>

Both Shelley’s and Blanchot’s titles point to an unconventional literature, a literature which might interrupt the convention of the literary itself, as well as the convention of the ‘unconventional’. Such literature might resemble a triumph, overcoming or surviving of the conventional/unconventional opposition; a dimension of living on from which to affirm what remains in excess of the text. ‘Living On – Border Lines’ is a dense and complex text, and cannot be reduced to the argument attempted here. Derrida conducts a reading which superimposes Shelley and Blanchot’s texts, and in turn, the two *récits* of *L’Arrêt de mort*, affirming each as they extend into and incorporate the other – a living on the other – as the very condition of their determination.

As *La Jetée* shares several thematic and aesthetic motifs with Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* (1958), it could be suggested that the films live on or para-cite each other. Although a conventional linear chronology would suggest this is impossible, an anachronistic resonance between the films suggests that each is marked by the other. Such an extension into, and incorporation of, the other, can be read in a scene which, in both films, features the cross-section of a Sequoia – or Redwood – tree. By following

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<sup>61</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Border Lines’, pp.94-95; ‘Journal de Bord’, pp.163-64.

Tom Cohen's readings of Hitchcock<sup>62</sup>, I want to argue that the Sequoia scenes can be read in terms of a *spectrographic* cinema. I will suggest that the Sequoia scenes deploy a quasi-originary textual dimension as the place from which the conventional and traditional themes of cinema and cinematic criticism can be re-read, and in terms of this thesis, a place which marks, and is marked by, the *might* of an event which remains to come. Such a quasi-originary dimension echoes both the 'structural and rigorously original dimension' of *survivre*, as well as Derrida's notion of the 'jetty', a structure which extends into and incorporates the other in order to speak before the other; a structure which suffers or survives the mark of the other whilst maintaining the other's 'inappropriable exteriority'.

### 1.5 *The Sequoia scenes*

*Vertigo* is structured around the ability to figure, command, bear, or suffer death. Scottie – the male protagonist – is contacted by Gavin Elster, an old college friend, who asks Scottie to follow his wife Madeleine, suggesting she has been possessed by the ghost of Carlotta Valdes, Madeleine's great-grandmother. Elster tells Scottie that Valdes killed herself in 1857, aged 26, the age that Madeleine is now, and that he is afraid Madeleine has the compulsion to repeat the same act. Scottie takes on Elster's assignment, and becomes obsessed with Madeleine. The film follows his attempts to reconcile her with herself, his attempts to exorcise the spirit of Carlotta from Madeleine. Yet Scottie is acrophobic, he suffers from vertigo, and so when Madeleine climbs a church tower in an attempt to commit suicide, his illness prevents him from following, and he watches helpless as she falls to her death.

The whole thing is a ruse however; Elster is planning to kill his wife in order to inherit her wealth, and so has hired a woman to dress as her and act as though possessed, a ploy to fascinate Scottie and frame him as a witness to her suicide. The ruse hinges on Scottie's inability to cope with heights: as he is unable to reach the top of the church tower, the real – but already murdered – Madeleine is thrown from the top by Elster whilst the fake Madeleine hides. Unable to confront what he believes is Madeleine's suicide, Scottie retreats traumatized from the scene. After being diagnosed with 'acute

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<sup>62</sup> See: Tom Cohen, *Hitchcock's Cryptonymies, vol. 1: Secret Agents* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p.3. I will also be referring to the second volume: *Hitchcock's Cryptonymies, vol. 2: War Machines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).



melancholia', Scottie finds himself wandering the streets of San Francisco, unable to come to terms with Madeleine's death. Through this wandering, he comes across Judy, the woman Elster had hired to impersonate Madeleine. Unsuspecting of any foul play, Scottie becomes obsessed with Judy; or more precisely, he becomes obsessed with re-figuring Judy to look *exactly* like the dead Madeleine. Judy goes along with this as she has actually fallen in love with Scottie, and hopes to make him love her for herself and 'so forget the other and forget the past'.<sup>63</sup> Eventually Scottie discovers the truth about Judy, and in his anger at her deception, he drives her – his 'second chance' – to the top of the same church tower from which Madeleine appeared to throw herself, and to her own suicidal fall, one which he now witnesses.

Scottie's vertigo derives from an inability to accurately figure the ground. The ground, therefore, becomes an abyssal beyond or other he cannot come to terms with. Such an abyss is synonymous with death, a death which Madeleine *manifests* through her possession by Carlotta. Madeleine, then, represents death for Scottie, she becomes a manifestation of death he might come to terms with and then exorcise (Scottie's aim is to cure Madeleine's possession through a combination of physical protection, observation and lay psychoanalysis). With Madeleine considered gone, however, Scottie is again haunted by the fear of an unthinkable, unrepresentable abyss. With the film's conclusion Scottie is able to *witness* Judy's plunge to the ground. In death, then, Judy finally provides him with the representation of death he had found in Madeleine. Judy has – if only for an instant – become Madeleine. Judy's death, therefore, presents Scottie with an image of death which he can fully witness and fully come to terms with. As a result of his witnessing this final act, Scottie's vertigo – and melancholia – is cured.

The event which seems to have led to Scottie suffering vertigo comes at the beginning of the film: whilst chasing a suspect over several rooftops, Scottie and a uniformed policeman attempt to jump a particularly wide gap between two buildings. The policeman does so successfully, but Scottie fails to make the jump, he lands short and finds himself hanging from the gutter. Scottie looks down and is horrified by the seemingly immeasurable distance between him and the ground. Seeing his plight, the

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<sup>63</sup> Alfred Hitchcock (dir.), *Vertigo* (Paramount Pictures: 1958). It is important to note this conflation of 'other' and 'the past'.

policeman gives up the chase and returns to help Scottie, he scrambles down the tiled roof and offers Scottie his hand. Scottie is reluctant to take it, the fear of letting go of the gutter is too strong. As the policeman strains to get a little closer to Scottie, he slips, and falls past him. Scottie looks down and can see the dead body of the policeman on the ground. The scene ends with this vertiginous abyss, now experienced as an unthinkable fear, synonymous with death and immense guilt.

As Susan White notes, this scene has been described as a ‘vertiginous birth experience’.<sup>64</sup> Coming at the opening of the film, this scene is the trauma through which Scottie enters our world. From the beginning then, there is a relation between death and the maternal, between threat and attraction which Scottie will find repeated in the figure of Madeleine. As trauma and the maternal combine here, Scottie can be seen to have been marked, or wounded, by the (m)other. He is thus both in fear of the (m)other – as the source of his vertigo – as well as enamoured by the (m)other (in that a certain reconnection with the (m)other would relieve him of that suffering). Attracted and repulsed by the (m)other, Scottie wants to reconnect with what at the same time he needs to sever himself from. His *fascination* with, or desire for, Madeleine takes the form of an attempt to rid her of the very thing that attracts him: her ability to manifest the dead.<sup>65</sup>

Along with the notions of trauma and the maternal, there is a third figure enigmatically entwined in *Vertigo*’s opening scene: the policeman as the figure of the father/law. Having witnessed the death of the father through a birth trauma, it is perhaps no coincidence that Scottie is seeking an ideal or *phallic* (m)other. As White notes:

Having witnessed the death of the “father” (the representative of the law, the policeman) at the beginning of the film, and having difficulty in his attempt to break with the motherly Midge [Scottie’s close friend], Scottie not only finds the ideal “phallic” woman in the Madeleine created for him by Elster,

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<sup>64</sup> Susan White, ‘Allegory and Referentiality: *Vertigo* and Feminist Criticism’, *MLN*, vol.106, no.5, Dec 1991, pp.910-32 (p.911). White is referring here to Robin Wood’s reading of *Vertigo* in ‘Male Desire, Male Anxiety: The Essential Hitchcock’, in: *A Hitchcock Reader*, ed. Marshall Deutelbaum and Leland Poague (Ames, Iowa: Iowa St. University Press, 1986), pp.219-30.

<sup>65</sup> Of course, the recognition of, and fascination for, ‘woman’ as the embodiment of death is not uncommon to Western aesthetics, see, for example: Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992). See also Lacan’s work on sexual difference, read most notably in terms of cinema in: Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 2005).

but also sees his own painful plight with regard to the mother mirrored in hers.<sup>66</sup>

White is referring to a complex series of identifications here; the fake Madeleine – as ‘created’ by Elster – is played by Judy, who, as we later find out, has moved to San Francisco partly due to the fact that, after her father’s death, her mother married a man she didn’t like. In a sense then, she feels abandoned by both her father and her mother, and as Madeleine/Judy is a figure haunted by Carlotta Valdes, a woman whose daughter was taken from her, Madeleine/Judy identifies with Carlotta as the lost ideal or phallic mother, as well as Carlotta’s daughter as abandoned child.<sup>67</sup> Both Madeleine/Judy and Scottie, then, can be seen to have been marked or wounded by the loss of the mother, and both bear or suffer this wound as the mark or promise of their return.

Tania Modleski works with this identificatory logic in her reading of *Vertigo* in *The Women Who Knew Too Much*.<sup>68</sup> Following a line of criticism which attempts to affirm a position in cinema for a feminine identification/spectator, the lack of which forms the basis of Laura Mulvey’s seminal essay ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’<sup>69</sup>, Modleski aims to complicate the received reading of cinema as the place where woman’s response can only be masochistic, whilst man’s would be sadistic. Modleski suggests how Scottie identifies with Madeleine/Judy, thus introducing an identificatory logic which cannot be reduced to the binary of male/female, active/passive. Modleski suggests that ‘despite all his attempts to gain control over Madeleine, Scottie will find himself repeatedly thrown back into an identification, a mirroring relation, with her and her desires [and thus] will be unable to master the woman the way Gavin Elster and Carlotta’s paramour are able to do.’<sup>70</sup> Scottie is unable to draw Madeleine into the net of a phallic reason as he is on a certain level her mirror image, that is, ‘[i]t is as if he were continually confronted with the fact that woman’s uncanny otherness has some relation

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<sup>66</sup> Susan White, ‘Allegory and Referentiality’, p.917.

<sup>67</sup> See: William Rothman, ‘Vertigo: The Unknown Woman in Hitchcock’, *Images in Our Souls: Cavell, Psychoanalysis, and Cinema*, Joseph H. Smith and William Kerrigan (eds.) (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp.64-81.

<sup>68</sup> Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1989), pp.87-100.

<sup>69</sup> Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ [1975], in: *Feminism and Film Theory*, Constance Penley (ed.) (London: BFI Publishing, 1988), pp.57-68. Mulvey has also responded to her own article, see: Laura Mulvey, ‘Afterthoughts on “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” Inspired by *Duel in the Sun*’ [1981], *Feminism and Film Theory*, pp.69-79.

<sup>70</sup> Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much*, p.92.

to himself, that he resembles her in ways intolerable to contemplate – intolerable because this resemblance throws into question his own fullness of being.<sup>71</sup> Modleski cites Sarah Kofman here:

[m]en's fascination with [the] eternal feminine is nothing but fascination with their own double, and the feeling of uncanniness, *Unheimlichkeit*, that men experience is the same as what one feels in the face of any double, any ghost, in the face of the abrupt reappearance of what one thought had been overcome or lost forever.<sup>72</sup>

Modleski suggests that '[w]oman thus becomes the ultimate point of identification for all of the film's spectators'<sup>73</sup> and thus that 'the boundaries between self and (m)other tend to be more fluid for the male than is sometimes supposed.'<sup>74</sup> *Vertigo* is then both the possibility that 'woman's story gets out, though weakened and distorted in the process', but also a demonstration of 'how she is used and cast aside or tortured and finally killed off, as man desperately tries to sustain a sense of himself that necessitates the end of woman.'<sup>75</sup>

Modleski's reading, as well as the citation from Kofman, suggests that it is at the level of the ghost that we must approach cinema, a place which uncannily allows the other to return. But it also confirms how cinema can be a site where otherness is assaulted, tortured and annihilated. As that which is *marked* by the other, then, it is perhaps in a textual dimension, a dimension which might survive cinema's Oedipal, heterosexual, anthropomorphic, mimetic, identificatory – and thus ocularcentric – structures, that a place for thinking film's potentiality (to re-think these structures, as well as the figurations of trauma and sexual difference which they condition) might emerge. Tom Cohen has considered such a dimension in Hitchcock's work, and refers to it as a 'spectrographics', a term coined 'for the prehistory of cinema's afterlife', a prehistory which 'many of the techniques we take for critical innovations, auratic strategies to anthropomorphic cinema' may have attempted to forget or cover up.<sup>76</sup> Against 'mimetic

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<sup>71</sup> Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much*, p.92.

<sup>72</sup> Sarah Kofman, *The Enigma of Woman*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 56; cited in: Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much*, p.92.

<sup>73</sup> Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much*, p.99.

<sup>74</sup> Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much*, p.100.

<sup>75</sup> Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much*, p.100.

<sup>76</sup> Tom Cohen, *Hitchcock's Cryptonymies*, vol. 1, p.3.

media's representational humanism', Cohen suggests a 'spectrographic cinema would alter the very program out of which reference is produced and anteriority managed.'<sup>77</sup>

A spectrographics prowls at the virtual interface of epistemology and event, trope and inscription, translation and mnemonics, an imaginary era of the book, on the one hand, and one of the image (*Bild*), video, the electronic archive, and so forth, on the other. For if the cinematic is distinguished, always, by accounting in advance for its own repetition, it also divides, recedes before itself, re-marks and precedes its own apparition.<sup>78</sup>

Cohen's remarks recall those of Smith discussed above, as well as Derrida's notion of the 'jetty' as a structure which extends 'beyond the whole and folds it back on the whole to comprehend it and speak before it.' Cinema, in order to 'be' itself, also 'recedes before itself', in order to account for its distinguishing repeatability, it extends beyond its borders into a spectrographic dimension which 'precedes phenomenalization'.<sup>79</sup>

For Cohen, '[c]inema suspends in advance the promised mimeticism literalized in the critical tradition's major trends (humanist, identificatory, Oedipalist, historicist, auteurist), as though replacing it with webs of cross-relays and trace chains.'<sup>80</sup> In *Anti-Mimesis*, a text in which Cohen approaches a 'spectrographic' cinema in his reading of Hitchcock's *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, he suggests the necessity and potentiality of reading Hitchcock's texts as an anti-mimetic cinema which sabotages ocularcentric structures, structures which in turn lead to a critical blindness:

Everything depends, it seems, on which questions are asked – and Hitchcock points out that the interpreter too is in this bind: by asking of the film itself only certain questions [...] generic, prescribed questions or questions of genre itself – we are guaranteed the same answers, that is, we are guaranteed not to see or hear. What are the other questions we can ask, then, to break away from this machinal or cultural loop or bind? Or differently, how does a recurrent rupture in the attempt to produce narrative in this space proceed?<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Tom Cohen, *Hitchcock's Cryptonymies*, vol. 1, p.12.

<sup>78</sup> Tom Cohen, *Hitchcock's Cryptonymies*, vol. 1, p.246.

<sup>79</sup> Tom Cohen, *Hitchcock's Cryptonymies*, vol. 1, p.247.

<sup>80</sup> Tom Cohen, *Hitchcock's Cryptonymies*, vol. 1, p.8.

<sup>81</sup> Tom Cohen, *Anti-Mimesis: from Plato to Hitchcock* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.239.

Cohen's reference to the 'machinal' is useful here; he begins by asking how to get beyond, or 'break away' from the machinal bind, but then asks how such a mechanical recurrence might also be a space of potentiality.<sup>82</sup> This abandoning of abandoning the machine suggests the 'other questions' to be asked here must involve asking how a mechanical or cultural repetition might also welcome the other, and thus how these repetitious cultural tropes might be read otherwise. Of course, this is not to say we can abandon the 'critical tradition's' ocularcentric trends, nor that we should ignore the questions of gender and sexual difference wrapped up in the notion of the image and representation, but rather that Cohen's readings of Hitchcock attempt to re-elaborate a textuality – or spectrographics – of cinema as the space of determinability from which these questions, tropes or trends might emerge otherwise:

In contrast to tracing rules of the game or reading strategies to evade the institutional error of a divide between the visual and the scriptive, image and text, Hitchcock's recasting of marks, language, and teletechnics at the core of the cinematic redefines an entire set of performatives that include gender, memory, agency, and time.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Through his deconstructive reading, Cohen also channels the work of Walter Benjamin. As Karyn Ball writes in a review of Cohen's *Cryptonymies*, 'Cohen gives us a theory of materiality in a telematized present that "mobilizes in Hitchcock a transformation of reading itself" (vol. 2, p.xi). This transformation is convened in these two volumes as an interplay between a deconstructive and a Benjaminian materialism. The premises of Paul de Man's formalist materialism and prioritization of allegory over symbol in conjunction with Jacques Derrida's attention to graphemes, signatures, and "postal" relays (as well as their respective debts to Walter Benjamin) train Cohen's scrutiny of the composition of shots, the grammar of montage, as well as the significance of graphics, patterned backdrops, and the hieroglyphic languages of the props that populate each scene. The other side of this materialist Hitchcock heuristic is Benjamin's weakly Messianic historiography with its allegorical-revolutionary agency that "breaks through all historicism to chance an act that puts various pasts and futures at risk" (vol. 2, p.116). It is this agency that "alters and deforms the terms by which the world or the senses are programmed, pasts and futures designated or occluded" and that "turns on the formal not to abstract itself from historical conflict but precisely to alter the model of the historical 'experience', horizons of the possible" (vol. 1, p.10).' Ball also notes the debt Cohen's work owes to the cryptonymy of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, whilst lucidly noting how Cohen's texts radicalizes their approach: '[Cohen's] 'Hitchcock' dream work weaves a "telemnemonic archive" and with it the deconstructive promise of Maria Torok and Nicolas Abraham's famous cryptonomic reinterpretation of Freud's Wolf Man case study. Yet it must be acknowledged that Cohen's metonymic virtuosity also radicalizes Torok and Abraham's detection method in exploding the isomorphic logic of any code, map, referential system, or psychoanalytic catechism of sexual symbolisms, which imply eyeline matches between image surfaces and their 'hidden' depths. The *Cryptonymies* do not merely sidestep identitarian thematizations and film-critical traditions, but also sabotage them from within as an act of war.'

See: Karyn Ball, 'Hitchcock's Material Whirl', <http://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/viewArticle/174/155>

<sup>83</sup> Tom Cohen, *Hitchcock's Cryptonymies*, vol. 1, p.8.

Cohen's spectrographics echoes Derrida's suggestion that the cinema concerns the art of ghostly return, a place where ghosts are allowed or made to return.<sup>84</sup> Cohen suggests that

locating a practice of cinema within this site [that is, as a spectrographics] has two immediate consequences that cannot be shed, disavowed, and bracketed. First, the Hitchcockian practice (which is not a unique style so much as the hyperformalization of the medium) inscribes the "world" [...] as a type of animation, which might then be called "life" or which, at least, renders "death" a horizonless semaphoric plane of speeds and intensities. And second, it confronts in different modes its own status as virtual "event" or intervention within the histories it serves as regenerative station and transit point.<sup>85</sup>

A spectrographic cinema would 'inscribe' or 'animate' life, or the 'world'. Moreover, if this is seen as the rendering of death (in that the cinematic text is the reanimation of what has ceased 'to be'), this 'life' of death might be thought of as an 'afterlife'. In order to highlight that if a spectrographic dimension is to be thought of as an 'afterlife' of the phenomenal world, that *afterlife* would also be originary, Cohen cites Derrida's reading of the spectral in *Specters of Marx*:

Two conclusions then: (1) the phenomenal form of the world itself is spectral; (2) the phenomenological ego (Me, You, and so forth) is a specter. The *phainesthai* itself (before its determination as phenomenon or phantasm, thus as phantom) is the very possibility of the specter, it brings, it gives death, it works at mourning.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>84</sup> On the difference between 'making' and 'letting' the ghost return, see Chapter Three.

<sup>85</sup> Tom Cohen, *Hitchcock's Cryptonymies*, vol. 1, p.13.

<sup>86</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: the State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994), p.135; *Spectres de Marx: L'État de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1993), p.215. Cited in: Tom Cohen, *Hitchcock's Cryptonymies*, vol. 1, p.13. In a note to this passage, Derrida reminds us that 'the narrow and strict concept of the phantom or the *phantasma* will never be reduced to the generality of the *phainesthai*. Concerned with the original experience of haunting, a phenomenology of the spectral ought, according to good Husserlian logic, to isolate a very determined and relatively derived field within a regional discipline (for example, a phenomenology of the image, and so forth). Without contesting here the legitimacy, or even the fertility of such a delimitation, we are merely suggesting the following, without being able here to go any further: the radical possibility of all spectrality should be sought in the direction that Husserl identifies, in such a surprising but forceful way, as an intentional but *non-real* [*non-réelle*] component of the phenomenological lived experience, namely, the *noeme*. Unlike the three other terms of the two correlations (*noese-noeme*, *morphē-hulē*), this non-reality [*non-réellité*], this intentional but *non-real* inclusion of the noematic correlate is neither "in" the world nor "in" consciousness. [...] Is not such an "irreality" [*irréellité*], its independence both in relation to the world and in relation to the real stuff of egological subjectivity, the very place of apparition, the essential, general, non-regional possibility of the specter? Is it not also what inscribes the possibility of the other and of mourning right onto the phenomenality of the phenomenon?', see: Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 189; *Spectres de Marx*, pp.215-16. Such an 'irreality', neither in the world nor in consciousness, might resemble the quasi-

As noted above, Derrida states in *Ghost Dance* that cinema concerns ‘the art of allowing ghosts to come back [*un art de laissez revenir du fantôme*].’ Cinema is not a production of ghosts, then, but a place where what is *already* spectral might return. As an ‘afterlife’, then, cinema also remains quasi-originary, a spectral dimension which gives the possibility or semblance of ‘life’ or ‘death’ through its ‘horizonless semaphoric plane of speeds and intensities’.

Cohen’s reference to a ‘horizonless semaphoric plane of speeds and intensities’ marks both a similarity to, and difference with, Gilles Deleuze’s reading of Hitchcock in *Cinema 1*.<sup>87</sup> For Cohen this horizonless plane is ‘semaphoric’, thus it ‘bears’ or ‘suffers’ the sign as its quasi-originary condition. Though a horizonless plane chimes with Deleuze’s ‘plane of immanence’, or ‘body without organs’, equally a site of differing speeds and intensities, the sign or mark would, for Deleuze, remain symbolic of this originary dimension, rather than its very materiality. Cohen marks this distinction between Deleuze’s reading of Hitchcock and his own spectrographic approach:

There has always been a problem with characterizing Hitchcock’s signifying strategies, into which trap the most sophisticated theorists have stumbled. Objects are hosted, seem marked, yet refuse assigned contents and dissolve into citational networks; after their passage through a sort of ‘spies’ post office”, they reemerge elsewhere, become host.<sup>88</sup>

Cohen suggests that in the case of Deleuze, who assigns the term ‘demark’ to the objects which ‘leap outside the web [of natural relations, or ‘marks’] and suddenly appear in conditions which take it out of its series, or set it in contradiction with it’<sup>89</sup>, this attempt to radicalise the mimetic or representational logic of the symbol actually ‘relapses into a logic of symbolization.’<sup>90</sup> In his reading of *The Birds* Deleuze states that

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originary textual dimension of Cohen’s ‘spectrographic’ cinema. In terms of this chapter, and recalling Derrida’s notion of the ‘jetty’, it might also be described as the (non)place from which the very possibility of phenomenal determination might emerge, a place which extends into and incorporates or inscribes ‘the possibility of the other’ as that which *might* return from the future.

<sup>87</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson & Barbara Habberjam (London: Continuum, 2005 [1983]).

<sup>88</sup> Tom Cohen, *Hitchcock’s Cryptonymies*, vol. 1, p.45.

<sup>89</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p. 207; cited in: Tom Cohen, *Hitchcock’s Cryptonymies*, vol. 1, p.45.

<sup>90</sup> Tom Cohen, *Hitchcock’s Cryptonymies*, vol. 1, p.45.



the first gull which strikes the heroine is a demark, since it violently leaves the customary series [...] But the thousands of birds [...] are a symbol: these are not abstractions or metaphors, they are real birds, literally, but which present the inverted image of men's relationship to Nature.<sup>91</sup>

For Cohen this reading suggests that:

[t]he Deleuzian *demark* operates by standing out from a series, yet as such it denaturalizes the natural and the “demark” is effaced back into the “symbol”, as when the “thousands of birds” appear to him to be “the inverted image of men's relationship to Nature.” The fact that “Nature” is evoked marks a limit of Deleuze's technique, since whatever the “birds” are doing can, according to their alliance with machines, have no accord with an anthropomorphism like “Nature”.<sup>92</sup>

By referring to the ‘birds’ as an ‘*inverted* image of men's relationship to Nature’, Cohen suggests that Deleuze is sustaining an anthropomorphised narrative – the ‘natural’ – in order to describe the indexical functioning of Hitchcock's film. This operation can also be seen in the way Deleuze approaches ‘Hitchcock’ himself, whose films or signature effects are indexical of the intentions of an auteur-father. As Karyn Ball notes:

Auteurism still belongs to the regime of the Author as Father. Despite an apparent semiotic agenda which breaks down perception, action, and affect shots into multiple signs including the mental image, presumably perfected in Hitchcock, '*which takes as its object, relations, symbolic acts, intellectual feelings*' (*Cinema 1*, p.203; emphasis in original), the *Cinema* books remain resolutely transfixed on the auteur as a vehicle of a Bergsonian 'creative evolution,' whereby cinema 'thinks' itself from the ancient to the modern perception of movement in relation to time. Cohen, in contrast, focuses on a 'Hitchcock' who 'is conjured and produced by signature systems and marks and not the reverse' (*Hitchcock's Cryptonymies, vol. 2*, p.264). There is only 'Hitchcock' as the dynamic cumulative cross-referenced interplays among such marks. It is this deauraticizing 'Hitchcock-effect' that derails the indexical functions of images and with them, the visible surface-hidden depth aesthetic ideologies that convene the illusion of a guarantee that signs ultimately testify to prior, known, or knowable referents.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, pp. 207-8.

<sup>92</sup> Tom Cohen, *Hitchcock's Cryptonymies, vol. 1*, p.46.

<sup>93</sup> Karyn Ball, 'Hitchcock's Material Whirl', <http://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/viewArticle/174/155>

For Deleuze, Hitchcock's films remain indexical of 'life', or 'reality', and thus remain tied to the auratic classicism as theorized by Benjamin. Moreover, Hitchcock's oeuvre remains indexical of a linear evolution of cinema which underpins Deleuze's reading. Alternatively, Cohen's *Cryptonymies* attempt to read 'Hitchcock' as a weave of signature effects, an 'allomorphic archive [...] void of semantic content, irreducibly (a)material and semaphoric, mnemonic and performative.'<sup>94</sup>

In both *Vertigo* and *La Jetée* the Sequoia scene comes roughly at the mid point; interrupting the films' narrative and duration to manifest the 'cut' or 'cutting' which Hitchcock describes as the 'pure orchestration of the motion-picture form.'<sup>95</sup> In both films the Sequoia's cross-section is marked with historical dates; concentric circles emanate from, or recede into the centre or origin of the tree, indexing the width of the tree in relation to the historic events which have taken place during its lifetime, thus figuring it as a record or archive of history. Cohen suggests that '[i]n part, "wood/oak" cites the tree as trope of nature itself as product of the "cut", or preinhabited by a prosthetic, such as the archival circle of dates inhabiting the severed Sequoia in *Vertigo*.'<sup>96</sup> The cross-section of the Sequoia makes the natural itself a product of the 'cut', and thus in a sense spectrographically cinematic. 'Nature' is, like 'life', reanimated as an 'originary' dimension, the cross-section a cut in the very 'nature' of cinema, revealing 'nature' to be preinhabited by its other; cinema as cutting machine. Hence Cohen's further suggestion that, in more general terms, the 'tree is used [in Hitchcock's films] as a trope of the photograph's "natural image", which it must cite and which must seem recognizable to others.'<sup>97</sup> The tree reveals the iterability of the

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<sup>94</sup> Tom Cohen, *Hitchcock's Cryptonymies*, vol. 1, p.49. In an interview originally published in 1986, an interview which is partly concerned with elaborating on his cinema books, and thus the notions of the 'movement-image' and the 'time-image', Deleuze suggests: 'The brain is the screen. I don't believe that linguistics and psychoanalysis offer a great deal to the cinema. On the contrary, the biology of the brain – molecular biology – does. Thought is molecular. [...] Cinema, precisely because it puts the image in motion, or rather endows the image with self-motion [*auto-mouvement*], never stops tracing the circuits of the brain.' 'The Brain is the Screen', trans. Marie Therese Guirgis in: Gregory Flaxman (ed.), *The Brain is the Screen: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp.365-373 (p.366). For Deleuze, then, the cinematic image allows the brain to overflow the traditional limits of the body, and the screen to overflow its conventional cinematic framing. Performing a molecular inscription of flows and intensities, the brain/screen does seem to extend beyond the anthropomorphism of which Cohen accuses Deleuze. Deleuze goes on to state that 'the cinema doesn't reproduce bodies, it produces them with grains that are grains of time' (p.372), suggesting cinema's potential to produce a 'body' which is not reducible to traditional humanist or anthropomorphic categories.

<sup>95</sup> Alfred Hitchcock to François Truffaut, cited in: Tom Cohen, *Hitchcock's Cryptonymies*, vol. 2, p.xi.

<sup>96</sup> Tom Cohen, *Hitchcock's Cryptonymies*, vol. 1, p.59.

<sup>97</sup> Tom Cohen, *Hitchcock's Cryptonymies*, vol. 1, p.59.

‘natural image’, and therefore the division or cut which must inhabit it in order to make it seem ‘natural’ to others. The cross-section demonstrates that the natural/unnatural binary is itself a product of the cinematic ‘cut’. The ‘archival circle of dates’, which is cut into the cross-section, shows that history is also a product of this cinematic orchestration of the cut. The Sequoia is marked by history; it incorporates history as a series of *re-markable* circles, in order to come before the whole of history. It marks ‘history’ with the cut, dividing ‘history’ in advance with the mark or wound of the future.

The cross-section is marked by what it produces; it is preinhabited – marked or wounded – by a ‘past’ which it precedes, a past which is also therefore ‘to come’. The cross-section acts here in the same way as the image of the woman in *La Jetée*, in that they both touch on, and defer, what remains to be thought.<sup>98</sup> Cinema and the feminine are aligned, both bearing the mark of the other as that which also remains to come. The image of an ideal or phallic mother, the mother both Scottie and the man in *La Jetée* can be seen to desire, is preinhabited by a promise of the future. A search for an ideal or phallic mother, therefore, is undercut here by the *might* (force and possibility) of the future. The cinematic image (of woman) divides itself in advance; it is marked or wounded by itself as other. An essential spectrographics makes it impossible to reduce the image (of woman) to an identificatory logic, including that of a male gaze. For Cohen this would be a disruptive signature effect, ‘Hitchcock’s recasting of marks, language, and teletechnics [which] redefines an entire set of performatives that include gender, memory, agency, and time’. Cohen suggests that ‘the vertigo-swirl in the Sequoia trunk preinhabits the faux maternity of nature [...] with a movement that archives historical moments.’<sup>99</sup> The Sequoia, marked by an essentially divided or remarkable history, demonstrates a spectralized or spectrographic ‘now’: ‘If the dead that inhabit the living are grafted into the past by the seemingly alive (who are, anyway, unwitting specters), there is no “living” to begin with’.<sup>100</sup> The ‘living’, the ‘natural’, or the ‘faux maternity of nature’ are ghostly to begin with, a spectrality conditioned by the ‘dead’ who inhabit them and who are ‘grafted into the past’ as what *might* return (the *revenant*). The spectrographic cinema of ‘Hitchcock’ demonstrates, then, that what

<sup>98</sup> If this image of the woman is to be thought in terms of a ‘screen-memory’ (see above), this would radicalize, or perhaps traumatize, the notion of the past for psychoanalysis.

<sup>99</sup> Tom Cohen, *Hitchcock’s Cryptonymies*, vol. 2, p.63.

<sup>100</sup> Tom Cohen, *Hitchcock’s Cryptonymies*, vol. 2, p.63.

might be thought of as ‘natural’, ‘alive’, or even ‘maternal’ is only so because it is marked by the other. Indeed, such cinema, a cinema which concerns itself with the art of allowing the ghost to return, re-reads the tropes of maternity, nature, life and death as ‘essentially’ spectrographic.<sup>101</sup>

In *Vertigo*, the Sequoia scene takes place in Muir Woods, just north of San Francisco<sup>102</sup>, and is accessed by Scottie and Madeline by the coastal highway. Here the Sequoias are referred to by Scottie with their ‘true name’: ‘*Sequoia sempervirens*: always green, ever-living.’<sup>103</sup> This scene appears to mark the end of the couple’s ‘wandering’, a word which returns several times in *Vertigo* and recalls change, turning, deviation, a movement without aim. But their movement without aim is interrupted by an object which is marked by the past, by events which might seem to have been and gone. The cross-section marks a deathly interruption to the ‘ever-living’ Sequoia forest; but it is not an inverted image of that immortal forest, an image of death. Rather, as noted above, it reveals that what we think of as ‘life’ and ‘death’ are in fact conditioned by their ‘essential’ or quasi-originary spectrality. The complexity of this scene is intensified as Madeleine/Judy, appearing to be possessed by Carlotta, reaches out to indicate on the cross-section the points which signify her – with this ‘her’ remaining ambiguous – birth and death.

Madeleine/Judy dislikes the immortal Sequoias, when Scottie asks why, she states ‘knowing I have to die’ to be the reason. Madeleine/Judy, as well as the plot, are still clinging to the life/death binary here, even if death has somehow possessed the living Madeleine/Judy. Yet when she touches the cross-section of the Sequoia there seems to be an interruption where the identificatory premises of the plot fall into a vertiginous abyss. As Madeleine/Judy marks the cross-section, she announces that ‘somewhere in here I was born... and here I died; it was only a moment for you... you took no

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<sup>101</sup> One of the suggestions which follow from Cohen’s reading of ‘Hitchcock’ as that which short-circuits the hermeneutic model, is that a ‘*spectrographics* may be allied to a figure sometimes called ‘Mother’ – an archival site of inscriptions, premise of celluloid and mnemonics.’ See: *Hitchcock’s Cryptonymies*, vol. 1, p.245. Here Cohen is citing the ‘Mother’ from *Psycho*, a film which, if ‘Hitchcock is the ground zero of the cinematic [...] is the ground zero in Hitchcock.’ (vol. 2, pp.88-9). ‘If there is one thing [*Psycho*] seems to show us, it is the “Mother” is not where you think she is. That she may not have a place as such’ (vol. 2, p.89). *Psycho* ascribes ‘Mother’ to a non-place, where she is not quite herself. Thus ‘Mother’ is no-where *as such* – irreducible to Oedipalizing reading strategies and/or identificatory practices – and yet, as the ‘archival site of inscriptions’, *everywhere* in ‘Hitchcock’.

<sup>102</sup> The scene was actually filmed in Big Basin State Park, south of San Francisco.

<sup>103</sup> Alfred Hitchcock (dir.), *Vertigo*.

notice.’<sup>104</sup> It is difficult to know who is speaking here, it could be Judy acting as Madeleine channelling Carlotta, but it could also be Judy, who ‘died’ as she became Madeleine/Carlotta. It is also difficult to know who she is talking to; it appears to be the cross-section itself, resembling a history of major events and thus unconcerned by her own, personal story, a story which is – as Pop Leibel states as he tells the story of Carlotta Valdes to Scottie – ‘not unusual’.<sup>105</sup> But she could also be speaking to Scottie as the representation of a male history, unconcerned with that of the feminine, who only wants to rid Madeleine of Carlotta. However, and as Modleski highlights, Scottie also identifies with Judy/Carlotta/Carlotta’s daughter, in that he also sees himself wounded by a certain uncanny otherness. Modleski suggests that ‘[w]oman thus becomes the ultimate point of identification for all of the film’s spectators.’<sup>106</sup> The Sequoia scene marks this vertiginous sabotaging of identificatory logic, in which everyone can identify with everyone else through a quality or uncanny otherness which is impossible to reduce to a single person or character. This scene marks the point at which the wound, mark or cut radiates out across a horizonless plane or quasi-originary dimension, a dimension in which both fiction and reality suffer the mark or wound of the other. Here, cinema’s Sequoia scene spills out from the frame of the cinematic screen and incorporates all its others – including the audience – within a vertiginous ‘horizonless’ plane upon which innumerable others are allowed to return.

### 1.6 *The promise of cinema*

In *La Jetée*, the Sequoia scene comes at a point when the man has returned to what appears to be a pre-war time, and in which he appears to have found the woman with whose image he has become obsessed. The man has travelled to a point in time at which he is ‘sure he recognizes her’, to a world where this is in fact ‘the only thing he is sure of’, and to a moment at which ‘she welcomes him without surprise.’<sup>107</sup> In this central section of the film the man and woman are ‘without memories, without plans’; like Scottie and Madeleine/Judy they are wandering, vertiginously. But they also find themselves at the cross-section of a Sequoia tree which, again, deploys a certain vertiginous logic. As the man and the woman approach the cross-section, the woman

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<sup>104</sup> Alfred Hitchcock (dir.), *Vertigo*.

<sup>105</sup> Alfred Hitchcock (dir.), *Vertigo*.

<sup>106</sup> Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much*, p.99.

<sup>107</sup> Chris Marker, *La Jetée, ciné-roman*, page number unspecified.

‘pronounces a foreign name [the man] doesn’t understand.’<sup>108</sup> The commentary for *La Jetée* indicates that here the woman says ‘Hitchcock?’ The scene therefore provokes different reactions from the man and the woman. For the woman this scene is already a cinematic echo, the cross-section is something she recognizes as being marked by a certain relation to ‘Hitchcock’, and we can presume, then, this means a familiarity with the Sequoia scene from *Vertigo*. Their arrival at the Sequoia is – for the woman – uncannily and coincidentally a reference to ‘Hitchcock’; it is a recognition that this experience is already in a certain sense cinematic, that the signature effects of ‘Hitchcock’ have extended beyond *Vertigo* into the text of *La Jetée*, which cites *Vertigo* as if it were reality citing the fictional, or vice versa – a cinematic fiction citing cinematic history – so that each film incorporates the other, each fiction/reality ventriloquizes another fiction/reality in order to ‘be itself’.

For the man, the name ‘Hitchcock’ is unfamiliar, but being faced with the cross-section he is provoked to confess he is from another place: ‘As in a dream, he shows her a point beyond the tree, hears himself say, “This is where I come from...” [‘*Comme en rêve, il lui montre un point hors de l’arbre. Il s’entend dire: « Je viens de là... »*’].<sup>109</sup> Undertaken as if in a dream, the man’s pointing resembles Madeleine/Judy/Carlotta’s marking of her life-death on the cross-section, again with the cross-section deploying this identificatory logic far beyond the borders of each film. In *La Jetée*, however, the man is pointing to a ‘là’ beyond the cross-section; a space which would be analogous to the Sequoia forest in *Vertigo*. He dreamily indexes a space beyond the cross-section; a ‘real’, ‘natural’ or even ‘maternal’ space beyond the cross-section from which he has originated and to which he might teleologically return. This echoes Patrick Ffrench’s suggestion (noted above) that *La Jetée* can be read to take place ‘as if between the beginning and end of a single sentence’. The origin/future to which the man points, and from which he has come, is calculated in advance as the (maternal) origin/future which he once knew, and to which he dreams of returning. And yet ‘là’ is also a vertiginous term, in that it can mean both here and there. The man’s gesture is one which suggests he comes from a place essentially divided, a ‘there’ (the future, the past, the origin; a maternal, natural forest), and a ‘here’ (cinema, film, the tree as a ‘nature’ preinhabited

<sup>108</sup> ‘Elle prononce un nom étranger qu’il ne comprend pas’, *La Jetée, cine-roman*, trans. modified.

<sup>109</sup> Chris Marker, *La Jetée, ciné-roman*, page number unspecified.

by the prosthesis of the cinematic cut). Divided in advance, the man's 'here' is also a 'there', indexed as if in a dream, his reality is also a fiction; the man – like the very operation of the cinematic, or as Robert Smith suggests, the 'recordability' of the recordable – is preinhabited by the other as the mark of his *own* essentially unknowable past/future.

As what is indexed with the man's 'là' can be thought of as the man's point of departure – the memory of an *image*, the trace of a fragment of time as that which triggered his ability to travel through time – this scene suggests that it is the image of (the) woman which wounds, but cannot be situated as such, by cinema. The image of (the) woman drives the man's – and indeed cinema's – archival desire to capture, think, resurrect and understand the other. The man gestures, therefore, towards a certain future of cinema, one which has the ability to recover the image from his past in such perfect and comprehensible detail as to complete the perfect archive; such a cinema would allow his memory of the past to return in its originary glory, that which would enable his reconnection with the lost (m)other, returning him to the truth or origin from which he came. As the cross-section demonstrates, however, the archival image is preinhabited by the cut, and is thus irreducible to a pure origin or truth. It is the archival image which is marked by a 'past' which it grafts into the future; the very condition of thinking the past, then, is an essential cut or division which inhabits the 'now'. In order to think the past, future, or now 'as such', it is necessary that they are preinhabited, wounded or marked by the other.

Both the structure and the premise of *La Jetée* explore the relation between cinema and the photographic image. Indeed, as an individual film frame, the latter is often thought of as a certain 'origin' of cinema. In the same way that the man is marked by an image of his past, it could be suggested that – in its relation to the photographic image – *La Jetée* is scarred by an image of its origin. Yet *La Jetée*'s engagement with the photographic image is one which questions its ontological status. Constructed by filming the 'still' image, *La Jetée* reanimates it at 24 frames per second. In filming the still image, in producing its stillness in movement, *La Jetée* seems to be questioning the notion of stillness itself – and perhaps the place of the still image in cinematic history. As *La Jetée* renders stillness in movement, the still, or photographic image, cannot be reduced to a location, moment or history which is proper to itself.

*La Jetée*'s rendering (or projection) of the photographic image would seem to resist the possibility of deciding upon either movement or stillness as the modality proper to the image's capacity to preserve, reanimate, or record 'life'. Moreover, this suggests that the incalculable status of the cinematic image would always resist any archi-teleological desire to capture or represent either origin or end. The structure of *La Jetée* suggests that, for the cinematic text, there is only a movement in stillness, or stillness in movement; with each irreducible to, but marked by, the other. Even the freeze frame which may close a film is the continual repetition of a 'still' image. As if to demonstrate this, *La Jetée* gives us a brief scene when its 'still' images are edited so closely together as to give the impression of movement. This scene demonstrates that what might be thought of, or experienced as, a movement or speed which seems 'natural' to cinema, is also a certain product of the cut, of stillness or death, and thus that the 'natural' movement or speed of cinema is again – like the cross-section – preinhabited by the mark of the other.<sup>110</sup>

It is no coincidence that this scene in which the 'natural' movement or speed of cinema is undermined is a scene which shows only the face of a woman. With this interruption of 'stillness' by 'movement', *La Jetée* suggests that what seems to be 'natural' cinematic movement is in fact preinhabited by an *originary* excess, a deathly 'stillness' which 'natural' movement incorporates in order to appear 'natural'. As this is

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<sup>110</sup> On this irreducible relation between stillness and movement in cinema see Laura Mulvey's *Death 24x a Second* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006). In this text she considers how, with the development of digital technology, 'anyone who wants to is now able to play with the film image', that is, anyone can now discover the 'presence of death' which the still or paused image recalls to cinema (p.102). Mulvey explores cinema's relation to stillness and death through Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), suggesting that with the film's iconic shower scene the 'stillness of the "corpse" is a reminder that the cinema's living and moving bodies are simply animated stills and the homology between stillness and death returns to haunt the moving image' (p.88). Following Peter Wollen's essay 'Hybrid Plots in *Psycho*' (1982), she discusses how this haunting is manifested in the film: the entwining of Marion's linear journey towards death and 'end', and the backward looking detective story of Lila's attempt to find out what happened to Marion, the 'searching for and deciphering of clues in order to reconstruct events that have already taken place' (p.90). With this double movement, which begins from Marion's death (the shower scene at the heart of the film), Hitchcock begins to displace the conventional staging of death which had become a feature of his earlier films: 'A circling movement concentrated increasingly on the Bates house and motel replaces the horizontal direction of the road and its forward movement' (p.95). In a sense the vertiginous receding into the uncanny spaces of the house prevents the clean ending of a conventional narrative, with the final scene of Norman's haunting by his 'Mother' indicative of this uncanny space, a space which cannot be resolved but which reveals the essential haunting of cinema by death and the 'still' (pp.89-101). Though Mulvey suggests *Psycho* marks a particular transition in Hitchcock's consideration of death and the cinema, *Vertigo* is equally suffused by this spectrality. Indeed, the signature effect of the Sequoia can be read to return in the vertiginous spiralling of *Psycho*'s plot.



demonstrated with the image of a woman, the film seems to suggest that the man's desire to be reconnected with a natural, maternal (m)other is futile, as there is no reality with which this essentially divided – or spectral – image is commensurate. With this scene *La Jetée* is marking cinema's ability to *produce* both life and stillness, to revive the dead – to produce life – by 'executing' the image. What might appear to be the origin of cinema (life as such, or the photographic image as film frame), are in fact *effects* of an essentially spectrographic text.

*La Jetée* goes beyond the conventions of cinematic movement in order to incorporate its other – the photographic still. It extends into stillness in order to come before it; Marker's film is thus marked by the still image as the mark of what remains to be thought. Sarah Cooper reads how *La Jetée* questions the borders between photography and cinema, and how such a problematization makes precarious what some see as the very origin of cinema:

*La Jetée* is *neither life nor death* twenty-four frames per second. Nor is it simply the temporal stasis by which photography is often defined. The photo-roman projects photographs into the space of cinema, showing how 'movies' can be made from them but also how their stillness is never entirely static or lifeless, in spite of their difference from the filmic image. The photograph *endures* here *beyond its status* as the beginning and end of cinema, as the still image engenders time enough *to live and love again*.<sup>111</sup>

By going beyond its stasis – its status as its state or standing – the photographic image or still return as the ghost of cinematic movement. *La Jetée* incorporates the other in order to come before it, thus suggesting the need to question any notion that the photographic image or film frame is the origin of cinema. Here the notion of the photographic image is recast as the mark of what remains to come, as the memory of the future. Marker's text is marked by the still image; it suffers or bears the still image as a question which, for cinema, remains or returns. In marking this possibility of the future, the still image engenders or promises the 'again' in which we might have 'time enough to live and love'.

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<sup>111</sup> Sarah Cooper, *French Film Directors: Chris Marker* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), p.56 (my emphasis).

What may have been thought to be cinema's past or origin – the photographic image – is demonstrated through a more complex relation between cinema and photographic discourse. *La Jetée* suggests that cinema's relation to the photographic image is something which is yet to be thought, and as such, the photographic image cannot be thought as either its past, or its material essence. The suggestion that the status of the photographic image remains a question for cinema is reflected in (the) man's obsession with the image of the woman. This image, memory trace, or fragment of time, is marked as a certain *promise* of cinema, it is a trace of what cannot be reduced to the cinematic archive, and therefore the trace of what is yet to be thought. As the Sequoia scenes demonstrate, both *Vertigo* and *La Jetée* are marked by a trace of the other. They are wounded by, and therefore suffer or bear the *might* of, what remains to come. Hitchcock's 'signature effect', then, would mark a cinematic promise of the future, the mark or might of what is yet to be comprehended, *and at the same time*, perhaps never to be comprehended.

Derrida discusses this promise of the future in relation to the notion of the archive:

[T]he question of the archive is not, we repeat, a question of the past. It is not a question of a concept dealing with the past that might *already* be at our disposal or not at our disposal, *an archivable concept of the archive*. It is a question of the future [*d'avenir*], the question of the future itself [*l'avenir meme*], the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow. The archive: if we want to know what it will have meant, we will only know in times to come [*les temps à venir*]. Perhaps. Not tomorrow but in times to come, later on or perhaps never.<sup>112</sup>

As the cinematic structure can be thought of in terms of an archiving technique or archival technology, the Sequoia scenes seem to ask how we might await the promise of cinema itself: would it be its future perfection, an archival technology capable of faithfully recalling the purity of the moment of impression (as origin, life, death, time, affect or the other *as such*)? Or, would it be as a continued engagement with otherness, a suffering of the mark or wound of the other, the *might* of the future, which sees cinema's very survival irreducibly folded into the (im)possibility of awaiting what is unexpected or incalculable? To know what the archive 'will have meant', the projection

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<sup>112</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p.36; *Mal d'Archive* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1995), p.60.

of meaning into the future anterior, is to survive or suffer the impossible anticipation of what Derrida refers to as the ‘to-come’; not the *futur*, but the *à-venir*, the ‘to-come’ which points towards ‘the coming of an event rather than toward some future present’.<sup>113</sup> Recalling Derrida’s suggestion that all events must remain in a sense traumatic,<sup>114</sup> the spectrographic signature effects of ‘Hitchcock’, which traverse *Vertigo* and *La Jetée* via the Sequoia scenes, suggest that cinema itself may be divided in advance, marked or wounded by the other and thus an essentially spectral dimension which awaits or projects (itself as) an event which remains to come.

### 1.7 A trauma study

Derrida suggests that ‘archival technology no longer determines, will never have determined, merely the moment of the conservational recording, but rather the very institution of the archivable event.’<sup>115</sup> If we think of cinema as an archival technology, not least in relation to the storage of time,<sup>116</sup> then it is not simply that it archives a recordable event, but rather that what we might archive *as* the event is determined by the very archival technology which attempts to capture it. Though this may seem obvious, if we think of this in terms of a mnemonic archive, it suggests that what is remembered is never a copy of an event, but rather that an event has in a sense been determined by the mnemonic apparatus. As Derrida states, ‘archivable meaning is also and in advance codetermined by the structure that archives. It begins with the printer.’<sup>117</sup> Although there is something to be remembered – an ‘archivable meaning’ – such meaning is codetermined by the ‘structure that archives’. As Eric Prenowitz notes, the archive ‘never neutrally consigns a pre-existent archivable content in a simple manner.’<sup>118</sup> As what is archived of the event is never analogous to it, the very act of archiving is preinhabited by a certain otherness. At the heart of all archival desire, this otherness is what Derrida refers to as *mal d’archive*, or ‘archive fever’. Such a fever, which preinhabits all archival technology, might be thought of as a certain finitude, a

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<sup>113</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p.68; *Mal d’Archive*, p.109. See also *Specters of Marx*, passim. I read the notion of *l’à-venir* as discussed in the latter text in Chapter Two.

<sup>114</sup> See the introduction to this thesis.

<sup>115</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p.18; *Mal d’Archive*, p.36.

<sup>116</sup> With the advent of modernity, ‘Time is no longer the benign phenomenon most easily grasped by the notion of flow but a troublesome and anxiety-producing entity that must be thought in relation to management, regulation, storage, and representation. One of the most important apparatuses for regulating and storing time was the cinema.’ See: Mary Ann Doane, ‘Temporality, Storage, Legibility: Freud, Marey, and the Cinema’, *Critical Enquiry*, 22 (Winter 1996), p.314.

<sup>117</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p.18; *Mal d’Archive*, p.37.

<sup>118</sup> Eric Prenowitz, ‘Right on [*à même*]’ in: Jacques Derrida *Archive Fever*, p.110.

cut, forgetting, or radical evil in relation to which there would be no desire to archive: ‘There would indeed be no archive desire without the radical finitude, without the possibility of a forgetfulness which does not limit itself to repression.’<sup>119</sup> Therefore, the archive ‘always works, and *a priori*, against itself’<sup>120</sup>; all archival desire is marked in advance by a radical forgetting. ‘Archive fever’ means that there is no archival technology which is commensurate to the event it purports to record or remember.

In a similar sense, for it to be possible to *recall* what has been archived, it would be necessary to remember to forget. Such forgetting is not a simple act of repression or disavowal; it is the radical finitude or cut which makes all memory possible. No matter how commanding or complete the archive, its very possibility is due to the fact that it cannot be reduced to that which it attempts to archive. The archive will always be the mark of what exceeds it, an impression of the other – an otherness which cannot be reduced to its recording or reproduction. Always-already exceeded by what is nevertheless marked by the archive, the archival trace is divided in advance, marked by what is grafted into the future. The archive, then, is a certain spectrographic technology, a ghost-writing machine, a machine which lets the ghost return as the mark of what remains to come. The Sequoia scenes explore this archival fever, allowing us to ask what it might mean to suffer, survive or *live on* with the fever at the heart of every archive. Deploying a spectrographic cinema, Hitchcock’s ‘signature effects’ provide an essentially unstable platform from which to ask what such a suffering and survival would mean for the notions of memory and for forgetting.

Archontic desire is preinhabited, therefore, by the question of suffering, of suffering the mark of a radical otherness as that which cannot be recalled to memory or to forgetting, but which is the condition of both. That a memory or record of the event is conditioned by a certain ‘fever’, echoes Derrida’s suggestion that ‘[b]y reason of this unforeseeability, this *irreducible and inappropriable exteriority* [my emphasis] for the subject of experience, every event as such would be *traumatic*.’<sup>121</sup> As the event ‘*injures* desire, whether or not desire desires or does not desire what happens’<sup>122</sup>, its very condition – for the experiencing, archiving subject or structure – would be the mark or

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<sup>119</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p.19; *Mal d’Archive*, p.38.

<sup>120</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p.12; *Mal d’Archive*, p.27.

<sup>121</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Typewriter Ribbon’, p.159.

<sup>122</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Typewriter Ribbon’, pp.159-60 (my emphasis).

wound of what remained ‘irreducible and inappropriable’. Cinema, subject, and the archive are traversed by this essential spectrographics; an art of cinema, the experience of the subject, and the possibility of the archive are all conditioned by their bearing the mark of ‘some outside, [...] some nondesire, some death, and something inorganic, the becoming possible of the impossible *as* im-possible.’<sup>123</sup> All are preinhabited by what exceeds them, like Derrida’s ‘jetty’, they extend into and incorporate the other as their very possibility. In turn, each are ‘themselves’ by bearing the *might* of the future as the ‘becoming possible of the impossible *as* im-possible’.

A trauma study, as that which attempts to devote itself to thinking the traumatic event, must also suffer and live on as that which bears the mark or *might* of the im-possible. Of course, this would mean that the study of a traumatic event would be the study of what remains ‘to come’, a study in the possibility of the im-possible. This would also mean, however, that such a suffering would be the *only* possibility of thinking a traumatic event, in that, at an infinite distance from the event, a trauma study would register its essentially divided impression. As an impression, mark or wound of what remains to come, a trauma study remains trembling and hesitant upon this horizonless plane. A trauma study, then, could never be (re)assured. As the archiving of the traumatic event could never be reduced to itself once and for all (to the point where its ‘traumatic’ status could be secured), any study which might attempt to think that event would be equally unstable. A traumatic event is a return from the future, a ghost-effect which returns to the texts which attempt to write (on) it. Moreover, as a traumatic event could never be reduced to the total control, command or recollection of a perfect memory or a total forgetting, it would never be proper to a particular archive, or to a particular scientific or academic discipline. Indeed, a trauma study would put such archives, categories or disciplines necessarily at risk. As there ‘is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory,’<sup>124</sup> a trauma study, then, as the possibility of the im-possible, would politicize trauma and traumatize the political.

Of course, a trauma study would also be impossible to name ‘as such’; it would always be the possibility that it might be something other than what it purports to be, and this inability to decide once and for all upon its status would be its necessary condition. *If*

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<sup>123</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Typewriter Ribbon’, pp.159-60.

<sup>124</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p.4.

there is *to be* a trauma study, it would be impossible to situate or to locate ‘as such’ (either academically, politically, epistemologically, nomologically, or topographically). Rather, a trauma study would suffer and survive – live on – as that which is marked by what remains to come. It is as likely, then, that a trauma study would ‘take place’ as a cinematic text as an academic text. Indeed, there is no genre or faculty which would be appropriate to it. This is why cinema – or an art/science/séance or spectrographic cinema – is a medium in which a trauma study, as the possibility of the im-possible, might take place.

### 1.8 *Suffering the wound*

As a making visible of the cut which preinhabits the natural, the Sequoia scenes are suffused with the fantasy of castration. Indeed, as a traumatic cut or interruption would be the very condition of the event, the question of castration is central to a cinema whose condition is also a certain marking of the other. However, as the Sequoia scenes reveal the cut to be the condition of the ‘natural’ or ‘living’, it could be suggested that, in their deployment of a certain spectrographics, these scenes might allow us to re-read the relation to the other upon which the fantasies of castration (and their traumatic effects) rely.

In various ways, both *Vertigo* and *La Jetée* can be seen to suffer the mark of the other. At the opening of *Vertigo* Scottie witnesses the death of the law, of the father, a death which marks a shift of castrating authority from the real father to the symbolic father, or what Lacan terms the ‘Name of the Father’.<sup>125</sup> Thus the castrating threat of the real father shifts to the threat of death ‘as such’. Like the man in *La Jetée*, Scottie is marked by the image of his death; both films open with a clear demonstration of this threat, in turn suggesting that a reconnection with the phallic (m)other is the only safeguard against it. The narratives of both films follow this search for a reconnection with a maternal safety, the return to an idyllic prehistorical bliss of the (phallic) mother. From this it is clear how critics can read Scottie as identifying with Madeleine/Judy, in that both are haunted or marked by a notion of the feminine/maternal to which they wish to

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<sup>125</sup> Lacan’s term for ‘the fundamental signifier which permits signification to proceed normally. This fundamental signifier both confers identity on the subject (it names him, positions him within the symbolic order) and signifies the Oedipal prohibition, the ‘no’ of the incest taboo. If this signifier is foreclosed (not included in the symbolic order), the result is psychosis.’ See: Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p.119.

return. However, and as Cohen notes, the notion of the feminine with which Scottie wishes to reconnect or reattach (himself) is fake: ‘a *first* model, *first* object, or *first* memory for Scottie on which all else supposedly depends, is itself a plant, prosthetic, even a joke – that is, Madeleine.’<sup>126</sup>

Like Scottie, the man in *La Jetée* is also haunted by something which is planted, inscribed, or marked in him. The memory which haunts him from *childhood* – the memory of his own death – is also a fake, in that, as he *witnesses* that death as a child, it cannot be his *own*. His death is also another’s, and therefore a fake, virtual, inappropriable to himself alone. Both films, then, can be seen to ask what might be the effect of believing that what is most natural, most our own, most proper to us is in fact a prosthetic implant, something inscribed in us like the archiving circles of the Sequoia’s cross-section. Castration, or the cut, interruption, wound, or mark of the other, is addressed as an originary condition of what we take to be most natural, real, or proper. Cohen glosses this spectrographic dispossession of origin:

With this circular buckling of mnemonic order, model and copy, before and after are decoupled. Any intervention in the historical program [...] rests with this *rendering virtual* of a programmed past through a dispossessing “priority” of inscription to perception, identity, legibility.<sup>127</sup>

In both *Vertigo* and *La Jetée*, then, castration, or the mark of the other, can be read to be figured through a phallogentric prism: for Scottie, Judy, and the man in *La Jetée*, the desire to reconnect (with) a lost maternal other allows them to be linked via an identificatory logic (hence Modleski can read *Vertigo* as exceeding the masculine gaze by anticipating a feminine or bisexual spectator). However, as Scottie and Judy are haunted or preinhabited by a *virtual* memory (Madeleine), we find an identificatory logic has been disposed of its priority by a logic of prosthesis, inscription, and the cut. It could be suggested, then, that a certain spectrographic cinema – or cinema as the art/science/séance of ghosts – preinhabits a cinema based on identificatory, Oedipal, mimetic, and anthropomorphic themes and structures. In a sense castration, or the mark of the other, is the condition of all these themes and structures, and yet, as sites where

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<sup>126</sup> Tom Cohen, *Hitchcock’s Cryptonymies*, vol. 2, p.297, fn.5.

<sup>127</sup> Tom Cohen, *Hitchcock’s Cryptonymies*, vol. 2, p.297, fn.5.

this textual dimension is deployed, *Vertigo* and *La Jetée* present opportunities to read castration otherwise.

We can see the potential of, and the resistance to, such an opportunity in the Sequoia scene from *La Jetée*. When faced with the cross-section, the word the woman speaks but the man cannot comprehend is ‘Hitchcock?’ (for some perhaps the father of auteur cinema). This is a certain staging of the castration complex: whilst the woman makes an association between the cross-section and ‘Hitchcock’ (that is, she recognizes the Name of the Father), the man cannot comprehend this name; his reaction is one of disavowing this castrating symbolic law – and the cross-section as the image of the cut – and indexing a point beyond the cross-section from which he originated (as the future and/or the image of woman which guards him from death). Just as the man attempts to go beyond the image of the woman in order to reconnect with her real presence, he also disavows the signifier ‘Hitchcock’ when faced with the cross-section, an image of castration as a ‘natural’ – and ‘ever-living’ – life marked by death. As noted above, however, the vertiginous logic of the Sequoia scene, of a natural life preinhabited by the cut, overflows or extends beyond the confines of the cross-section. The spectral inscription mirrors the double meaning of ‘là’ (here/there) with which the man tries to index his origin/future.

In terms of narrative plot, we might see a difference between *Vertigo* and *La Jetée* in their relation to loss – which, again, can be read in both films through the castration complex. For *Vertigo*’s Scottie, the loss/castration/death he cannot bear is a loss/castration/death he cannot *figure* – hence his acrophobic condition, illustrated in the film with the famous ‘dolly zoom’ or ‘Vertigo shot’ in which camera both zooms towards and moves away from the subject. Scottie attempts to rid himself of his vertiginous relation to loss/castration/death through his desire for a woman who can *manifest*, and therefore *figure* death for him; someone who can contain death by giving it a presence.<sup>128</sup> After what appears to be the death of Madeleine – something he cannot

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<sup>128</sup> We might also note here Scottie’s relation to his old college friend, Marjorie ‘Midge’ Wood. ‘Midge’ is a lingerie designer and commercial artist. She is therefore depicted – figured – as figuring or sculpting women. Midge takes on a motherly role in the film, she both cares for Scottie whilst he’s recuperating from his acrophobia, and encourages his maturity by alluding to him as a ‘big boy’ capable of coming to terms with the realities of life (for example in introducing Scottie to the practical aspects of the cantilever bra she is designing). But she is also attracted to Scottie, and wants to be desired by him in the same way he desires Madeleine. As if to tell Scottie this, Midge paints a portrait of herself in the image of the dead



witness and which provokes a profound melancholy – his ‘second chance’ comes with the discovery of Judy, a woman who can figure the dead Madeleine, and in turn, Madeleine’s capacity to represent death. Once uncovered as a sham however, Judy, as his second chance, turns out to be his saving grace: with the discovery that Madeleine’s capacity to figure the dead was faked, Scottie drives Judy to her real death, and in doing so overcomes his vertigo by witnessing loss/castration/death as a bearable event.

Whilst *Vertigo*’s plot sees Scottie shifting from a ‘pathological’ melancholia to ‘normal’ mourning, a work of mourning which seems to end successfully by coming to terms with/witnessing Judy’s death, the man in *La Jetée* is returned to the instant of his ‘own’ death. Here, the man – who is also the child – survives *and* experiences his own death. This doubling of the child/man means that the subject/other is at once in a position of knowledge and non-knowledge: the man knows he is – as a child (and therefore as another) – witnessing his/another’s death, and the child – as the man (and therefore another) – does not. The man knows what himself-as-other does not know, and the child does not know what himself-as-other knows. One way to think this impossible logic might be in relation to the notorious ambiguity surrounding the status of the primal scene<sup>129</sup> – that is, as to whether such a scene has been experienced ‘for real’ or fantasised. Such ambiguity would also concern the castrating violence with which most instances of the primal scene are overdetermined: for the child/man in *La Jetée*, the primal scene is both witnessed *and* experienced. If such a vertiginous logic could be cured (as Scottie’s is in *Vertigo*), the boy would know *immediately* that what he was witnessing was a murder – and that he could bear, or figure this appearance of death. However, though the boy/man will later realise that ‘he had seen a man die’, and that this death is his ‘own’, his survival of it renders that death as essentially divided or spectral. His ‘own’ death in fact divides him in advance; his ‘own’ death is the other

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Carlotta – that is, she figures herself as what will screen/figure death for Scottie. But Scottie is appalled by this, and states she has gone too far. Though Midge’s role in *Vertigo* would require a much longer reading here, it might tentatively be suggested that Scottie’s rejection of Midge suggests that death has *already* been more comprehensively figured for him by Madeleine, and that Midge’s painting appeared to him as only a weak, clumsy and excessive counterfeit.

<sup>129</sup> ‘Scene of sexual intercourse between the parents which the child observes, or infers on the basis of certain indications, and phantasises. It is generally interpreted by the child as an act of violence on the part of the father.’ See: Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, p.335. In this case, the boy/man witnesses/experiences the murder as the violent and castrating act of the father. That the boy/man is both witness and subject of the experience raises a further complication regarding the roles of reality and fantasy here.

which preinhabits him, which wounds or marks him, as his very condition. The man can only assume his ‘own’ death because he has already survived it.

From the opening scene of *La Jetée*, a curious logic sees the man survive himself in order to experience ‘himself’. As a point of origin or end – a point which would be proper to the man’s history – the child/man finds that his murder/witnessing is impossible to return to or arrive at, as it would always-already be marked – and therefore divided or differentiated – by the other. Indeed, the very notion of this moment being reducible to an origin or end could only be thought because it was marked, differentiated, and haunted by the other. We can think of this in terms of the film’s relation to psychoanalysis, and to Derrida’s suggestion that psychoanalysis is an event whose interruption has marked intellectual discourse, but which remains irreducible to conventional reason. For Derrida, psychoanalysis and cinema form an art/science/séance of ghosts. In its pseudo-psychoanalytic scenario – the analyst/experimenter’s provocation of the prisoner’s dreams as a passage to their proper origin/history – *La Jetée* suggests that, in order to recall their past, the analysand must be haunted by the other. The secret of psychoanalysis, or what Derrida refers to in *Ghost Dance* as an ‘aspect’ or ‘something’ [*quelque chose*] of psychoanalysis, is the very thing which cannot be reduced to psychoanalytic reason, to the reason of the analyst. Once the man tunes into the images with which he is obsessed, he can dream that time and therefore be transported to it. But to live these moments *again* would demand their repetition, their *iterable* trace. The moment of which the man dreams, and to which he wants to return, must *first of all* be the mark of what *might* return, a mark which is haunted by the other as the possibility of the future. The fragment or memory trace of which he dreams cannot be reduced to an experience, history, or space-time which is proper to the subject, as that trace is divided in advance by the possibility of its repetition. This pseudo-psychoanalytic process is both conditioned and compromised by the very thing it introduced, an irreducible unconscious. It is perhaps necessary then that psychoanalysis be thought of in terms of a theoretical jetty, as that which must extend beyond its own borders and incorporate the other in order to be ‘itself’. Such a pseudo-science might also incorporate a certain *art*, or indeed, be an art of incorporation. Indeed, and recalling Derrida’s reference to a relation between cinema and a certain ‘something’ of psychoanalysis, here we might find an art/science/séance of cinema as the medium which channels the return of its ghostly other.

*La Jetée* demonstrates an essential paradox: the man is both dead and alive, his history his own because it is also another's. And this paradox is the very condition of memory, the very possibility of thinking or 'returning' to a 'past'. The condition of time-travel (which depends upon an intense attachment to a fragment of memory), and thus the condition of the man's pseudo-analysis, is that it is impossible for the man to be reduced to his *own* memory. Here, the very condition of psychoanalysis would be the impossibility of reducing analysis to a traditional notion of the psyche: an animating force which is proper to a host subject or entity. As if in defiance of this essential irrationality, the 'reasonable'<sup>130</sup> experimenter of the future (the figure of the analyst) attempts to terminate the session by returning to the pier to kill the man (with violence and the desire to 'call time' providing a castrating law here). But the experimenter has travelled *with* the man; he is already part of the impossibility of terminating that scene as his shooting of the man begins the process anew. The event which demands that this story cannot end (the murder witnessed by the child) is, therefore, the result of a desire to end it – to put an end to the enigmatic *might* of memory. The castrating death, the cut or interruption is the condition of the film, *La Jetée* only 'begins' because it is preinhabited by the end, the cut, death.

With the man's murder comes the realization that 'there was no way to escape Time.'<sup>131</sup> A moment of inescapable death, then, must also be escaped (as it is also the moment of resurrection) *in order to be thought of as inescapable*. This event is at the same time a 'madness'<sup>132</sup> (for the child), and a sober realization (for the man). The paradox at work here is that the (im)possible doubling of the event (in that it is both experienced by the man and witnessed by the boy) is, on the one hand, the result of the child/man already surviving him/them-selves. On the other hand, however, such a survival is also a result of the doubling of the event. It would seem that what might be thought of as death and survival are constituted in the very difference of the same (moment). The consequence being that such a moment both can and cannot be thought. From the moment of the murder/witnessing, every step of the film can be thought of as both an after-effect *and* an awaiting of the (un)known 'traumatic' event; an event – or the 'worst' – both

<sup>130</sup> Chris Marker, *La Jetée, ciné-roman*, page number unspecified.

<sup>131</sup> Chris Marker, *La Jetée, ciné-roman*, page number unspecified.

<sup>132</sup> Chris Marker, *La Jetée, ciné-roman*, page number unspecified.

experienced and to come, a paradox conditioned by the quasi-originary suffering, marking, or inscription of the other.

The boy's survival of his own death forever defers the man's reconnection with it. The image of the woman, then, which seems to promise the absolute knowledge of maternal origin and proper death, only signifies that origin/death as a further virtuality. The spectrality of the image, as the mark or inscription of what exceeds it, defers the phallogocentric archival drive of the man's desire to reconnect with the lost object, as well as a certain cinematic desire to reduce everything – including the threat of death – to a mimetic regime. That the very possibility of the film's plot depends upon the impossibility of resolving it suggests that the plot is itself preinhabited by a textuality which exceeds it. Such a textuality would be the spectrographics or cryptonymies which survive on the borders of the text; the signature effects of 'Hitchcock' which sabotage narrative in their endless traversal of a 'Hitchcockian' telegraphic network. In neither avowing nor disavowing the man's attempted denial of castration, *La Jetée* allows this spectrographic textuality to infiltrate the plot and form a resistance to any definite reading of it.<sup>133</sup> The film neither allows his complete reconnection with the woman, nor – in the fact the child survives his own (that is, the man's) death – disallows this possibility. Neither does it sublimate his desire (the film resists substituting or translating woman as the object of desire). Rather the film affirms a quasi-originary textual dimension, a *living on* which bears the mark of the (m)other as its very possibility, a spectrographics which suffers or *survives* the (m)other as the *might* – the force and potentiality – of the future.

### 1.9 Welcoming the im-possible

As if somehow expecting the man's arrival, the woman in *La Jetée* 'welcomes him without surprise'.<sup>134</sup> Though the man repeatedly returns in his desire to know once and for all what she means for him, she is not alarmed by his unexpected appearances, instead she

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<sup>133</sup> Like the Palais de Chaillot which hid a Resistance *reseau*, a spectrographic network of resistance, which traverses or tunnels/extends into and under Hitchcock's work, is deployed here.

<sup>134</sup> Chris Marker, *La Jetée, ciné-roman*, page number unspecified.

welcomes him in a simple way. She calls him her ghost [...] She accepts as a natural phenomenon the ways of this visitor who comes and goes, who exists, talks, laughs with her, stops talking, listens to her, then disappears.<sup>135</sup>

Moreover, when the man tells her his almost unbelievable story, she takes it seriously: 'Of a truth too fantastic to be believed he retains the essential: an unreachable country, a long way to go. She listens. She doesn't laugh.'<sup>136</sup> Though the man knows that in the future from which he has come she is dead, and that therefore she is also a ghost for him, it is only the woman who *welcomes* the ghost, who doesn't expect, demand or desire the confirmation of presence or knowledge, but allows the other to return in the here and now; it is only the woman who welcomes what is 'too fantastic to be believed'.<sup>137</sup>

The welcoming of the other, of the ghost effect, can be seen in the Sequoia scene; as opposed to the man's unawareness of the cinematic significance of this scene, the woman recognizes the signature of 'Hitchcock', she countersigns this signature effect or mark of the other as her 'reality' incorporates the cinematic. It is as if she inhabits cinema as that which preinhabits her, that 'something' which cannot be reduced to the logic of 'reality'.<sup>138</sup> The spectrographics of 'Hitchcock' have been incorporated by the woman so that when faced with the cross-section she welcomes it as the return of an almost familiar ghost, as something with which she has already been marked, and yet which keeps returning from the future.

The two grammars of *La Jetée* each preinhabit the other. Indeed, *La Jetée* is grammatically doubled in advance; it extends into the other as a text marked by what remains to come, whilst also coming back to itself *because* of that marking. It can be seen to take place between the beginning and end of a single sentence because it extends

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<sup>135</sup> Chris Marker, *La Jetée, ciné-roman*, page number unspecified.

<sup>136</sup> 'Elle l'accueille sans étonnement'; 'Elle l'accueille simplement. Elle l'appelle son Spectre'; 'Elle accepte comme un phénomène naturel les passages de ce visiteur qui apparaît et disparaît, qui existe, parle, rit avec elle, se tait, l'écoute et s'en va'; 'D'une vérité trop fantastique pour être reçue, il garde l'essentiel : un pays lointain, une longue distance à parcourir. Elle l'écoute sans se moquer.' See: Chris Marker, *La Jetée, ciné-roman*, page number unspecified.

<sup>137</sup> Chris Marker, *La Jetée, ciné-roman*, page number unspecified.

<sup>138</sup> This 'inhabiting' of cinema recalls Benjamin's essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in which he suggests a certain distracted or habitual consideration of film, mirroring the distracted or disinterested way people inhabit buildings. See: Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp.211-44 (p.233). Of course, distracted consideration or disinterested interest has a philosophical history which stems at least from Kant's *Critique of Judgement*.

into and incorporates what remains beyond that circular or teleological grammar. Because of this double movement, *La Jetée* can be read to subscribe to the same structure of Freud's 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'<sup>139</sup>, a structure noted in Derrida's 'To Speculate – On "Freud"'<sup>140</sup>, in which Freud touches on, marks, or is marked by the death drive which preinhabits the pleasure principle.<sup>141</sup> As Smith notes, Derrida's reading asks if Freud 'is the author of this text or is there a more powerful machine manipulating him?'<sup>142</sup> As Freud attempts to move his theory of trauma forward, as he attempts to touch on the death drive, he also recoils from his hypothesis, as if to return the text to the safety of a pleasure which is not inhabited by the mechanical repetitions of the death drive. Freud will touch on the other whilst returning to himself, in this sense his text suffers the inscription of the death drive as what remains to come, and performs the very movement he is trying to theorize (and reduce to a single point or principle). Yet whilst Freud is tentative and timid in his inscription of the other, and whilst the man in *La Jetée* attempts to return to his own principle point, the woman seems to welcome the other as if it were the very condition of the 'natural'.

In his essay on the 'state' or 'states' of 'theory' in the North American university, Derrida distinguishes in the jetty

on the one hand, the force of the movement which throws something or throws itself (*jette* or *se jette*) forward and backwards at the same time, prior to any subject, object, or project, prior to any rejection or abjection, from, on the other hand, its institutional and protective consolidation, which can be compared to the jetty, the pier in a harbour meant to break the waves and maintain low tide for boats at anchor or for swimmers. Of course, these two functions of the jetty are ideally distinct, but in fact they are difficult to dissociate, if not indissociable.<sup>143</sup>

On the one hand the force of a movement which throws itself forward and backwards would be a certain destabilizing 'jetty', a 'non-place' in which the 'the appearance of the effects of deconstruction can be situated.'<sup>144</sup> On the other, the jetty as harbour pier

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<sup>139</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' [1920], *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XVIII (London: Vintage, 2001), pp.7-64.

<sup>140</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'To Speculate – On "Freud"' [1980], *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp.257-409.

<sup>141</sup> See also: Robert Smith, 'Deconstruction and Film', pp.123-4.

<sup>142</sup> Robert Smith, 'Deconstruction and Film', p.123.

<sup>143</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Some Statements and Truisms', p.65.

<sup>144</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Some Statements and Truisms', p.72.

would consolidate its position, calming the waters for those who want to swim in them. These two jetties can be read in *La Jetée*; the destabilizing jetty, essentially divided by a forward and back movement, recoiling and suffering from the mark of the other it also projects or grafts into the future. The Sequoia scene would be only one instance of this double movement in the film. Derrida's second jetty can be found in Ffrench's suggestion that the film can be read to take place as if between the beginning and end of a single sentence; a film which extends into the other only to return to its 'proper' conclusion (the man's 'own death'). Following Derrida then, these two jetties would be difficult to separate, indeed each may be the possibility of the other, and both contribute to the 'essential vagueness'<sup>145</sup> of the notion of 'theory' he is discussing.

As 'Trauma Studies' – as a discipline or field of academic enquiry – can be seen to have emerged from North American (comparative literature) departments, departments in which Derrida's 'essentially vague' notion of 'theory' also appears, there is the possibility that Derrida's indissociable jetties can also be found there. Trauma Studies, then, might be seen to function according to the destabilizing jetty of deconstruction, as well as to the consolidating or static jetty of an academic discipline's political desire to sustain and secure its borders. A *trauma study*, then, might also be structured by these indissociable jetties; both a place where deconstruction *might* happen, or where its effects *might* appear, but also a consolidatory act: that which *gives place* to an 'essential vagueness', a *thetic* placing, assurance or consolidation of what can't be placed, reassured, or consolidated. I have tried to *give place* to a destabilizing jetty through my reading of the Sequoia scenes, suggesting that such scenes radiate 'Hitchcock's' vertiginous signature effect as a writing which suffers the mark or wound of the other. I suggest that these vertiginous scenes mark a particular instance where a trauma study – which must remain in a sense im-possible – might find its possibility.

If *La Jetée* is to be read as a trauma study, such a reading must preserve its secret as the very condition of being able to think, experience and come to terms with it. Whilst returning to itself in an attempt to come to a conclusion, I hope this chapter has also touched on the other, that it has borne or suffered the mark of the other as a memory of what exceeds it. If *La Jetée* is to be read as a trauma study, such a reading must

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<sup>145</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Some Statements and Truisms', p.85.

countersign it 'as such', it must place itself alongside the woman who welcomes the ghost, who suffers what might return, alongside the one who welcomes a story '*too* fantastic to be believed', but who says yes to this unbelievable excess as if it were the very essence of the believable.



## 2.

**FROM LOSS TO IMMINENCE:  
READING BARTHES READING STENDHAL**

In short, what has happened – what has transpired – between the travel journals and *The Charterhouse*, is writing [*c'est l'écriture*]. Writing – which is what? A power, probable fruit of a long initiation, which annuls [*défait*] the sterile immobility of the amorous image-repertoire [*l'imaginaire amoureux*] and gives its adventure a symbolic generality. When he was young, in the days of *Rome, Naples, Florence*, Stendhal could write: "... when I tell lies, I am like M. de Goury, I am bored"; he did not yet know that there existed a lie, the lie of novels [*le mensonge romanesque*], which would be – miraculously – both the detour of truth and the finally triumphant expression of his Italian passion.

*Roland Barthes.*<sup>1</sup>

Does this all mean I'm going to write a novel? How should I know?

*Roland Barthes.*<sup>2</sup>

My first epigraph is from '*On échoue toujours à parler de ce qu'on aime*', an essay written in 1980 by Roland Barthes, for a colloquium in Milan on Stendhal. It is thought to be the last he wrote before his death. Barthes left the first page typed and amended, but the manuscript's second page remained in the typewriter. Perhaps it was left unfinished (the fact Barthes had amended the first page certainly implies he would have amended the rest), but this cannot be known for sure, and so it might also be considered as a text which marks what remained to come. Barthes's essay maps a shift between Stendhal's early travel journals and his later novels; with the latter performing the '*romanesque*' lie as referred to in my epigraph. Such a lie is the lie of the novel, which, in going via the 'detour of truth', achieves the final 'triumphant expression of [Stendhal's] Italian passion'. Barthes's essay is concerned with Stendhal's ability to

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<sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes, 'One Always Fails in Speaking of What One Loves', trans. Richard Howard, in: *The Rustle of Language*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1986), pp.296-305 (p.305); '*On échoue toujours à parler de ce qu'on aime*', *Tel Quel*, no.85, automne 1980; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.V (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002), pp.906-914 (p.914).

<sup>2</sup> Roland Barthes, '« Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure... »', trans. Richard Howard, in: *The Rustle of Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1986), pp.277-90 (p.289); *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.V (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002), pp.459-470 (p.470).

address this intense ‘Italian’ passion without reducing that passion to definitive knowledge, or specific object. My second chapter, therefore, will argue that, with his reading of Stendhal, Barthes also reflects on his own desire to write on the subject of (his) passion, a writing which might express that passion whilst sustaining it as his most intimate secret.

Chapter One of this thesis suggested how an art/science/séance of cinema might affirm, or write (on), the traumatic event as the possibility of the im-possible, a writing (on) trauma which welcomes the *might* of what remains to come. Chapter Two reads this ‘might’ in terms of *imminence*, and asks how, in his reading of Stendhal, Barthes reserves a space in writing for what is yet to come. Referring to Jacques Derrida’s notion of the *arrivant* as that which must remain wholly other, utterly unexpected and ‘to come’, this chapter argues that, in order to think the other as what must remain ‘to come’, Barthes puts to work a notion of the ‘imaginary’ as an effect of the text in which what remains wholly other is imminent, but yet to arrive ‘as such’. I argue that, it is through this reading of the imaginary that Barthes can claim Stendhal has ‘triumphantly’ expressed his ‘Italian passion’ via the truth of a ‘*romanesque*’ lie, that this ‘triumph’ has been achieved through an imaginary punctuated by the promise – and threat – of what remains to come.

At the beginning of ‘*On échoue toujours à parler de ce qu’on aime*’, Barthes seems a little uncertain of his conclusion; he remains unsure as to whether Stendhal did eventually express his passion for Italy: ‘Stendhal’s Italy is indeed a fantasy [*un fantasme*], even if he partially realized it [*même s’il l’a en partie accompli*]. (But did he? I shall end by saying how).’<sup>3</sup> As we can’t be sure that Barthes’s essay was complete, we cannot be sure of how he thought Stendhal might have ‘partially realized’ his fantasy, though the closing passages do give an indication of the direction in which his thought was heading. Barthes suggests that ‘Italy’ is ‘*un fantasme*’ for Stendhal, a term which recalls a psychoanalytic lexicon. Moreover, my first epigraph shows Barthes using the term ‘*imaginaire*’ to describe a space in which the mode of address shifts in Stendhal’s work. The use of these two terms marks Barthes’s essay as an intersection in the work of several major thinkers: Nietzsche, Sartre, Deleuze, Guattari and Lacan.

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<sup>3</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘One Always Fails in Speaking of What One Loves’, p.296; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.V, p.906.

Though it is impossible to recall the intricacies of this convergence here, it is necessary to sketch its outline.

Kris Pint argues that Barthes re-reads the imaginary in order to find a neutral term between the Lacanian and Deleuzian readings of fantasy.<sup>4</sup> Lacan sees fantasy as a form of defence, a compromise formation which touches on but protects the subject from an overwhelming ‘Real’ or ‘*jouissance*’, whilst sustaining a desire for the other. The fantasy, therefore, is a function of the subject, a ‘defense which veils castration.’<sup>5</sup> Whilst Lacan sees fantasy as essential to the formation of the subject, Deleuze and Guattari see the Lacanian subject as an effect of the Oedipal/castration fantasy, and therefore a subject whose desires are individuated, stifled and controlled according to the formation of the self or ego.<sup>6</sup> For Deleuze and Guattari, the Freudian/Lacanian – and therefore Oedipal – subject is an effect of language or representation, a subject which is determined by an originary lack (castration). As Claire Colebrook explains, ‘[i]f I am subjected to this system of lawful signs (the [Lacanian] Symbolic), then I imagine that there was some renounced object that was lacking (but which the law promises).’<sup>7</sup> The subject of the Symbolic order must therefore mediate their relation to lack – their desire – through the signifier. Through its imaginary manipulation of the Symbolic order, the subject of the Oedipal/castration fantasy is predicated on lack and negation, a lack or negation figured through the loss of the mother, and thus the feminine. In turn, the signifier which might account for this originary loss is phallic. Against this Oedipal subject, Deleuze and Guattari propose a ‘nomadic’ individual-as-collective, a function of the desiring-machines which populate a ‘plane of immanence’ (or ‘body without organs’). Here, echoing Nietzsche, desire is not predicated by lack or need, but is instead a process of ‘becoming’.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Kris Pint, ‘How to Become What One Is: Roland Barthes’s Final Fantasy’, *Paragraph*, 31:1 (2008), pp.38-49.

<sup>5</sup> Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p.60; with reference to: Jacques Lacan, *Le Seminaire, Livre IV, La relation d’objet*, 1956-57, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1994), pp.119-20.

<sup>6</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: capitalism and schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (London: The Athlone Press, 1984), *passim*.

<sup>7</sup> Claire Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2002), p.22.

<sup>8</sup> See: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: The Athlone Press, 1988), *passim*.

Kris Pint argues that Barthes utilizes the notion of the imaginary to span these theories of desire; such an imaginary suspends the decision between a position of subjective fantasy as the enaction of a desire which guards against an originary and castrating lack, an internalised Oedipal/castration fantasy, and one which admits the revolutionary potential of a Nietzschean/Deleuzian ‘becoming’. For Pint, however, Barthes’s use of the imaginary ‘eludes’ both Lacanian psychoanalysis and the work of Deleuze and Guattari.<sup>9</sup> For him, Barthes’s later work reassessed the notion of the imaginary, and in doing so, ‘explicitly pleaded for a return of the repressed “ego” in literary theory.’<sup>10</sup> Though the purpose of my argument will be to show how Barthes’s use of the imaginary cannot be reduced to the return of a repressed ‘ego’ formation, Pint’s argument is useful in that it suggests how Barthes reads the imaginary as a neutral position between Lacan’s theory of the subject as predicated on lack, and Deleuze and Guattari’s denunciation of the imaginary as a function of an individual subjected to language. Pint’s suggestion, therefore, points towards a position between lack and immanence, a position which my argument will develop in terms of *imminence*.

The relation between Barthes and Sartre must also be underlined here. Whilst Pint fails to mention how Barthes’s use of the imaginary is indebted to Sartre’s use of the term, Jean-Michel Rabaté highlights that Barthes maintained an allegiance with Sartre throughout his work. Indeed, Rabaté suggests that Sartre’s ‘*L’Imaginaire*, published in 1940, can be taken as the philosophical foundation for *Camera Lucida*.’<sup>11</sup> That Barthes dedicates *Camera Lucida* to Sartre’s text would seem to endorse Rabaté’s claim. Yet Sartre’s notion of the imaginary – and therefore his concept of ‘freedom’ – is structured by the idea of ‘nothingness’ or negation; central terms for much of his work. As Rabaté explains, for Sartre, the ‘imaging or imagining consciousness, which transforms the object into an analogon of itself, is therefore *primarily a negating consciousness* that has to empty the world of its ordinary qualities in order to transform it into an aesthetic image.’<sup>12</sup> As with the Lacanian subject, the Sartrean imaginary requires an originary lack or loss which Deleuze and Guattari will read as conducive to the phallic mediation of desire. Moreover, Rabaté argues that Sartre’s ‘negativity makes it impossible [...] to

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<sup>9</sup> Kris Pint, ‘How to Become What One Is’, p.44.

<sup>10</sup> Kris Pint, ‘How to Become What One Is’, p.44.

<sup>11</sup> Jean-Michel Rabaté, ‘Introduction’, *Writing the image after Roland Barthes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), p.6.

<sup>12</sup> Jean-Michel Rabaté, ‘Introduction’, p.7 (my emphasis).

move logically from the domain of aesthetics to the realm of ethics [and that this] tragic dimension of the imaginary experience' is revisited by Barthes.<sup>13</sup>

That Barthes dedicated one of his most famous texts to Sartre's *L'Imaginaire* indicates that in this late period he is concerned with returning to the notion of the imaginary. My chapter will argue, therefore, that Barthes's late essay on Stendhal offers a reading of the imaginary as an effect of the text. I want to suggest that Barthes's later work approaches an aesthetic of the promise which, rather than revisiting a 'tragic dimension of the imaginary experience', instead reads the imaginary to be marked by the very possibility of doing justice to the other. Rather than being predicated on an originary lack – which might require the mediation of the text/symbolic in order to recall what has been lost – I suggest that Barthes's reading of the imaginary engages with a symbolic or representative order which is structured by the promise of what is wholly unexpected and always to come. This chapter will demonstrate that Barthes's reading of the imaginary cannot be reduced to any one particular definition. It reads the imaginary to be an effect of the text which inherits the work of Nietzsche, Deleuze and Guattari, Sartre and Lacan (amongst others), without affirming any of these readings as the definition of the imaginary as such. This suggests that the imaginary negotiates the investments of those who attempt to formulate it, whilst remaining irreducible to them. Though populated by fantasy, the imaginary cannot be reduced to what Deleuze and Guattari see as the colonizing Oedipal and castration complexes, but neither can it be denounced as a singular engagement with loss, division and difference. I argue instead that Barthes reads the imaginary as an effect of the text which cannot be reduced to the subject, yet is neither a collective fantasy; rather, Barthes posits a '*romanesque*' imaginary for which there is no *originary* loss or lack, a '*romanesque*' imaginary as an essentially textual dimension imminent with wholly other.

Barthes's mother died in 1977, and '*On échoue toujours à parler de ce qu'on aime*' was written in the shadow of that event. As Barthes suggests, 'Italy' is, for Stendhal, a profoundly feminine and maternal space:

passion is Manichean for Stendhal, the wrong side is France, i.e., *la patrie* – for it is the site of the Father – and the right side is Italy, i.e., *la matrice*, the

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<sup>13</sup> Jean-Michel Rabaté, 'Introduction', p.7.

space in which “the Women” are assembled (not forgetting that it was the child’s Aunt Elisabeth, the maternal grandfather’s sister, who pointed her finger toward a country lovelier than Provence, where according to her the “good” side of the family, the Gagnon branch, originated).<sup>14</sup>

As Stendhal’s mother died when he was ‘scarcely seven years old [*quand à peine j’avais sept ans*]<sup>15</sup>, ‘Italy’ becomes an important figure for staging a possible (re)connection with a maternal love. Barthes, then, writing in the aftermath of losing his own mother, sees in Stendhal’s writing of ‘Italy’ an attempt to speak of what one has loved and lost. In the shift from the travel journals to the novel, Barthes reads Stendhal’s representation of ‘Italy’ to shift from a writing predicated on – and attempting to mediate – maternal loss, and one for which a maternal ‘Italy’ is triumphantly expressed. As his essay opens, Barthes finds himself at Milan station, and whilst ‘parodying’ Stendhal, he suggests that ‘lovely Italy is always farther away...elsewhere’.<sup>16</sup> Even when he is seemingly there, Barthes’s ‘Italy’ becomes an idyllic place towards which he can address his imagination:

a train was leaving; on each car hung a yellow placard bearing the words *Milano-Lecce*. I began dreaming: to take that train, to travel all night and wake up in the warmth, the light, the peace of a faraway town. At least that was my fantasy [*ce que j’imaginais*], and it doesn’t matter what Lecce (which I have never seen) is really like.<sup>17</sup>

For Barthes, ‘Italy’ both situates the dreamer, and is that of which the dreamer dreams. ‘Italy’ remains a function of the imaginary for Barthes, even when he is there. It could be said that Barthes sees ‘Italy’ as a destination at an infinite distance. There is an irreducible difference between being situated in Milan and an imaginary ‘Italy’, suggesting that, for the imagination, the point of arrival is precisely to not arrive. This relation to ‘Italy’ points towards what Barthes will also read in Stendhal’s later work; work in which the ‘triumphant expression’ of ‘Italy’ also signals its imminence. Barthes’s essay is concerned with how what might be thought of as a

<sup>14</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘One Always Fails in Speaking of What One Loves’, p.297; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.V, p.907.

<sup>15</sup> Stendhal, *The Life of Henry Brulard*, trans. John Sturrock (New York: New York Review of Books, 2002), p.33; *Vie de Henry Brulard* (Genève: Cercle du Bibliophile, 1968), p.44.

<sup>16</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘One Always Fails in Speaking of What One Loves’, p.296; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.V, p.906.

<sup>17</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘One Always Fails in Speaking of What One Loves’, p.296; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.V, p.906.

mediation/recollection of an originary or primary loss of the maternal in Stendhal's early travel journals shifts – in his later novels – to a writing of 'Italy' as the expression or marking of what remains imminent to the text. In terms of this thesis, I want to argue that this shift takes place through a reading of the imaginary which is conducive to a trauma study, a study in which writing (on) the traumatic event is not the mediation in language of an originary loss or lack. Rather, such a study would be structured by the apparent paradox of expressing what remains to come. I will argue that, in his later work, Barthes alludes to a '*romanesque*' imaginary as a place where an art *and* science of study combine to evade the platitudes of critical analysis, a project which was overdetermined by the question of how to write about (the death of) his own mother.

### 2.1 A '*primal state of pleasure*'

Barthes's essay aims to read a profound difference between Stendhal's experience of Italy as depicted in his early writing – his travel journals and quasi-autobiography (*Rome, Naples et Florence en 1817* and *Vie de Henri Brulard*) – and the encounter with Italy in the later novel, *La Chartreuse de Parme*.<sup>18</sup> For Barthes, Stendhal's expression of his beloved Italy manifests itself through music, yet Barthes will read a shift in the mode of that expression. Whilst Stendhal's earlier texts describe countless musical experiences through which he searches for a profound pleasure, Barthes intimates that the later novel has *become* that experience. Indeed, and as I hope to demonstrate, Barthes's essay suggests that whilst Stendhal's travel journals describe encounters with a music that promises the other, the later novel has become that promise.

Barthes reads Stendhal as being in love with 'specific details', a plurality of pleasures which overdetermine the notion of 'Italy'. Through these pleasures, Stendhal can both produce and mask – symptomize – his passion for the maternal other. Barthes suggests that Stendhal's desire, unable to attach itself to one experience in particular, 'cruises' the delights on offer. Such cruising is 'evidentially a Stendhalian principle: it involves an implicit theory of *irregular discontinuity* which can be said to be simultaneously aesthetic, psychological, and metaphysical.'<sup>19</sup> Though Barthes is aware that this

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<sup>18</sup> Stendhal, *Rome, Naples et Florence en 1817* [1854], *Voyages en Italie* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1973); *Vie de Henry Brulard* [1890] (Genève: Cercle du Bibliophile, 1968); *La Chartreuse de Parme* [1839], 2vols. (Paris: Le Divan, 1932).

<sup>19</sup> Roland Barthes, 'One Always Fails in Speaking of What One Loves', p.298; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.V, p.908.

transferential drift persists throughout Stendhal's work, the question for him is whether or not Stendhal might realize the object of his desire through writing, a writing which might be capable of speaking of what he loves.

Opening the essay with a discussion of Stendhal's travel journals, Barthes suggests that, in Stendhal's 'Italian system, Music has a privileged place because it can replace everything else: it is the degree zero of this system: according to the needs of enthusiasm, it replaces and signifies journeys, Women, the other arts, and in a general manner any sensation.'<sup>20</sup> 'Music', therefore, allows Stendhal to 'cruise' the pleasures 'Italy' may offer. As Barthes describes it, music would figure a primal state of pleasure, a pleasure which has no knowable cause:

[Music's] signifying status, precious above all others, is to produce effects without our having to inquire as to their causes, since these causes are inaccessible. Music constitutes a kind of *primal state* of pleasure: it produces a pleasure one always tries to recapture but never to explain; hence, it is the site of the pure effect, a central notion of the Stendhalian aesthetic.<sup>21</sup>

Though music may signify 'any sensation', its 'pure effect' means that it generates in the listener a 'primal state of pleasure'. It could be suggested here that Barthes is claiming that 'any sensation' might be pleasurable as long as its cause is inaccessible. Barthes asks 'what is a pure effect?', and in answering, suggests an 'effect severed from and somehow purified of any explicative reason, i.e., ultimately, of any *responsible* reason.'<sup>22</sup> As the 'degree zero' of Stendhal's 'Italian system', 'music' would be the elusive signifier of an encounter untainted by the ideology, reason or experience of bourgeois society, but as such, this would also be a purely fleeting – if not impossible – encounter. 'Music' signifies the impossibility of feeling anything but 'pleasure', but without reference to any clear category of pleasure, we might ask how we would be able to determine this experience in the order of 'pleasure'; hence to experience music as a 'primal state of pleasure' would be to experience what is irreducible to both memory and history. As an experience irreducible to memory and history, Stendhal's search for

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<sup>20</sup> Roland Barthes, 'One Always Fails in Speaking of What One Loves', p.299; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.V, p.909.

<sup>21</sup> Roland Barthes, 'One Always Fails in Speaking of What One Loves', p.299; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.V, p.909.

<sup>22</sup> Roland Barthes, 'One Always Fails in Speaking of What One Loves', p.299; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.V, p.909.



the most *primal* of pleasures would, paradoxically, mark a search for the very possibility of the future.

It is possible to relate Stendhal's search for a 'primal state of pleasure' to Barthes's reading of *plaisir* and *jouissance* in *Le Plaisir du texte*:

(Pleasure [*Plaisir*]/Bliss [*Jouissance*]: terminologically, there is always a vacillation – I stumble, I err. In any case, there will always be a margin of indecision; the distinction will not be the source of absolute classifications, the paradigm will falter, the meaning will be precarious, revocable, reversible, the discourse incomplete.)<sup>23</sup>

Though the relation between pleasure and bliss retains a 'margin of indecision', Barthes does offer something which – through an experience of the text – resembles a distinction between the two terms:

Text of pleasure: the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a comfortable practice of reading. Text of bliss: the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language.<sup>24</sup>

Though the texts of pleasure and *jouissance* may appear to denote two distinctly separate experiences, the 'stumble' [*j'achoppe, j'embrouille*] over the definition of either term suggests that separation may not be as clear as it first appears. As Barthes suggests, there is an unavoidable ambiguity between the terms: 'Pleasure of the text, text of pleasure: these expressions are ambiguous because French has no word that simultaneously covers pleasure (contentment) and bliss (rapture). Therefore, "pleasure" [*plaisir*] here (and without our being able to anticipate) sometimes extends to bliss [*jouissance*], sometimes is opposed to it.'<sup>25</sup> The (in)distinction between pleasure and *jouissance* suggests the possibility of an encounter with the text which can *both* comfort and discomfort the reading subject, a relation with the text which allows the reader both

<sup>23</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* [1973], trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p.4; *Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973), p.10.

<sup>24</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, p.14; *Le plaisir du texte*, p.25.

<sup>25</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, p.19; *Le plaisir du texte*, p.33.

a subjective experience of pleasure as well as the dissolution of that subjectivity through *jouissance*.

An encounter with such pleasure/*jouissance* would not resemble a dialectical conflict, but instead allow for a simultaneous *but differential* experience which both defers and welcomes the other. The pleasure/*jouissance* of the text, therefore, would be the (im)possibility of situating an experience of self or other; it is a dimension of the text which survives the self/other opposition, indeed, all oppositions. But equally, pleasure/*jouissance* takes place as the *possibility* of a self/other; it is the possibility of experience, response, and therefore, of the future. Encountering pleasure/*jouissance*, then, would be an experience which is *essentially* disjointed by a ‘margin of indecision’; an experience of each would go via the other, what would be a decision would go *via* indecision. In his reading of Stendhal’s later work, this incalculable logic will be the condition which allows Barthes to describe the novel as effecting a lie which takes a ‘detour’ through truth. The difference between Stendhal’s early journals and later novels will, for Barthes, be one which sees a shift from a writing which depicts the search for this pleasure/*jouissance*, to one which manages to produce it.

## **2.2 A promise of the other**

At the conclusion of *Le degré zéro de l’écriture*, Barthes posits a relation between desire and a ‘Utopia of language’, a relation which he then elaborates upon in the later work *Le Plaisir du texte*. In *Le degré zéro de l’écriture*, Barthes speaks of the ‘living languages’ of ‘Nature’ ‘from which the writer is excluded.’<sup>26</sup> As such, the writer is condemned to a ‘stale language’ which he must, paradoxically, continue to use in order to try to escape it. The writer is therefore caught in the double bind of attempting to locate an ideal – or perhaps ‘Italian’ – language through its unnatural and always-already impure form:

Feeling permanently guilty of its own solitude, [literary writing] is none the less an imagination eagerly desiring a felicity of words, it hastens towards a dreamed-of language whose freshness, by a kind of ideal anticipation, might portray the perfection of some new Adamic world where language would no longer be alienated. The proliferation of modes of writing brings a new

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<sup>26</sup> Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), p.86; ‘*Le degré zéro de l’écriture*’, *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002), pp.169-224 (p.223).

Literature into being in so far as the latter invents its language only in order to be a project: Literature becomes the Utopia of language.<sup>27</sup>

With a move which is perhaps led by an anxiety concerning what might be seen as an idealistic utopian ‘project’, Barthes’s *Le Plaisir du texte* appears to reformulate a ‘Utopia of language’ by stressing its radically *atopic* aspect. In this later text, Barthes utilises the ambiguity of the term ‘utopia’, a term which means both an ideal place and no place. Moreover, he reads this ambiguous place in terms of pleasure. The notion of *jouissance*/bliss has been dropped here; rather, pleasure [*le plaisir*] is itself an ambiguous potentiality – or ‘might’ – of the text:

Pleasure [*Le plaisir*], however, is not an *element* of the text, it is not a naïve residue; it does not depend on a logic of understanding and on sensation; it is a drift, something both revolutionary and asocial, and it cannot be taken over by any collectivity, any mentality, any idiolect. Something *neuter*? It is obvious that the pleasure of the text is scandalous: not because it is immoral but because it is *atopic*.<sup>28</sup>

Instead of the utopic project of *Le degré zéro de l’écriture*, *Le Plaisir du texte* posits an atopic site across which pleasure drifts. For Barthes, the pleasure of the text must be thought, paradoxically, as an unusual, or *out of place*, place which resists the normalising strategies of both bourgeois mythology and academic intellectual thought.

The ambiguity of *plaisir* is atopically ‘situated’ as an experience of the text, and the utopia of *Le degré zéro* has been re-read by the atopia of *Le plaisir du texte*. From this we can suggest that the notion of a ‘new Literature’ – which announced the ‘Utopia of language’ – has become ‘the pleasure of the text’ as a possible experience in the here and now. Although we cannot reduce the movement between utopia and atopia to a shift between two clear concepts, especially ones determined by a chronological succession of texts, we may provisionally suggest that whilst the utopic is projected (as an ideal), the atopic is an imminent potentiality of the text. It is necessary, however, to retain the notion of the utopic in that of atopia. As it is the placing of what is unusual or out of place, the atopic marks what is here is also not where it should be, that what is ‘here’ is not proper to this site, but the mark of another place. The atopic *marks*, then, the

<sup>27</sup> Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, p.88; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.1, p.224

<sup>28</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, p.23; *Le plaisir du texte*, p.39.

possibility of an ideal or proper space, but also a non-space, a Utopia. The atopic is the promise of the utopic, the very mark or expression of a place which is yet to come. The essential ambiguity of the atopic/utopic would resist the attempt to reduce 'pleasure' to what is merely the result of a calculation. Rather, pleasure would be the very marking of what remained other, an otherness or non-place for which the text reserves a place.

Rather than an 'element' of the text – something reducible to an identifiable constituent of its construction – Barthes's experience of utopia/atopia would be an effect of the text, of the trace, and therefore of a writing as spatio-temporalization. The thinking of an atopic/utopic experience, therefore, would constantly run the risk of being compromised by the reductive strategies of language and discourse. The concern here, would be that the promise of the other might be reduced to a determinable essence which can be put to work as a concept or commodity. Hence the necessity for an interminable vigilance, a vigilance which admits that an atopic/utopic pleasure of the text could only be expected *without the horizon of expectancy*.

For Barthes, Stendhal's relation to Italy, and in turn the 'privileged' relation to music, is the search for a 'primal state of pleasure'. Such pleasure 'one always tries to recapture but never to explain.' It could be suggested, therefore, that this pleasure has come and gone for Stendhal, and that his only hope will be to locate a place in which he can encounter it once again. Yet 'to recapture but never to explain' also admits the impossibility of apprehending once and for all. If what we recapture can never be explained, the impossibility of knowing for sure what we apprehend would also be the eternal evasion of that recapture. What 'recapture' might signify, then, would be an interminable apprehension without apprehending; neither the absolute activity of seizing the experience, nor the absolute passivity of being evaded by – or subject to – it. Beyond activity and passivity, to 'recapture' but never explain would be an apprehending *and* apprehension of something to come – the suggestion of an immanence which could only be forever imminent. Though the prefix 're-' would suggest a return, it would be the return of what was never fully 'here', a here and now which is also and always elsewhere.

Barthes reads a 'primal state of pleasure' as the experience of 'pure effect', where cause is unthinkable, and where one is 'voluptuously delivered from the responsibility of the

*citizen*.<sup>29</sup> Barthes quotes Stendhal when he reads that, if ‘Stendhal were an Italian citizen, he would die “poisoned by melancholy”’: whereas, a Milanese by affection [*de cœur*] rather than civil status, he need merely harvest the brilliant effect of a civilisation for which he is not responsible.’<sup>30</sup> For Barthes, with official citizenship comes a recognised duty, a national language and civil responsibility; as citizen, Stendhal would be confined to all that attempts to delimit ‘Italy’ in an essential fashion. Yet, by being neither native nor tourist, Stendhal inhabits an Italian imaginary; an imaginary which is neither the ‘real’ Italy of the citizen nor the fantasy of the tourist. Neither ‘poisoned’ by the melancholy which accompanies the immutable allegiance to the lost object (as we’ve seen, ‘Italy’ is overdetermined as a maternal figure), nor freed through the complete abandoning of that object (a completed work of mourning), Stendhal inhabits his Italian imaginary as the site of an infinite – and insistent – transferential movement.

As neither native nor tourist, Stendhal neither abandons the love object as lost, nor is nostalgically bound to it. Rather, and regardless of Stendhal’s intentions (to either ‘recapture’ a ‘primal state of pleasure’ or triumphantly express his passion), the promise of the other seems to be staged as a function of the imaginary. It is only with this imaginary – where one is neither at home nor abroad, neither in nor out of mourning – that Stendhal can conduct his transferential search for the other. Moreover, it is only through this imaginary that the logic of the transference could operate: irreducible to either a past or present encounter, transference presupposes an essential and originary (im)possibility of ‘both’, as it is always-already marked by a relationship to the other which remains to be thought. Such an incalculable dimension would also suggest the impossibility of Stendhal ever *recapturing* a ‘primal state of pleasure’ once and for all. As this ‘primal’ state is sought through the logic of transference, it would be an experience of pleasure *as the mark of the other*, and thus the mark of what remained to come.

Barthes cites the phrase ‘poisoned by melancholy’ from Stendhal’s *Rome, Naples et Florence en 1817*. In the same passage, the phrase is preceded by an indication that the figure of ‘music’ – which according to Barthes is a ‘primal state of pleasure’ that can

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<sup>29</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘One Always Fails in Speaking of What One Loves’, p.299; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.V, p.909.

<sup>30</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘One Always Fails in Speaking of What One Loves’, p.299; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.V, p.909.

signify any sensation – also lives on despite everything: ‘In Italy, Music alone remains alive [*La Musique seule vit en Italie*], and the only other thing to do in this beautiful country is to make love; the other pleasures of the soul are inhibited there [*les autres jouissances de l’âme y sont gênées*]; if one were a citizen of that country, one would die poisoned by melancholy.’<sup>31</sup> There is something noticeably odd in the notion of music remaining the only thing alive. Music alone has survived in an otherwise desolate world; it remains that with which Stendhal can engage in order to think a relation to the past – to the lost or past glory of a Renaissance ‘Italy’ which is overdetermined with a lost maternal relation. Yet as the only thing alive, music remains the very possibility of the future, it prompts sexual relationships whereas all other ‘pleasures of the soul are inhibited’. Moreover, as the only thing alive is music, we might presume Stendhal is not living either. As the promise of a ‘primal state of pleasure’, music might bring Stendhal back *to* life. As the last thing alive, music marks the possibility of the future for Stendhal.

Whilst other pleasures remain on offer to Stendhal, they are inhibited in comparison to the transference relation to music, a relation which promises an unadulterated passion:

We know that for Stendhal, Italy was the object of a veritable transference, and we also know that what characterises transference is its gratuitousness: it occurs [*il s’instaure*] without any apparent reason. Music, for Stendhal, is the symptom of the mysterious action by which he inaugurated his transference – the symptom, i.e. the thing which simultaneously produces and masks passion’s irrationality. [...] Stendhal constantly reproduces it, like a lover trying to regain that crucial thing which rules so large a share of our actions: the first pleasure.<sup>32</sup>

Barthes reads transference to occur without apparent reason; it is the irrational method which Stendhal reproduces in his attempt to recapture his primal love. As a symptom, music manifests the ‘mysterious action’ [*l’acte mystérieux*] of that which inaugurated Stendhal’s transference: ‘the first pleasure’. The question for Barthes is one of how Stendhal ‘reproduces’ that symptom, how he appears to shift between the description of his recurring encounters with music and a ‘*romanesque*’ lie, a ‘lie’ which allows that encounter to take place *as* writing. Barthes’s (un)finished essay marks this shift as a

<sup>31</sup> Stendhal, Rome, *Naples et Florence en 1817*, entry for:17/11/1816, p.9 [my translation].

<sup>32</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘One Always Fails in Speaking of What One Loves’, p.297; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.V, pp.906-07.

movement between what seems to be Stendhal's courtship of 'Italy' and – in later novels such as *La Chartreuse de Parme* – a wholly other expression of desire. Barthes suggests that 'Stendhal, shifting from the Journal to the Novel, from the Album to the Book [...] has abandoned sensation, a vivid but inconstruable [*inconstructible*] fragment, to undertake that great mediating form which is Narrative, or better still Myth.'<sup>33</sup> Such a move has allowed Stendhal to write 'certain triumphant pages about Italy which, this time, fire up the reader (this reader – but I don't suppose I'm the only one) with that jubilation, with that irradiation which the private journals claimed but did not communicate.'<sup>34</sup> Indeed, Barthes appears to find a 'pleasure of the text' in the later work, a pleasure he could not find in the travel journals.

What is perhaps surprising – for a writer who championed the fragmentary in many of his most well known texts – is that such pleasure could not be found in the '*inconstructible*' fragments of the journals, but rather with the relatively linear narratives of myth. Recalling my epigraph, Barthes describes the change:

In short, what has happened – what has transpired – between the travel journals and *The Charterhouse*, is writing [*c'est l'écriture*]. Writing – which is what? A power, probable fruit of a long initiation, which annuls [*défait*] the sterile immobility of the amorous image-repertoire [*l'imaginaire amoureux*] and gives its adventure a symbolic generality. When he was young, in the days of *Rome, Naples, Florence*, Stendhal could write: "... when I tell lies, I am like M. de Goury, I am bored"; he did not yet know that there existed a lie, the lie of novels [*le mensonge romanesque*], which would be – miraculously – both the detour of truth and the finally triumphant expression of his Italian passion.<sup>35</sup>

Rather than asking why Barthes finds a certain pleasure in the later novels of Stendhal, a pleasure which he couldn't find in the journals, this passage allows us to suggest the pivot upon which that move is made: the amorous imaginary [*l'imaginaire amoureux*].<sup>36</sup> Barthes suggests a shift in Stendhal's writing, a shift to 'writing' [*l'écriture*], which

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<sup>33</sup> Roland Barthes, 'One Always Fails in Speaking of What One Loves', p.304; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.I, pp.913-14.

<sup>34</sup> Roland Barthes, 'One Always Fails in Speaking of What One Loves', p.304; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.I, p.913.

<sup>35</sup> Roland Barthes, 'One Always Fails in Speaking of What One Loves', p.305; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.I, p.914.

<sup>36</sup> Jean-Michel Rabaté notes that in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, '*l'imaginaire* is variously translated as 'image-system', 'image-repertoire' and 'imaginary' by Richard Howard'; ('Introduction', p.15, fn.3). I would suggest that this ambiguity as to how to translate the term has persisted throughout Barthes's work and allows it the ambiguity I seek to sustain in this chapter.

enacts a shift in the ‘amorous’ imaginary. Writing stages the imaginary here, and as Barthes reads Stendhal, it is the shift to writing which ‘annuls’ the imaginary’s immobility in favour of a ‘symbolic generality’, an imprecision or sketch which can perform the lie of the novel and triumphantly express Stendhal’s ‘Italian passion’. Therefore – and in referring to *La Chartreuse* – Barthes suggests an imaginary which expresses the event to such a degree that he experiences ‘a kind of miraculous harmony between the “mass of happiness and pleasure which explodes” in Milan with the arrival of the French and our own delight in reading: the effect described finally coincides with the effect produced.’<sup>37</sup>

For Barthes, there has been a shift from Stendhal’s early inability to express his ‘two loves’ (Italy and Music).<sup>38</sup> In the travel journals, Barthes claims that Stendhal is suspicious of language, and therefore that ‘Music and Italy’ are ‘spaces *outside of language*’, outside of the trace and beyond history.<sup>39</sup> This ‘suspicion attached to language joins the kind of aphasia which is generated by the excess of love: before Italy and Women, and Music [note here the addition of Stendhal’s third love: ‘Women’], Stendhal is, literally *speechless, interloqué*, i.e. ceaselessly interrupted in his locution [*Stendhal est à la lettre interloqué, c’est-à-dire sans cesse interrompu dans sa locution*].<sup>40</sup> Stendhal is, literally, taken aback by his – at this point – three excesses of love. Rather than an experience of the ‘atopic’ – which would be an experience of the text – Barthes suggests that Italy, music and women are, for Stendhal, outside of language. Such an ‘outside’ of language, as a space of pure effect, or a space without responsibility, remains – paradoxically – reassuringly local in Stendhal’s early texts. The ‘outside’ is a space localised by the ability to delimit what is internal to language, and therefore pre-programmed by a categorisation of what is or is not proper to language. The ‘other’ of language, then, is safely put to one side as an outside of language which can remain an idealistic – or Utopian – dream for the writer. We can see

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<sup>37</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘One Always Fails in Speaking of What One Loves’, p.304; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. p.914.

<sup>38</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘One Always Fails in Speaking of What One Loves’, p.302; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. p.912.

<sup>39</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘One Always Fails in Speaking of What One Loves’, p.302; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. p.912.

<sup>40</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘One Always Fails in Speaking of What One Loves’, p.303; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. pp.912-13.



that the limits of the imaginary are very clear at this point; it knows in advance the outline of the other which it will be impossible to represent.

For Barthes – reading Donald Winnicott – Stendhal’s early aphasia recalls the child’s interactions with the transitional object:

Such a dialectic of extreme love and difficult expression resembles what the very young child experiences – still *infans*, deprived of adult speech – when he plays with what Winnicott calls a *transitional object*; the space which separates and at the same time links the mother and the baby is the very space of the child’s play and of the mother’s counterplay: it is the still-shapeless space of fantasy, of the imagination, of creation. Such is, it seems to me, Stendhal’s Italy: a kind of transitional object whose manipulation, being ludic, produces these squiggles which Winnicott notes and which are here any number of travel journals.<sup>41</sup>

At this point the Stendhalian imaginary is that of an infant who – without adult speech – maintains a relation to the love object through a transitional object. Not the expression or representation of the love object, the transitional object is rather the fantasy of its extended presence. Stendhal is yet to express his love; he is still using a Winnicottian squiggle to sustain himself in the vicinity of his love object’s presence, a presence to which he might one day be reconnected.

However, ‘twenty years later, by a kind of after-the-fact [*une sorte d’après-coup*] which also constitutes part of the devious logic of love’<sup>42</sup>, Barthes suggests that Stendhal’s *La Chartreuse de Parme* forms a relation between writing and the imaginary which can produce an effect of reading analogous to that being described. Stendhal can now express what he loves to such an extent that the reader encounters that same effect. Rather than the capture of, or reconnection with, the love object – its presence in writing – this is an expression of the other, an other which, nevertheless, also remains at an infinite distance. Moreover, this expression of what remains elsewhere seems to condition a telepathic dimension: Barthes has found a text which allows him to witness – in an analogous fashion – the events being expressed in Stendhal’s text. This

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<sup>41</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘One Always Fails in Speaking of What One Loves’, p.303; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. p.913.

<sup>42</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘One Always Fails in Speaking of What One Loves’, p.303; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. p.913.

telepathic dimension seems to take place through a development of the imaginary, a mutation effected by Stendhal's shift *to* 'writing'.

Writing and the imaginary are in a relation which is the site of both the writer's, and the reader's, experience. There is, then, a transferential relation to the text through which the experiences of Stendhal and Barthes are entwined. Transference is experienced through an imaginary which seems particular to *both* Stendhal and Barthes, and as such, the imaginary cannot be reduced to the writer or reader *as subject*. Particular to both, it is reducible to no 'one' as such. Rather, the imaginary is the staging of experience which survives a reduction to the psyche as the locus for that experience. Indeed, Barthes's reading suggests this, in that his allusion to the imaginary is such that we cannot tell for sure whether he is describing his own, or Stendhal's. Rather than producing the presence of the other, as a staging of the imaginary, the text would now be a place where the 'symptom' can be shared; a symptom which is not localisable within the traditional limits of the body, a symptom which would be an experience of the promise of writing.

### ***2.3 Spectral reservation***

Barthes's experience of 'jubilation' or 'irradiation', an almost atopic pleasure achieved in his reading of Stendhal's novel, would suggest the promise of writing is a shared experience. In the reading of Stendhal's *La Chartreuse de Parme* – a text where 'the effect described finally coincides with the effect produced' – there is an experience of the text which is irreducible to self or other (either Barthes or Stendhal). Instead, the experience of the event takes place in a shared imaginary. Here, 'Stendhal's' writing is an experience which is not reducible to a history which is proper to himself or another. Barthes does not experience a description of the event *as himself*; rather, there is an experience of the event – in writing – which cannot be reducible to a place, time or identity which is proper to a reader who consumes it. Barthes's essay suggests an experience of the text as the promise of the other (of both the other's experience and an experiencing *as other*). Such a promise would be the effect of a writing which both marks and defers that event.

From the naïveté of the travel journals to the triumph of the novel, Barthes's reading suggests a promise of the other. In order to read how Barthes's use of the imaginary

functions in terms of this promise, we might recall how Derrida reads Maurice Blanchot's consideration of the coming of the messiah. For Blanchot:

Jewish messianic thought (according to certain commentators), suggests the relation between the event and its non-occurrence. If the Messiah is at the gates of Rome among the beggars and the lepers, one might think that his incognito protects or prevents him from coming, but, precisely, he is recognized: someone, obsessed with questioning and unable to leave off, asks him: "When will you come?"<sup>43</sup>

For Derrida, the profundity of Blanchot's tale resides in the suggestion that there is an essential disjunction of the present:

[t]here is some inadequation between the now and now. He is coming now; the messianic does not wait. This is a way of waiting for the future, right now. The responsibilities that are assigned to us by this messianic structure are responsibilities for here and now. The Messiah is not some future present; it is imminent and it is this imminence that I am describing under the name of messianic structure.<sup>44</sup>

We might read a resonance, therefore, between this structure of the promise and the structure of '*On échoue toujours à parler de ce qu'on aime*'. Whilst opening with the suggestion that 'Italy' is 'always farther away... elsewhere', Barthes's essay closes with the promise that it can finally and triumphantly be expressed. Like much of Barthes's work, this essay asks how writing could be a place for an encounter with the other; how the text might be a place from which to await the other without the horizon of expectancy which the many codes, ideologies and mythologies of language can bring to writing. It is no coincidence, therefore, that '*On échoue toujours à parler de ce qu'on aime*' closes with a focus on literature – and the novel in particular (the '*romanesque*') – as a privileged space for this encounter, for Barthes is also concerned with evading the predictable rhythms of critical theory.

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<sup>43</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster* [1980], trans. Ann Smock (London: The University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p.141.

<sup>44</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'The Villanova Roundtable: A conversation with Jacques Derrida', *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, ed. John D. Caputo (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), p.23.

For Derrida, the text is imminent with what is yet to arrive, the ‘*arrivant*’.<sup>45</sup> As the *arrivant* is irreducible to any possible identity, it must remain ‘to come’, and as what remains ‘to come’, it sustains what must remain incalculable as the possibility or promise of the future. *Essentially* incalculable, then, the *arrivant* survives what is determinable as possible or impossible, and is instead the very possibility of the *impossible*:

This originary affirmation of beyond the beyond offers itself on this basis of numerous figures of the impossible. I have studied a few of these elsewhere: hospitality, gift, forgiveness – and above all the unpredictability, the “perhaps,” the “what if” of the event, the coming, and the coming of the other in general, his or her arriving. Their possibility is always announced as the experience of a non-negative im-possible.<sup>46</sup>

As ‘non-negative im-possible’, the *arrivant* would be the coming of the wholly unexpected; a possibility of the ‘im-possible’ which survives the possible/impossible binary. And as the *arrivant* is awaited via a promissory structure, Derrida is also alluding to what he terms the ‘messianic’. As Stendhal moves from the travel journals to the novel (and whether he desires a reconnection with a primal presence or not), what is constant throughout Barthes’s reading is the promise of the other. For Barthes, it is the imaginary which stages this promise; whether it is the ‘sterile immobility of the image-repertoire’ or the miraculous and final ‘expression of his Italian passion’, the imaginary is marked by the promise of the other as its essential structure.

Derrida reads the notion of a messianic structure in his engagement with the spectres of Marx, and therefore with the promise of communism.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, the messianic structure is, for Derrida, the very locus of spectrality, and as such, the place where we *commune*

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<sup>45</sup> In French this word means, ‘newcomer’, ‘arrival’, or ‘arriving’; for Derrida, the word ‘*arrivant*’ can mean ‘the neutrality of *that which* arrives, but also the singularity of *who* arrives, he or she who comes, coming to be where s/he was not expected, where one was awaiting him or her without waiting for him or her, without expecting *it* [*s’y attendre*], without knowing what or whom to expect, what or whom I am waiting for – and such is hospitality itself, hospitality toward the event.’ See: Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp.33-35. Irreducible to any pre-determined place or identity, the unexpectedness of the *arrivant* would put all the conditions of their arrival in question – therefore, the *arrivant* can only be awaited without waiting.

<sup>46</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Psychoanalysis Searches the States of Its Soul: The Impossible Beyond of a Sovereign Cruelty’, trans. Peggy Kamuf, in *Without Alibi*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp.238-280 (p.276); the French text in: René Major (ed), *États généraux de la psychanalyse*, juillet 2000 (Paris: Aubier, 2003), pp.177-228 (p.223-24).

<sup>47</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: the State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994); *Spectres de Marx : L’État de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1993).

with ghosts, ghosts of the past, present and future. Such a structure is conditioned by the imminence of the wholly other, and is therefore a structure whose stability is comprised – indeed threatened – in advance by this radical unpredictability. The *arrivant*, therefore, would disrupt any horizon of expectation, it would problematize any attempt to decide upon, predict or pre-programme the form or condition of the future. Awaiting the other would also be the impossibility of waiting as such, as waiting would always be performed through the logic of expectation and prediction:

Awaiting without horizon of the wait, awaiting what one does not expect yet or any longer, hospitality without reserve, welcoming salutation accorded in advance to the absolute surprise of the *arrivant* from whom or from which one will not ask anything in return and who or which will not be asked to commit to the domestic contracts of any welcoming power (family, State, nation, territory, native soil or blood, language, culture in general, even humanity), *just* opening which renounces any right to property, any right in general, messianic opening to what is coming, that is, to the event that cannot be awaited *as such*, or recognized in advance therefore, to the event as the foreigner itself, to her or to him for whom one must leave an empty place, always, in memory of the hope [*en mémoire de l'espérance*] – and this is the very place of spectrality.<sup>48</sup>

For Derrida, and although this structure obviously takes up a Jewish inheritance – and the question of inheritance is of course at the heart of his reading – the ‘use of the word “messianic” bears no relation to any messianistic tradition.’<sup>49</sup> Derrida suggests, therefore, that an awaiting without the horizon of the wait might therefore be ‘nicknamed’ the ‘messianic without messianism [*surnommons le messianique sans messianisme*].’<sup>50</sup> Of course, such a nicknaming, or *sur*-naming (both inherited name and *over*-naming – an excessive or supplementary name) should immediately alert us to the provisional status of the ‘messianic’; this term is yet to be determined ‘as such’. Indeed, the logic of Derrida’s term seems quite apparent: as what we await would be wholly other to the notion of awaiting, any determined horizon of expectation – including a *determinable* messianism – would compromise the other in advance. Although Derrida refers to this movement as a ‘messianicity’, any right to, or appropriation of, this term by an (un)orthodox religious tradition would be problematized by the wholly otherness

<sup>48</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.65; *Spectres de Marx*, p.111.

<sup>49</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Marx & Sons’, in : *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida’s Specters of Marx*, ed. Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1999), pp.213-256 (p.250).

<sup>50</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.73; *Spectres de Marx*, p.124.

of the *arrivant*, by its absolute heterogeneity to thinking. Thus Derrida's use of the messiah refers to a 'desert-like messianism', paradoxically, a messianism 'without content and without identifiable messiah.'<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, Derrida has maintained the term 'messiah', and therefore a structure of the promise, of emancipation (hence the return to/returns of Marx) and of hope. For Derrida, the messianic would be 'a certain experience of the emancipatory promise; it is perhaps even the formality of a structural messianism, a messianism without religion, even a messianic without messianism, an idea of justice – which we distinguish from law or right or even human rights – and an idea of democracy – which we distinguish from its current concept and from its determined predicates today.'<sup>52</sup>

In retaining an 'eschatological relation to the to-come of an event and of a singularity, of an alterity which cannot be anticipated'<sup>53</sup>, there remains, however, a notion of 'last things'. Whilst the fulfilment of an eschatological promise would take the form of a faithful and responsible accordance with the wholly other – something to which we might refer as 'justice' – the wholly other would disrupt the fulfilment of the eschatological promise. Recalling the logic of Blanchot's tale of the messiah, we can see that what might be seen to be the arrival of the 'end', or the judgement of 'last things', would also be a renewed – and perhaps more urgent – question of when they might arrive. It is the here and now which must remain structured by imminence, an imminence of the other which ruptures any calculable determination of the present moment; it is in the here and now that it remains imperative to keep asking when might justice come. It is this notion of imminence that Derrida puts to work in the deconstruction of the 'determinable messianisms' of biblical and secular thought (Judeo-Christian; Hegelian; Marxist; Fukuyamic, and indeed, a Freudian work of mourning). As John D. Caputo suggests, Derrida's insistence on the future 'to come' [*à-venir*], as justice or democracy, would mean that

one cannot gauge the extent to which it is being approximated or realized, even while conceding that it is consistently deferred. For that allows us to tolerate, to be patient with the most massive injustice. Because the *à-venir*

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<sup>51</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.28; *Spectres de Marx*, p.56.

<sup>52</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.59; *Spectres de Marx*, p.102.

<sup>53</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.65; *Spectres de Marx*, p.111.

of the “messianic in general” is completely open-ended [...] it is profoundly urgent and unable to be placidly complacent with the present.<sup>54</sup>

There remains, then, a disjunction of the injunction, a need to affirm the imminence of such justice, and this would require *remembering* that there *remains* a promise of the other, a promise that the other is still ‘to-come’, and therefore that it is necessary to ‘leave an empty place, always, in memory of the hope [*en mémoire de l’espérance*].’<sup>55</sup> The condition of the other would be a memorial to ‘*l’espérance*’, to hope but also to a notion of expectancy (*l’espérance de vie* means ‘life expectancy’). A memorial would not ‘be’ hope and expectancy, but their marking, a trace in memory to them (recalling Barthes’s reading of Stendhal, we might use ‘symptom’ here rather than memorial). Further, a memorial to/symptom of hope and expectancy would mark – here and now, in the present – a memory which could only come from the future. Such a memorial, therefore, would also be the trace of an originary time out-of-joint, a tracing of the untraceable which would reserve a place for the other as ‘the very place of spectrality.’<sup>56</sup>

In considering the notion of a writing of the promise, or a marking of the other, we may read a more general relation between the notion of the messianic structure and Barthes’s search for an atopic experience of the text, an experience other than that provided by the coded and compromised structures of language and culture. In memory of the future, works such as *Le Plaisir de texte* – with its reading of *plaisir/jouissance* – seem to approach a notion of the other to whom our relation may be one of absolute unpreparedness. Moreover, we might suggest that in Barthes’s reading of Stendhal’s later texts – as the place which may admit a shared experience of the symptom – it is with the notion of the imaginary that Barthes appears to situate this promise of the other. As the site which reserves a place for the other, and the notion which irreducibly spectralizes the Barthes-Stendhal experience of reading/writing, the imaginary seems to function via a messianic structure, as that through which – whether it be deemed possible or not – the other *might* arrive.<sup>57</sup> Should this be the case, the imaginary may be

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<sup>54</sup> John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), p.129

<sup>55</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.65 ; *Spectres de Marx*, p.111.

<sup>56</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.65; *Spectres de Marx*, p.111.

<sup>57</sup> As I discussed in Chapter One, this ‘might’ is not unimportant here. The imaginary is marked by this force and potential of what remains to come. I discuss this ‘might’ further in Chapter Three.

a dimension in which to affirm the absolute otherness of the event through the necessity of representational structures (or horizons), whilst at the same time attempting to remain faithful and to do justice to the unknowability and unpredictability of experience. It may be ‘here’, then, where we ‘delimit’ a horizon without horizon.

I want to suggest that Barthes’s reading of the imaginary, a space imminent with the other, would be where a trauma study might take place. The promise of the wholly other would rupture the position of study in advance, yet that promise would also be its very possibility. We might think this by recalling the terms ‘punctum’ and ‘studium’ from Barthes’s *La Chambre claire* – in terms of a trauma study the imaginary would be a text in which the *studium* (as what is reducible to analysis and study) would be marked or punctuated by the *punctum* (a ‘detail’ which promises the other). Indeed, *La Chambre claire* is testimony to this haunted space, it is a study of the image punctuated by ‘details’ which remain irreducible to analysis. Though I return to how Barthes stages this imaginary, and how it might function in terms of a trauma study, below, I want to take a slight detour through some of Derrida’s work on the notion of the messianic. This will help demonstrate the spectral dimension in which the imaginary might be situated, a dimension in which the imaginary might reserve a place for the other.

#### **2.4 Spectralizing messianism - a hesitation**

In his reading of Blanchot’s tale of the messiah’s arrival, Derrida demonstrates the imminence of the messianic structure, an imminence which means ‘He is coming now; the messianic does not wait.’ The messianic, therefore, would be a dimension in which ‘the now’ remains inadequate to ‘the present’. Moreover, with the possibility that ‘the Messiah might also be the one I expect while I do not want him to come [... that] I do not want what I want and I would like the coming of the Messiah to be infinitely postponed’<sup>58</sup>, Derrida reads a libidinal investment in the messianic. A desire for the arrival of the messiah, then, might also be the desire for its deferral, with this ambiguity forming a condition for thinking and living on:

That is why the man who addressed the Messiah said, “When will you come?” That is a way to say, well as long as I speak to you, as long as I ask you the question, “When will you come?”, at least you are not coming. And

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<sup>58</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘The Villanova Roundtable: A conversation with Jacques Derrida’, p.24.



that is the condition for me to go on asking questions and living. So there is some ambiguity in the messianic structure. We wait for something we would not like to wait for. That is another name for death.<sup>59</sup>

Derrida suggests an essential ambiguity concerning the *arrivant*, an ambiguity which would be the condition to thinking and living on. Such ambiguity leaves the possibility that the absolute otherness of the other may also be what we think of as death. Desire, therefore, would become a paradoxical notion: both a desire for the other and a desire for the deferral of the other. The difficulty would then be then, that, as the notions of ‘justice, peace and revolution’ are those which might come with the arrival of the messiah, such notions would inextricably be overdetermined by death. Thus the awaiting without waiting for such notions is also a risky and dangerous undertaking; it poses a threat which – both imminent and deferred – is both around every corner and always to-come.

The possibility of these concepts being arrived at in any concrete form is unthinkable for Derrida. But as such – and as the condition for thinking and living – our relation to the otherness of the other requires the combination of an infinite patience, immediate response, and the willingness to risk everything. As the arrival of the messiah might also be the arrival of death, it is perhaps reasonable that an experience of the other is sometimes teleologically projected as an ideal – rather than being the most imminent and intimate of responsibilities. Furthermore, it may also be possible that an intense encounter with death would short-circuit this imminence; indeed, that any intense encounter with a radical otherness – an intimate encounter with death, but also the infant’s bond with the mother – may subsequently render a thinking of the wholly other as that which has already happened and which is from then on only possible to think through (and as such, be the condition of) a logic of recollection or recapture.<sup>60</sup> We can see here how, as an experience of the wholly other cannot be reduced to any of these schemas – for to locate it would be to annul it – the messianic structure is always open to the reductive and comforting strategies of religious narratives and cultural mythologies.

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<sup>59</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘The Villanova Roundtable: A conversation with Jacques Derrida’, p.24.

<sup>60</sup> I refer the reader to my Introduction, in which I discuss this possible return of what Derrida refers to as ‘the worst’.

An aspect of this ambiguous relation to the messianic structure can be seen in Barthes's notions of pleasure [*plaisir*] and *jouissance*. Barthes suggests a definition of the text of pleasure and the text of bliss [*jouissance*]. The former would, to a certain extent, participate in culture – but only in a hedonistic manner. The latter would interrupt such culture, a textual encounter in which both culture and subject are dispersed. But as the text of pleasure and the text of bliss are entwined, their experience is conditioned by an essential anachronism:

Now the subject who keeps the two texts in his field and in his hands the reins of pleasure and bliss is an anachronistic subject, for he simultaneously and contradictorily participates in the profound hedonism of all culture (which permeates him quietly under cover of an *art de vivre* shared by the old books) and in the destruction of that culture: he enjoys the consistency of his selfhood (that is his pleasure) and seeks its loss (that is his bliss). He is a subject split twice over, doubly perverse.<sup>61</sup>

Barthes's subject would have two aims, two perverse pleasures; he would be split doubly from 'normality' by this. Such a subject would desire – that is, seek pleasure – in both the profound delights of culture and its absolute destruction. In a certain sense this would be a *fort/da* relation figured through a 'perverse' experience of the text.<sup>62</sup> Recalling Derrida's reading of an ambiguous relation to the *arrivant*, we find in Barthes's reading a similar desire for both the deferral of the other as the condition for the pleasure of living and thinking (Barthes's 'culture') and – folded irreducibly into that relation – the desire for the arrival of the wholly other as the bliss of what might be overdetermined as dispersion, death, pleasure and justice. The locus for this relation to the text would be atopic, it would be the non-site of a double perversion, not a stable place from which to peruse or await the pleasures on offer, but an essentially spectral experience where an *art de vivre* is also the bliss of losing that life. Neither a living according to cultural or ideological norms, nor death as the exhaustion of desire, Barthes's doubly split subject would be an – atopic – locus of awaiting at the horizons of a culture always-already punctuated by the blissful event 'to-come'. Barthes's reading of 'pleasure' suggests an attempt to formulate thinking in the vicinity of bliss, without reducing its absolute unpredictability through an horizon of expectation. He is

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<sup>61</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, p14; *Le plaisir du texte*, p.26.

<sup>62</sup> See: Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' [1920], *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XVIII (London: Vintage, 2001), pp.14-17.

thus attempting to reserve a place for the other without delimiting that place through the logic of determinable space.

Barthes's subject of the text of pleasure/*jouissance* would be 'anachronistic'; to recall Derrida's allusion to *Hamlet* in *Specters of Marx*, the subject would 'be' essentially out of joint. Indeed, a subject split twice over would also be the subject of an essentially divided temporality.<sup>63</sup> This experience of time, a time rent by the 'doubly perverse' subject, suggests a relation to Derrida's messianic structure as an 'inadequation between the now and now.' Such a structure marks the 'present' as essentially divided; hence a 'now' would never be adequate to itself. This also resonates with Barthes's formulation of the text of pleasure/*jouissance*, in that a text split by a doubling of desire would be a state of pleasure/bliss. Such a doubling could not be reduced to a single locus of experience; it would have to take 'place' in an *atopic* community, perhaps a community of ghosts. Yet there appears to be a resounding difference between Barthes's reading of pleasure/bliss and Derrida's messianic structure, in that the latter, as it is deemed to be an essential condition for thinking and experience, may seem to assume a *universal* status, whereas Barthes's reading is dependent upon a *particular* experience: *hedonism*. The problem of how we might think the status of the messianic structure is already posed in the notion itself: is the messianic structure an essential condition for thinking our determinable messianisms, or, is it abstracted from a determinable messianism as its essential structure? Derrida returns to this question at several points, and in the following citation, it remains an enigma:

The problem remains – and this is really a problem for me, an enigma – whether the religions, say, for instance, the religions of the Book, are but specific examples of this general structure, of messianicity. There is the general structure of messianicity, as the structure of experience, and on this groundless ground there have been revelations, a history which one calls Judaism or Christianity and so on. [...] This is one hypothesis. The other hypothesis – and I confess that I hesitate between these two possibilities – is that the events of revelation, the biblical traditions, the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions, have been absolute events, irreducible events which have unveiled this messianicity. We would not know what messianicity is without messianism, without these events which were Abraham, Moses, and Jesus Christ, and so on. In that case singular events would have unveiled or revealed these universal possibilities, and it is only on that condition that we

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<sup>63</sup> Recalling my argument in Chapter One, this essentially divided subject would perhaps mark a certain art/science/séance of cinema.

can describe messianicity. Between the two possibilities I must confess I oscillate and I think some other scheme has to be constructed to understand the two at the same time, to do justice to the two possibilities.<sup>64</sup>

Derrida must ‘confess’ that he hesitates between these two possibilities, that he remains undecided. Of course, it is necessary that this is the case; should Derrida come down on either side, it would either name the structure of experience as determined by a particular Messianism, or name a universal structure of experience which is immanent to itself, thus erasing the very possibility of the other and their promise.

At this point, a second question arises: if such a position is necessarily ambiguous for Derrida, how might one approach the thinking of the messianic without reducing one’s point of departure to either possibility? In this case, the answer requires a reference to the word ‘Messiah’ as the hinge upon which both possibilities rest:

That is why – and perhaps this is not a good reason, perhaps one day I will give this up – for the time being I keep the word “messianic”. Even if it is different from messianism, messianic refers to the word Messiah; it does not simply belong to a certain culture, a Jewish or Christian culture. I think that for the time being I need this word, not to teach, but to let people understand what I am trying to say when I speak of messianicity. But in doing so I still keep the singularity of a single revelation, that is Jewish, Christian revelation, with its reference to Messiah. It is a reinterpretation of this tradition of the Messiah.<sup>65</sup>

Therefore, with the word ‘messianic’, Derrida maintains the singularity of the event in the suggestion of a universal structure of experience without deciding upon either as the basis of the other. To enable a re-reading of religious tradition, the ‘messianic’ becomes a term which remains in the vicinity of Judeo-Christian revelation without being solely its property. Neither does such a term name the absolute or universal structure of experience, for, as noted above, the very notion of the messianic is that it waits without horizon of expectation. In other words, what might be ‘to come’ – as wholly other – would puncture in advance the universality of any universal structure.

As the history and heritage of the messiah is ambiguous for Derrida, as the ‘messiah’ cannot be reduced to a Jewish or Christian messianism, but also because it can never

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<sup>64</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘The Villanova Roundtable’, pp.22-23.

<sup>65</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘The Villanova Roundtable’, p.23.

leave behind these singular experiences of the promise, the term ‘messiah’ seems to sketch the oscillatory, hesitant position Derrida suggests he must take (for now). Derrida suggests that if a ‘to come’ is to be expected without expectancy, if it is to be awaited without the ‘calculation of a program’, then such a promise of the other, such a messianicity, must always-already be rent by the hesitancy between a general structure and a particular experience. This would be a promise of the other entrusted to an ‘experience that is so impossible, so unsure in its indigence’.<sup>66</sup> Thinking the promise of the other as such an impossible experience would render the notion of the messianic as ‘strange, strangely familiar and inhospitable at the same time (*unheimlich*, uncanny)’.<sup>67</sup> An existential and ontological ambiguity, then, is sketched in the very word ‘messiah’ – its status is impossible to determine in the notion of messianicity. The ‘messiah’ is a mark of hesitancy, or figure of spectrality, in the word ‘messianic’; the very word reserving a space for the stranger, the very word structured by the imminence of the other. The word ‘messianic’ survives; it lives on as a spectral trace, the mark which promises a ‘messiah’ to come. Such is a ‘despairing “messianism”’, one which, with a curious ‘taste of death’, awaits without waiting as an *essentially* uncanny experience.<sup>68</sup>

### 2.5 *It’s all in the head*

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida suggests that what both Marx and Stirner ‘seem to have in common is the critique of the ghostly. Both of them want to have done with the *revenant*, both of them hope to get there.’<sup>69</sup> With this ‘hoping to get there’ Derrida is alluding to a determinable messianism, a utopian promise of Marx and Stirner, realised for both as the ‘reappropriation of life in a body proper.’<sup>70</sup> Derrida reads that whilst for Stirner this ‘messianic formality’ would be the promise of exorcising the self, for Marx, it would come with exorcising the social body from the ghostly operations of capitalist production:

whereas Stirner seems to entrust this reappropriation to a simple conversion of the self that *takes back into itself* (a self that in truth *is* nothing but this movement of interiorizing gathering) and authentically reanimates, in some

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<sup>66</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.168; *Spectres de Marx*, p.267.

<sup>67</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.168; *Spectres de Marx*, p.267.

<sup>68</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.169; *Spectres de Marx*, p.267.

<sup>69</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.129; *Spectres de Marx*, p.206.

<sup>70</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.129; *Spectres de Marx*, p.206.

fashion, the objectified ghosts, the ghost at large, Marx, for his part, denounces this egological body: there, he cries, is the ghost of all ghosts.<sup>71</sup>

Like Stirner, Marx will conjure up the ghosts of ‘the Emperor, the State, the Fatherland’, but in order to see them for what they are, in their ‘practical reality’, and therefore in a state which can be entirely exorcised. Of course, and as the possibility of exorcism is conditioned by a belief in ghosts, both Marx and Stirner paradoxically found their eradication of the spectral upon what Derrida calls a ‘pre-deconstructive’ ontology, an ontology which demands a clear opposition between being and not-being, and which is thus not at all spectral.

Derrida is engaged with a reading of Marx’s relation to the spectre, which, in both *The German Ideology* and *Capital*, provides a foil for a materialist philosophy. This reading takes up Marx’s reading of the commodity, its value(s), and its fetishistic appeal. For Derrida, the commodity is that around which the question of the ghost turns, for it is in the ‘socius’ of the commodity that Marx attempts once again to confine the ‘phantasmagoric’ relations of a market economy. Here, and through an analogy to the ‘misty realm’ of religion for which it is a substitute, the autonomy and automata of commodities form a series of ‘relations both with each other and with the human race.’<sup>72</sup> At this point Derrida asks if it is merely a coincidence that at the moment in *Capital* when Marx attempts to ‘demonstrate that the mystical character [of the commodity] owes nothing to a use-value’, his reading revolves around a table, or a table which revolves: ‘Is it just chance that he illustrates the principle of his explanation by causing a table to turn? Or rather by recalling the apparition of a turning table?’<sup>73</sup> As a footnote to the English translation explains, in French, “*une table tournante*” refers most often to the spiritualist séance.<sup>74</sup> Derrida is alluding here to the reading he is

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<sup>71</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.129; *Spectres de Marx*, p.206.

<sup>72</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol.1 (London: Penguin Books, 1976), p.165.

<sup>73</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.149.

<sup>74</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.192. It is interesting to note that Sigmund Freud was also concerned with a table which seemed to have a life of its own. In order to describe how, in literature, an ‘uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced’, Freud recalls the uncanny effect he felt whilst reading a story involving a ‘curiously shaped table with carvings of crocodiles on it.’ The story gives the understanding that ‘the presence of the table causes ghostly crocodiles to haunt the place, or that the wooden monsters come to life in the dark, or something of the sort.’ See: Sigmund Freud, ‘The “Uncanny”’ [1919], *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XVII (London: Vintage, 2001), pp.244-45. Freud’s essay is concerned with the uncanny effect felt when experiencing again the once ‘surmounted’ – or repressed – belief in the omnipotence of thoughts. I read this in more detail in Chapter Three.

about to make, of a commodity whose mystical ability to dance on its head is, for Marx, the result of it being haunted. For Marx, such ghosts must be exorcised from the commodity and traced to the head of the consumer, from which they can then be expelled once and for all.

For Marx, the table as commodity spins out ‘grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing of its own free will.’<sup>75</sup> If the table were endowed with its own essence, if its mind were its own, it would be far less interesting than in its commodity form, a form where it is possessed by the spirit of another. For Marx, then, the commodity both haunts and is haunted. Indeed, for him, the commerce between commodities should be a reflection of the socius of worker relations, but as this reflection is not clear – and as any real ghost knows that a mirror cannot show its true reflection – the ‘ghosts that are commodities transform human producers into ghosts.’<sup>76</sup> Here Marx is approaching a head-to-head with a ghosting *en abyme*. The commodity would be the objective reflection of labour relations by making those relations appear *natural* to the object they produce. It ‘shows by hiding’, and thus what should objectively reflect labour relations actually renders those relations in their essential spectrality:

the returned (deformed, objectified, naturalized) image becomes that of a social relation among commodities, among these inspired, autonomous, and automatic “objects” that are séance tables. The specular becomes the spectral at the threshold of this objectifying naturalization.<sup>77</sup>

Commodity relations produce a disruption of the specular relation between man and his object. Man can no longer see himself as that which is haunted, as the being *to which* a haunting happens; man is instead haunted, ghosted, spooked from the beginning: ‘There is a mirror, and the commodity form is also this mirror, but since all of a sudden it no longer plays its role, since it does not reflect back the expected image, those who are looking for themselves can no longer find themselves in it.’<sup>78</sup> There is a complex theatre at work here, where the actors who should represent the worker relations are instead the original performance of those relations (what Werner Hamacher terms a

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<sup>75</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, p.163.

<sup>76</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.156.

<sup>77</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.156.

<sup>78</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.155.

‘performaterialism’<sup>79</sup>). As the worker cannot see a specular reflection of himself as the one who is replicated by the commodity, but rather his originary – spectral – condition, the worker as other cannot be reduced to the same. A spectral dimension extends into both the market of the commodity and the socius of the worker.

In turn, the ghost effect of the commodity may also tell us about the ghosting of the one who seeks their reflection in it. As Derrida highlights, Marx describes the commodity as sensuously non-sensuous; in its form as table it is a sensuously wooden object, yet when it becomes a commodity, it is a sensuous supersensuous thing [*ein sinnlich übersinnliches Ding*].<sup>80</sup> Derrida glosses this:

Transcendence, the movement of super-, the step [*pas*] beyond (*über, epekeina*), is made sensuous in that very excess. It renders the non-sensuous sensuous. One touches there on what one does not touch, one feels there where one does not feel, one even suffers there where suffering does not take place, when at least it does not take place where one suffers (which is also, let us not forget, what is said about phantom limbs, that phenomenon marked with an X for any phenomenology of perception).<sup>81</sup>

The mysterious super-sensuous quality which haunts the form of the commodity survives the sensuous; it lives on as both supersensuousness and non-sensuous, the step/not [*pas*] beyond as an essential and originary dis-jointing of the material present. The ghost cannot be reduced to its proper essence in the commodity, the spirit cannot be made manifest as the commodity’s *own* sensuousness, and this is due to the disruptive spectrality of the commodity *which haunts it from the beginning*. As such, the ‘commodity is a “thing” without phenomenon, a thing in flight that surpasses the senses (it is invisible, intangible, inaudible, and odourless).’<sup>82</sup> But it also touches on all these realms, it survives them without being reduced to the phenomenon, or a phenomenology. The experience of a sensuous supersensuousness would also be one of ‘suffering’ of the other, a work of mourning which is never complete – an experience of what Derrida would call half-mourning – where a sense of the non-sensuous survives the opposition of absence/presence or mourning/melancholia. As a sensuous

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<sup>79</sup> Werner Hamacher, ‘*Lingua Amissa: The Messianism of Commodity-Language and Derrida’s Specters of Marx*’, in *Ghostly Demarcations*, pp.168-212 (p.178).

<sup>80</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.151.

<sup>81</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.151.

<sup>82</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.150.



supersensuousness, our relation to the commodity is spectral, an originary half-mourning, in that the commodity cannot be proper to, or property of, either itself or the other. There is no true value or essence of the commodity to which it can be reduced, a value with which we could exchange it in order to substitute it one for the other as in a complete work of mourning: ‘Just as there is no pure use, there is no *use-value* which the possibility of exchange and commerce (by whatever name one calls it, meaning itself, value, culture, spirit [!], signification, the world, the relation to the other, and first of all the simple form and trace of the other) has not in advance inscribed in an *out-of-use* – an excessive signification that cannot be reduced to the useless.’<sup>83</sup> As we can see, it is not Derrida’s aim to somehow champion the commodity as a transcendental or revelatory experience of the ghost effect, it is merely to point out that what Marx is attempting to exorcise from the head of the commodity is in fact the effect of an originary spectral dimension, a ghost-effect which survives the simple opposition of use/useless and ‘as such’ is the condition of all productive relations – capitalist or not (if there can be such a negation).

Not only does Marx try to exorcise the spectral from the head of the commodity, he also attempts to reduce it to the ‘head’ of the subject. In *The German Ideology*, as in *Capital*, ‘Marx advances that belief in the religious spectre, thus in the ghost in general, consists in autonomizing a representation (*Vorstellung*) and in forgetting its genesis as well as its real grounding (*reale Grundlage*).’<sup>84</sup> At this point Derrida is about to read a passage from *The German Ideology*, a passage in which Marx stages the desire to reduce everything to the archi-itecture of a materialist base. But ‘leaving that aside’, Marx – in his critique of Stirner – finds it more urgent to confine to the head the ‘obsessions’ which engender the (religious) ghosts we find it necessary to manifest *as if* they were autonomous. For Marx, the critique of these subjective representations presupposes the secured limits of the subject; it presupposes a clear notion of what is inside and outside the head. We should read Marx’s passage as cited by Derrida:

In religion people make their empirical world into an entity that is only conceived, imagined [*zu einennur gedachten, vorgestellten Wesen*], that confronts them as something foreign [*das ihnen fremd gegenübertritt*]. This again is by no means to be explained from other concepts, from “self-

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<sup>83</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.160.

<sup>84</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.171.

consciousness” and similar nonsense, but from the entire hitherto existing mode of production and intercourse, which is just as independent [*unabhängig*] of the pure concept as the invention of the self-acting mule [in English in the text] and the use of railways are independent of Hegelian philosophy. If [Stirner] wants to speak of an “essence” of religion, i.e., of a material basis of this inessentiality, [*d.h. von einer materiellen Grundlage dieses Unwesens*], then he should look for it neither in the “essence of man” [*im “Wesen des Menschen”*], nor in the predicates of God, but in the material world which each stage of religious development finds in existence. All the “spectres” which have filed before us [*die wir Revue passieren liessen*] were representations [*Vorstellungen*]. These representations – leaving aside their real basis [*abgesehen von ihrer realen Grundlage*] (which Stirner in any case leaves aside) – understood as representations internal to consciousness, as thoughts in people’s heads, transferred from their objectivity [*Gegenständlichkeit*] back into the subject [*in das Subjekt zurückgenommen*], elevated from substance into self-consciousness, are obsessions [*der Sparren*] or fixed ideas.<sup>85</sup>

For Derrida, this passage shows that in order to reduce the ghost to the head – that is, securely confined and awaiting exorcism – spectrality must permeate its walls from the beginning:

If one follows the letter of the text, the critique of the ghost or of spirits would thus be a critique of a subjective representation and an abstraction, of what happens *in the head*, of what comes only out of the head, that is, of what stays there, in the head, even as it has come out of there, out of the head, and survives *outside the head*. But nothing would be possible, beginning with the critique, without the surviving, without the possible survival of this autonomy and automatism outside the head.<sup>86</sup>

In order to exorcise the spectre of religious belief, which has its analogy in the commodity, Marx must act as if he did not know that the spectre proceeds and exceeds the limits of both, and is in fact, the very condition of their thinking. Like the table head of the commodity-form, the human head is the place of a haunting for Marx, it is that *to which* a haunting occurs, and in turn that which must be exorcised. Yet for Derrida, there can be no secure head *to which* this haunting happens, no house or economy (the law or rule of the house: *oikos* and *nomos*) from which a poltergeist can be identified and expelled; both the head and the house are *always-already* spooked – places where any attempt at exorcism must presuppose an essential spectrality. As Derrida states,

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<sup>85</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, in *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1976), pp.160-61; cited in Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.171.

<sup>86</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.171.

though Marx parodied Stirner for his attempt to reduce the ghost to the imagination of Man – Stirner’s ‘*Mensch, es spukt in deinem Kopfe*’ [‘Man, there are spectres in your head’] – he makes the same move.<sup>87</sup> In order to rid Stirner of the ghost – in order to locate its source in the ‘real grounding’ of the material modes of production – Marx must presume that the ‘I’ of man is something to which a haunting happens, rather than a figuration of the self whose very possibility is a relation to the ghost. Though it is impossible to summarise Marx’s reading of Stirner here, it hinges upon the possibility of revealing the ghost as an effect of a commerce which precedes the spectral, a commerce which would then generate a ghost effect in the heads of men. Marx suggests it is not enough to exorcise this ghost from the head – as he claims is Stirner’s aim. Rather, it should be exorcised from its source in the current modes of production. Of course, it is Derrida’s aim to show that Marx’s reading requires an ontology of presence, and therefore, that Marx must have already remembered to forget the ghost in order to posit a means of production as the real – and un-haunted – ground of his critique.

Derrida suggests that it is in Stirner’s – and Marx’s – use of the phrase ‘*es spukt*’ that we can begin to see that the head has already marked the impossibility of reducing the ghost to its source. As Derrida notes, ‘*es spukt*’ has always been difficult to translate.

The German idiom seems to name the ghostly return but it names it in a verbal form. The latter does not say that there is some *revenant*, specter, or ghost; it does not say that there is some apparition, *der Spuk*, nor even that it appears, but that “it ghosts,” “it apparitions.” *It is a matter* [Il s’agit], in the neutrality of this altogether impersonal verbal form, of something or someone, neither someone nor something, of a “one” that does not act.<sup>88</sup>

As Stirner claims that the ghost resides in the heads of the people (and that the head must be exorcised and restored to a pre-spectral architecture), and as Marx claims that Stirner himself needs to be rid of this haunting obsession (and instead turn his attention to the real source of the ghost), Derrida suggests that the ‘*es spukt*’ of ‘*Mensch, es spukt in deinem Kopfe*’ marks the very impossibility of reducing the ghost to a logic of identity. However, neither can it be confined to a function of rhetoric:

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<sup>87</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.172.

<sup>88</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.172.

[T]he figure of the ghost is not just one figure amongst others. It is perhaps the hidden figure of all figures. For this reason, it would perhaps no longer figure as one tropological weapon among others. There would be no metaphoric of the ghost.<sup>89</sup>

‘*Es spukt*’, then, cannot be reduced to the head of a haunted subject or object; neither does it describe the haunting of something previously un-haunted. To demonstrate this Derrida plays on the verb ‘*agir*’ [to behave, to act], which suggests that this is a matter of, or it is a question of [*il s’agit*], non-materiality, an action determined by neither subject or object, an action which is at the same time an apprehension about acting: ‘*It is a matter*’ [*Il s’agit*] rather of the passive movement of an apprehension, of an apprehensive movement ready to welcome.’<sup>90</sup> Such a movement requires thinking otherwise about the activity of action, where the ‘apprehensive movement’ would be that which welcomed the other, an action which passively *let* the other come. Of course, apprehension is often thought of as a seizing or laying hold of something or someone – in the name of the law, an arrest. Apprehension is also a consciousness or sensing of something, a feeling, which perhaps also becomes an anxiety. In the ‘passive movement of an apprehension’ we would find both a welcoming of the other, and an anxious desire to halt such a movement:

To welcome, we were saying then, but even while apprehending, with anxiety and the desire to exclude the stranger, to invite the stranger without accepting him or her, domestic hospitality that welcomes without welcoming the stranger, but a stranger who is already found within (*das Heimliche-Unheimliche*), more intimate with one than one is oneself, the absolute proximity of a stranger whose power is singular and anonymous (*es spukt*), an unnameable and neutral power, that is, undecidable, neither active nor passive, an an-identity that, without doing anything, invisibly occupies places belonging finally neither to us nor to it.<sup>91</sup>

Derrida suggests a movement which welcomes without welcoming, without accepting as domestic the strangeness of an absolute proximity to home, to economy, and therefore to the law of the house. Here, ‘*es spukt*’ would mark the uncanny anonymity or automatism that both Stirner and Marx attempt to confine to, and then exorcise from, the head. But the head cannot *be* ghosted; it cannot be reduced to the conjunctions of the verb ‘to be’. As Stirner remarks and Marx repeats, the head *already* ghosts, it spooks,

<sup>89</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.120.

<sup>90</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.172.

<sup>91</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.172.

'*es spukt*'; any delimiting of the 'head' as the container or receptacle of this experience would suggest that an apprehension of the stranger be diverted in advance. However, an attempt to apprehend would also suggest that the stranger had *already* been welcomed. The head would *first of all* be the experience of this ghosting, a space marked by an 'unnameable and neutral power', a certain 'might' of a stranger more familiar than the self, and yet impossible to apprehend or welcome once and for all to the household. Such a 'might' – as force and potential – would mark an originary dimension, neither active nor passive, but the condition of all (in)action and (in)decision (something along the lines of the 'weak messianic power' which 'shards' the logic of the 'now' – as Derrida reads in Benjamin<sup>92</sup>). Derrida asks where this experience might (not) take place, a (non) place where any mapping of its limits would be atopic in advance:

What is the head before this apprehension that it cannot even contain? And what if the head, which is neither the subject, nor consciousness, nor the ego, nor the brain, were defined first of all by the possibility of such an experience, and by the very thing that it can neither contain, nor delimit, by the indefiniteness of the "*es spukt*"?<sup>93</sup>

The 'head' would be the possibility of an experience of '*es spukt*', an experience which cannot be reduced to the subject, or consciousness, the ego, nor the brain. 'Here' the 'head' would atopically situate a ghost effect as the possibility of place, the 'head' would 'ghost' as the possibility of experience. The 'head' would exceed the limits of identity whilst remaining in the vicinity of the subject. The 'head' would survive, or live on as the 'indefiniteness' which gives the possibility of definition and experience. Before an ontology, then, the 'head' would mark what Derrida calls '*hantologie*' [hauntology<sup>94</sup>]:

This logic of haunting would not be merely larger and more powerful than an ontology or a thinking of Being (of the "to be", assuming that it is a matter of Being in the "to be or not to be", but nothing is less certain). It would harbour within itself, but like circumscribed places or particular effects, eschatology and teleology themselves. It would *comprehend* them, but incomprehensibly. How to *comprehend* in fact the discourse of the end or the discourse about the end.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, pp.180-81, fn.2.

<sup>93</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.172.

<sup>94</sup> '*Hantologie*' and '*ontologie*' are homophonic in French.

<sup>95</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.10.

A passive apprehension, a place of incomprehensible comprehension, this would be the logic of the ‘head’ as hauntology. Eschatology and teleology would be taken in, comprehended, but through a logic which could not reduce them to a ‘discourse of the end or the discourse about the end.’ Rather, they would mark a promissory discourse, irreducible to a comprehension of the end (death/justice/the messiah). Again, if the end appeared, as it had been promised, here and now, we could only ask if it was imminent.

Awaiting with an uncanny apprehension, *das (un)heimliche* would here be an originary *affect* of the text, the feeling without sensing, or sensing without feeling, of the most intimate and faraway stranger, both here-now, and forever to come. An alterity at the heart of singularity, as difference and *différance*, ‘*es spukt*’ as originary ghosting, the ‘head’ marks the very possibility of experience. Might we say here, following Barthes, that the ‘head’ is split by two desires, (in)comprehensibly and (un)decidably divided between, on the one hand, a desire for the other (the welcoming of the most strange, foreign, or other) and on the other hand, a desire to desire what remains other (and thus the deferral of the other)? Might the ‘head’ be a place in which both a welcoming of the other *and* the promise of the other remain possible? Both an apprehending and apprehension of the other, this divided desire would be impossible to separate once and for all. As the site of both activity and passivity, the divided desire of the ‘head’ would be impossible to reduce to the teleology, eschatology or ontology it may have promised itself. And if this echoes Freud’s reading of the ‘uncanny’, as what is a most familiar strangeness, it is perhaps because the ‘*es spukt*’ – as Derrida highlights – is the place from which Freud thought his thesis on the uncanny *ought to* have begun. For Derrida, if Freud didn’t start where he should or ought to have done

it is because with the thing in question (the strongest example of *Unheimlichkeit*, the “*es spukt*”, ghosts, and apparitions), one scares oneself too much [one makes oneself fear too much: *on se fait trop peur*]. One confuses what is *heimliche-unheimliche*, in a contradictory, undecidable fashion, with the terrible or the frightful (*mit dem Grauenhaften*).<sup>96</sup>

There is a risk involved by beginning with the ‘*es spukt*’; this would be the fear of fearing too much, of experiencing a fear incompatible to the ‘subject’ who experiences it. Such a fear would manifest itself in the possibility of confusing the ‘might’ or

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<sup>96</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.173. See also, pp.195-96, fn.38.

promise of the *(un)heimliche* with the *too* terrible, or *too* frightening. The excess, the ‘too much’ of what remains ‘undecidable’, is always at risk of being experienced as a fear too terrifying, too traumatic. The risk involved in thinking ‘*es spukt*’, then, would be that what is ‘to come’ would be too much to take. This uncertainty, however, might also suggest that what remains ‘to come’ could be the ability to say what one loves.

### ***2.6 Fragments d’un discours amoureux***

As an intense shock or wound, the effect of an encounter which exceeds the capacity for thought or avoidance but which the one who experiences it nevertheless survives, traumatic experience could be thought to be inextricably linked to a messianic structure, in that a traumatic experience would be the mark of what remained an unthinkable excess, the mark of what remains wholly other, still to be thought, still ‘to come’. The messianic structure, however, is a condition for thinking and living ‘as such’, it is the condition or possibility of *all* experience. The question to be asked, therefore, might be how such a general and originary condition for thinking and survival can be considered in terms of a particular notion of trauma or traumatic event. It has already been suggested that a hesitation between the universal and the particular remains necessary; we might now ask how such an essentially ambiguous ‘position’ may be taken up in the form of a trauma study. With this question in mind, we can return to Barthes to suggest that his reading of the imaginary could offer a particular place from which to await what must remain wholly other; a space which, whilst admitting the impossibility of thinking an unassimilable event once and for all, remains in the vicinity of that event. Such a study would be traumatized from the beginning, punctuated by the imminence or promise of the other; such a study would be – and whilst attempting to avoid reducing the other to the self-stabilising desires of discourse, discipline and myth, or the absolute dissolution of loss, madness or death, but not forgetting the role of desire in *any* encounter – a place for thinking the event which risks an essential – but potentially traumatic – exposure to the wholly other.

Although there may be many other places where we *ought* to begin reading such a study, Barthes’s 1977 text, *Fragments d’un discours amoureux*, might give us a particular idea of how we could read the imaginary as a memorial to the future, a study marked by the force and potential – the ‘might’ – of what remained to come. This would be where we could say to Barthes: ‘it’s all in your head’, whilst at the same time

knowing that the text marks the very impossibility of confining this passion for the other to the identity of a single subject. Such an imaginary, as an always-already ghosted 'head', could not be preceded by an ontology which is yet to be haunted, an ontology which was not yet the ghost-dance of a particularly haunting possession. The imaginary would be 'where' topography, ontology and chronology 'are' already structured by a promise of the other. Sharded or punctuated by the other, in advance of any logic of logos, the imaginary lives on in this text as a devotion to, an affection for, or study of, the other 'to come'. But this devotion is also a suffering and an endurance of a desire marked by the other, an imaginary doubled – or spectralized – by the twin desires of pleasure and *jouissance*, the pleasure/bliss in experiencing/awaiting the other as both here and to come.

*Fragments d'un discours amoureux* is a text which discusses the imaginary as the only structure through which the other may be awaited, but more importantly, intimates it is *essentially* out-of-joint. Barthes opens the text with a note upon the necessity for the text. For him, the potential of a lover's discourse is to return to a register which has been forsaken by literary critics, as well as the avant-garde, for being overly sentimental. There is therefore no *theory* of a lover's discourse, yet it is the shared language of thousands:

The necessity for this book is to be found in the following consideration: that the lover's discourse is today *of an extreme solitude*. This discourse is spoken, perhaps, by thousands of subjects (who knows?), but warranted [*soutenu*] by no one; it is completely ignored, disparaged, or derided by them, severed not only from authority but also from the mechanisms of authority (sciences, techniques [*savoirs*], arts).<sup>97</sup>

Of course, we might suggest that the book is already a technique or science of authority. That it already comes under the authority of editors and publishers, as well as the demands of the market. But the point is that the lover's discourse is an 'extreme' solitude, that is, an excess of solitude, a solitary discourse spoken by thousands, and under no authority. It *cannot* come under the authority of the book; it has already escaped the book, and yet is also what is promised in it. An extreme solitude would be absolutely alone; it would be an absolute singularity which could not be experienced by

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<sup>97</sup> Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2002), n.p; *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* [1977], *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. V, pp.27-296 (p.27).



any other – unthinkable to anyone but the One, absolute idiom, and therefore, absolutely untranslatable. But to name this experience as an absolute solitude would be to already think it, to figure it to oneself, and therefore to trace it, to mark it and therefore to translate it. The lover’s discourse would therefore also be the absolute impossibility of thinking the singular experience, it would be a discourse supported [*soutenu*] by ‘no one’ [emphasis mine]. Spoken by thousands (perhaps) but reducible to ‘no one’, a lover’s discourse is the *property* of no one. What might be thought of as proper to the lover or to the loved object – their identity for example – is impossible to delimit. The lover’s discourse is already the impossibility of confining it to a single head. But neither is it proper to all, a transcendental given. It is merely spoken by thousands, perhaps : ‘*Ce discours est peut-être parlé par des milliers de sujets (qui le sait?)*’.<sup>98</sup>

For Barthes, a discourse which resembles an extreme solitude, which is irreducible to absolute authority, is the place of affirmation:

Once a discourse is thus driven by its own momentum [*sa propre force*] into the backwater of the “unreal” [*la dérive de l’inactuel*], exiled from all gregariness [*hors de toute grégarité*], it has no recourse but to become the site, however exiguous, of an *affirmation*. That affirmation is, in short, the subject of the book which begins here... [*Cette affirmation est en somme le sujet du livre qui commence*].<sup>99</sup>

Here, Barthes seems to describe the actual loss of anything proper to the lover’s discourse; its momentum, which was its own, results in an unreality. The discourse thus becomes a drift [*dérive*] of the ‘*inactuel*’. Not actual, no longer present to its proper force, the discourse drifts in exile. Of course, Barthes’s notion of the ‘drift’ is a necessarily ambiguous term; as ‘pleasure’, the ‘neuter’ and the ‘atopic’, this term suggests a space which is resistant to the commanding order of the concept. But here, the discourse as drift must become a place of affirmation. It is not outside language as some sacred space of hallowed, unmediated, ground; rather, it must become – as the book, the text, or language – the site of an affirmation. And yet, as to what is affirmed we are unclear. This ambiguous affirmation hinges on the word ‘*sujet*’. What is affirmed is overdetermined: at once the affirmation of the subject (perhaps the lover or the beloved), or the subject of affirmation (the affirmation that the book is *about*

<sup>98</sup> Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse*, n.p; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. V, p.27.

<sup>99</sup> Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse*, n.p; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. V, p.27.

affirmation). Yet there is also the possibility that what is affirmed *is* the subject (the subject as either lover, beloved. The lover's discourse ambiguously affirms the 'subject' as an essentially spectral figure.

Spanning all these interpretations is an affirmation of the other, where the other would drift across and punctuate all possible sites of affirmation – making it impossible to reduce affirmation to a specific location, or what is affirmed to a determinable subject. Moreover, such an impossible affirmation, the affirmation of what remains indeterminable, is effected there where no proper identity, commanding order or determinable place which could host it. The lover's discourse is instead a (g)hosting, what has exiled itself from all gregarious company, all forms of commonality or community (or perhaps, communism) only in order to say yes to the imminence of the other – an affirmation which is (perhaps) spoken by thousands, and is therefore – perhaps – a very secret promise of (the) community.

As it is impossible to situate the site of affirmation, but the discourse remains that of the lover, the utterance of the lover must be staged. In a section entitled 'How this book is constructed', Barthes states that:

Everything follows from this principle: that the lover is not to be reduced to a simple symptomal subject, but rather that we hear in his voice what is "unreal", i.e., intractable [*mais plutot faire entendre ce qu'il y a dans sa voix d'inactuel, c'est-à-dire d'intraitable*]. Whence the choice of a dramatic method which renounces examples and rests on the single action of a primary language (no metalanguage). The description of the lover's discourse has been replaced by its simulation, and to that discourse has been restored [*on a rendu*] its fundamental person, the *I*, in order to state an utterance, not an analysis.<sup>100</sup>

All begins with a principle, but the principle is not what might be described as a 'simple symptomal subject', rather, the principle is the notion that we can hear or understand what is 'unreal' [*inactuel*], what is not actually here, what is not present, topical, of the moment, fashionable, or which refers to a current theme or discourse. But also what is virtual, what is virtually here – imminent perhaps. The principle from which all follows, from which we all begin, is that we can hear or understand what is not here, that there is

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<sup>100</sup> Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, p.3; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. V, p.29.

some form of a relation to what is virtually here which does not compromise that imminence with the topic of the day. The opening principle is that this channel of communication, whatever it is, and however impossible, is possible. Yet such virtuality, such imminence, is also ‘intractable’ [*intraitable*]. It is in-flexible, that with which one cannot reach an accord or an agreement, that which remains irreducible to current negotiations, or the negotiation of the moment. We find, then, that the lover’s discourse stages an originary out-of-jointness, a discourse that hears or understands the intractable imminence of what is virtually here.

The description of a lover’s discourse has been substituted for its double, for its simulation. Rather than attempt to describe it, which would presuppose a metalinguistic command over or distance from the lover – something no one could claim, the discourse being (perhaps) the secret language of thousands – the text can only simulate the discourse through various fragmentary figures. Not a lover’s discourse ‘as such’; rather, it is a fragmentary simulation of it. Renouncing examples, which would presuppose a perfect rendition of the discourse, there is here only a counterfeit, only the uncanny doppelgänger which resembles it (almost) to the letter. But Barthes’s text is not the double of an original; rather, it is a simulation of the virtual, the fake of a fake – which is perhaps the only possible option for a staging of the unreal. To that stage has been returned [*rendu*: past participle of *rendre*, which means, amongst other things: to give back, return, produce, pronounce, render] an ‘I’, a ‘*personne fondamentale*’. Barthes has therefore let what is fundamental return; he has restored the fundamental, and therefore, returned what is absolutely fundamental to the production. But the return is to a simulation. There can be no presentation of the lover’s discourse, no presentation of what is essential; rather, it must first of all be a matter of simulation, a simulation as the substitute for the discourse. What is essential or fundamental, therefore, can only be staged in a simulation. What is essential can only be virtual, almost, imminent. The ‘I’ – which might indeed stand in for the ‘Imaginary’ itself – is what *returns*. It is an essence which *haunts* the virtual, and the virtual is therefore spectralized – in essence – by the very thing it intends to stage. The ‘I’ is from the beginning a virtual essence, a simulation of the fundamental, a ghosted essentiality.

The fragmentary simulation of the lover’s discourse is therefore

a portrait – but not a psychological portrait; instead, a structural one which offers the reader a discursive site [*il donne à lire une place de parole*]: the site of someone speaking within himself, amorously, confronting the other (the loved object), who does not speak [*la place de quelqu'un qui parle en lui-même, amoureusement, face à l'autre (l'objet aimé), qui ne parle pas*].<sup>101</sup>

There is a confusion of tenses here; the virtual and fragmentary staging of the lover's discourse is a portrait, a rendering already made (the noun 'portrait' stemming from the past participle of *peindre*: 'to paint'). We have a site, then, at which the past speaks, where the past lives on. A 'portrait' can also refer to a photograph, and so here we might have a living photograph, or a photograph of what lives on. Not a film, but a living image as the impossibility of confining the past to the past. Not a present acting *like* a past, but the impossible conjunction of a simulation which is almost, virtually, the past; that is, its past is yet to come, the portrait is the memory of the future, the mark or 'trait' of the future's force and potential – its 'might'. There is only the simulation: its past – which is also its future – is yet to be uttered; both future and past are imminent, but impossible to reduce to the moment. The simulation (the 'I') is structured, therefore, by a promise which demands that this portrait should always be that of the ghost.

The 'portrait' is the site of someone speaking '*en lui-même*'. Barthes suggests here that the lover is faced with the other within himself. But he also suggests that the lover does not speak *with* the other, but rather speaks in sight of, *vis-à-vis*, or whilst confronted with the other [*face à l'autre*]. The other does not speak; the other cannot be assigned a speaking part. On the one hand Barthes seems to position the other in opposition to the site of the lover's utterance. The lover speaks in sight of the other in himself, but not *with* the other in himself, or himself as other. Indeed, there seems to be an incorporation of the loved object in relation to which the lover can then set up an opposition; a delimitation or crypting of the other in oneself in order to portray oneself in clear opposition to it – to cast the actors for this work of mourning. On the other hand, the lover's discourse resists the desire to stage the other as an identity, or perform an identification. This is, after all, a simulation, a series of fragments which stages an 'I' who can only speak '*amorously*' whilst faced with the other. Barthes does not set up a secure self in opposition to the other, but rather stages the lover's imaginary *in the vicinity of* an irreducible otherness. There can only be a *virtual affection* here, a loving

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<sup>101</sup> Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, p.3; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. V, p.29.

portrait – not a portrait *of* the other, but in relation to the other. We might say, then, that as a portrait of affection – a virtual affection in memory of a future in which ‘one’ may speak of what *has been* loved (the other is the ‘loved object’) – the lover’s discourse could come close to *a study in affection*, to a study which is punctuated or imminent with an other which it cannot identify and to which it could not be reduced. A study which is traumatized from the beginning – traumatized by being irreducible to the other, and therefore from having no secure or proper position from which to think the other. And a study for which the word ‘traumatized’ suggests the impossibility of reducing what is studied to the object or to a concept, even if that concept may be ‘trauma’ as such. Impossible ‘to *be*’ traumatized, rather, the traumatic would name the point of departure for all studies of experience. Such a study would stage a quasi-essential space, an apprehension without apprehending; a place which *may* be reserved for the other, reserved for their ‘might’. Such a study would suffer and survive *in the vicinity of the other* as an awaiting without waiting for the future as his/her/its – and indeed, the event’s – very possibility.

Barthes suggests a series of figures. These figures populate the lover’s imaginary as its fragmentary discourse:

These fragments of discourse can be called *figures*. The word is to be understood, not in its rhetorical sense, but rather in its gymnastic or choreographic acceptation; in short, in the Greek meaning: *σχῆμά* is not the “schema”, but, in a much livelier way [*d’une façon bien plus vivante*], the body’s gesture caught in action and not contemplated in repose: the body of athletes, orators, statues: what in the straining body can be immobilized. So it is with the lover at grips with his figures: he struggles in a kind of lunatic sport [*il se démène dans un sport un peu fou*], he spends himself [*il se dépense*], like an athlete; he “phrases”, like an orator; he is caught, stuffed into a role, like a statue [*il est saisi, sidéré dans un rôle, comme une statue*]. The figure is the lover at work.<sup>102</sup>

The figure is therefore a figure of action. But this is not the capturing of action; the figure is much livelier than that. Rather, it suggests a choreographic excess of life: the hyper-living of the figure which is immobilized whilst dancing; a dance which is performed at the same time as it is choreographed, a dance neither improvised nor scripted in advance. The lover exerts itself dementedly, in a sport which touches on

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<sup>102</sup> Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse*, pp.3-4; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. V, p.29.

madness. The lover spends itself in figures of *jouissance*, or of bliss, but that dispersion of the self is also its seizing or its captivation. In a phrase which is difficult to translate, Barthes suggests the lover's exertion, their *jouissance*, is staged through an awestruck seizure: '*il est saisi, sidéré* [from '*sidérer*': to be captivated, staggered, starstruck] *dans un rôle*'. The figure – that is, the lover's discourse – is the staging, the immobilized dance, of a passive or apprehensive action – or actor – who/which is seized or awestruck in its/their lunatic exertion.

Barthes suggests that the accuracy of these figures, or their potential to account for the lover or the beloved, is unimportant. The lover's discourse is not the (in)accurate rendition of a subject or object, not the description of an experience which is reducible to either, instead, it is a setting, a scene of writing, a map which is at the same time the very place it describes:

All the [lover] knows is that what passes through his mind at a certain moment is marked, like the printout of a code (in other times, this would have been the code of courtly love, or the *Carte du Tendre*).<sup>103</sup>

Each of us can fill this code according to his own history; rich or poor [*maigre ou pas*], the figure must be there, the site (the compartment [*la case*]) must be reserved for it. It is as if there were an amorous Topic, whose figure was a site (topos). Now the property of a Topic is to be somewhat empty: a Topic is statutorily half coded, half projective (or projective because coded).<sup>104</sup>

The figures of the lover's discourse reproduce a 'code', a system of marks or traces which represent – figure – an inscription or table/tablet of laws ('code' stems from the word 'codex' and therefore 'caudex', thus referring us to the trunk of a tree upon which laws are inscribed or the table/tablet hewn; with the table in turn recalling us to Marx's turning table, around which we spun tales with the dead).<sup>105</sup> But this code would be the mark or cipher of the other, a space reserved for the other's law. Hence these figures would be half coded, a half empty box which awaits the other's contribution. The amorous 'Topic', the theme which is common or local to the lover, would always be 'somewhat empty'. 'Statutorily', that is, by rights or by law, the topic would be only half coded, half planned, half decided – and only half decided *because* coded. As code,

<sup>103</sup> The *Carte du Tendre* is an illustration from the first part of *Clélie, Histoire romaine* by Madeleine de Scudéry. The illustration was attributed to François Chauveau.

<sup>104</sup> Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, pp.4-5; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. V, p.30.

<sup>105</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed online: 05/04/10.

the figure would *essentially be* only half decided, and therefore, to be read, written and populated by the other. The figure is *essentially* a space reserved for the other. Not yet decided and therefore also a promise of what remains to come. Moreover, the figure is projective, thrown towards the other, *because* it is coded, *because* it awaits the other; a projected waiting. What is written is always a movement which cannot be reduced to call or response, activity or passivity. It calls whilst responding, is active whilst passive, goes towards whilst waiting, and dances whilst remaining immobile.

The figure is first of all supplementary:

What we have been able to say [...] about waiting, anxiety, memory is no more than a modest supplement offered to the reader to be made free with, to be added to, subtracted from, and passed on to others: around the figure the players pass the handkerchief [*les joueurs font courir le furet*] which sometimes, by a final parenthesis, is held a second longer [*une seconde encore*] before handing it on. (Ideally, the book would be a co-operative: “To the United Readers and Lovers”).<sup>106</sup>

‘Waiting’, ‘anxiety’ and ‘memory’ are three figures which are included in the lover’s discourse. As figures, they are ‘no more than modest’ supplements. The passing on of such supplements is neither the search for their final resting place, their final definition (as the final parenthesis is always followed by a handing over to the other), nor a return to origin (as, being supplementary, ‘what we have been able to say’ about the figure will always have been preceded by an attempt to speak of it; therefore, one could never define the description of the figure as originary). Barthes also alludes here to a society game in which a circle of players pass an object (*le furet*) around another participant who, in the middle of the circle, must guess who holds that object at any particular moment. Barthes considers a particular moment in the game at which hesitancy, delay and desire combine. In a ‘final parenthesis’, the desire to locate the object, and *to be found* holding the object, *almost* synchronise at a moment of revelation – the player, holding onto the object for a second too long desires their own identification as the one who holds, whose location is proper to, the object of desire. The final definition of what is awaited – the determinable position of the object – is about to be aligned with the central figure (both the figure of the player and the figure of the discourse). The *topos* of the figure, as a supplementary and provisional ‘work’ in the vicinity of the other, is

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<sup>106</sup> Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse*, p.5; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. V, p.30.

about to be aligned with that which it attempts to say. Rather than the triumphant *expression* of the other in Stendhal's novel, this would be the actual manifestation of the object in a perfect alignment with what reveals it. In terms of messianism, this would be the arrival of a determinable messiah.

Yet the movement of the game cannot stop there; that the condition of the figure is its supplementarity, that it can be translated, read again, passed on, means that it is both produced by, and awaits, the other. The very possibility of it being held onto for one second longer than necessary (*une seconde encore*) – an *almost* melancholic attachment – means that it is never proper to a single moment. Indeed, the very idea of holding onto something for a moment longer than is *necessary* to it – even in an attempt to identify it – suggests a frivolous excess, a spending more time than one should, or one has, or is proper to the game. In relation to the figure, the object is passed around the circle of players. The object passes between them, awaiting identification by the central player, a movement which produces the double desire of wanting identification, and wanting the delay of that identification. It also provides the possibility of holding the object for too long; again, a movement which effects desire, which takes the one who holds the object and the one whose aim is to locate it to the brink of pleasure/*jouissance*. In order for this dance to go on (for, even if the object is found, the game can be played again and again), there must be no figure capable of locating the final and proper location of the object. No figure who could name the object as such. The figure is therefore a site which is neither proper nor improper to that with which it attempts to align itself. The figure, indeed, the game, survives – lives on; it survives its final destination, its definitive round. And this is the condition of thinking and desire: an *essential* survival as the lover at work, at work awaiting the other to whom that work will be passed. A half-finished work of mourning which – rather than preserving the other in a melancholic immutability (keeping the object for ever) or detaching oneself from the other in a completed work of mourning (pretending that there isn't always the possibility of holding it for just one second more) – awaits the other – suffers and survives as/with/for the other.

Barthes suggests a circle or society of friends, family or lovers who are 'united' in such a movement. This final assertion is problematic to everything I have said about an 'essential' spectrality, in that it suggests a predetermined attempt to delimit a



‘community’ of players/figures who might take part in the movement. Within such a community of figures, the other would always be predicted, foreseen or expected in advance. There would be an artificial and prescriptive containment of the other in the borders or limits of the community. Read in terms of a study, the figures which populated such a community would be the predetermined concepts with which we might attempt that study, the predicted structures of its dissemination or the pre-allocated spaces of articulation. A spectral logic, however, would always undermine any attempt to patrol the borders of this community, or the limits of a study. As there is no space-time which can exorcise itself from an originary and essential spectrality, a hauntology would always make the border impossible to police. If we are to affirm this essential spectrality, to affirm that uncanny anticipation or apprehension of what is both most familiar and wholly other, our starting point should then perhaps be the figures which stage, or which play the game.

We have seen how the figures which populate the lover’s discourse are *essentially* the supplementary, virtual and only partially rendered marks of the other. They populate an imaginary which cannot be reduced to the head of the lover, the limits of the book, or a borders of the community. Rather, the imaginary takes in and expels all of these terrains in its essential ghosting. The imaginary is where ‘*es spukt*’; where the head is ghosted from the beginning and therefore impossible to reduce (to shrink) to its proper borders. In terms of Barthes’s text, the imaginary is the very performance of the lover’s discourse, a performance which is forever imminent with the arrival on stage of the other. Such a performance affirms the virtual, the almost, the perhaps, the ‘as if’ at work in every theme, topic or concept which may want centre stage.

### 2.7 A spectral imaginary

As I have demonstrated, Barthes’s later work allows a reading of the ‘*imaginaire*’ as a space imminent with the wholly other. This ‘imaginary’ resembles both the amorous repertoire of a lover’s discourse, and an unfinished work of mourning; the subjects and objects of each impossible to reduce to a simple logic of identity. It could be suggested that, in relation to Barthes’s œuvre, figures such as *jouissance*, *plaisir*, *studium*, *punctum*, the obtuse, the filmic, the mother, atopia, and the neuter would populate such an imaginary; each a figure with which to (mis)apprehend the (*un*)heimlich impression of the other as *it* ghosts [*es spukt*]. Always-already spectral, the imaginary would enact

an originary ghosting of the ‘head’, an atopic topography which allows us to incomprehensibly comprehend the possibility of experiencing a radical otherness, without reducing it to the sacred image of a determinable messianism, or pre-programming it through an horizon of expectation. The imaginary would be messianic in structure, a structure through which drifts the promise of the other, a wholly other which punctuates the imaginary as its most imminent, urgent, intimate and distant stranger. Neither a gathering nor dispersal, the imaginary hosts the other whilst turning it away. Neither traumatized nor in love, it would instead – and at the same time – be the possibility of both. Recalling Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*, the imaginary would be reducible to neither a figure of homogenous space or linear time, nor to a ‘pre-deconstructive’ ontology proper to it; instead it would figure a hauntology from which or as which – and perhaps even as a ‘Scholar’ – it might be possible to speak *with* the ghost:

If he loves justice at least, the “scholar” of the future, the “intellectual” of tomorrow should learn it and from the ghost. He should learn to live by learning not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her, how to let them speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself.<sup>107</sup>

Such an imaginary could not be reduced to a concept of itself. The imaginary is a series of figures, fragments, scraps, which are gathered without gathering; that is, also dispersed. This movement does not exclude the notion of the imaginary itself. The imaginary would have no fixed definition, capacity or order; the term would span previous notions of the imaginary – Sartre’s or Lacan’s for example – without being reducible to them, that is, whilst exceeding them. Nor could the imaginary be reduced to a ‘Barthesian’ definition; as it would always exceed any authorial or commanding order, it would not be proper to any theory, definition or location. Therefore – and whilst all notions of the imaginary would be spectralized from the beginning, in that they would necessarily involve a notion of the trace – it seems necessary to refer to this reading of the imaginary as spectral. Affirming its spectrality would be an attempt to resist the reduction of the term ‘imaginary’ to either its concept, or an identificatory logic, in that a ‘spectral imaginary’ would always-already be ghosted by the other.

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<sup>107</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.176 and *passim*.

A spectral imaginary could not be circumscribed once and for all; its limits could not be determined by the edges of a book, the title which announces it, or the themes which it may address. A spectral imaginary would always be partial; irreducible to the limits of a whole. Barthes suggests in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* that ‘the vital effort of this book is to stage an image-system [*L’effort vital de ce livre est de mettre en scène un imaginaire*]’, where

“To stage” means: to arrange the flats one in front of the other, to distribute the roles, to establish levels, and at the limit: to make the footlights a kind of uncertain barrier. Hence it is important that the image-system [*l’imaginaire*] be treated according to its degrees (the image-system is a matter of consistency [*une affaire de consistance*], and consistency a matter of degrees), and there are, in the course of these fragments [of the book], several degrees of image-system. The difficulty, however, is that one cannot number these degrees, like the degrees of spirituous liquor or of a torture.<sup>108</sup>

The text would be the staging of the imaginary in that it would establish its consistency – in the sense of density or viscosity – without reducing that consistency to a quantifiable or measurable scale; hence an inconsistent consistency. As a staging of the imaginary, a staging of uncertain barriers, the text would already be in the vicinity of another. Through its plural and incalculable consistencies, any text might be read in relation to another without being comparable to it. Each text would be *of a consistency* with another – a relation between degrees of intensity, between stages or steps of the text – without either being preceded by a metatextual scale. We might describe this in terms of Derrida’s notion of messianicity, and say that the spectral imaginary is where a *general* messianic structure would find itself in the vicinity of a *particular* experience of the text, without either being the *a priori* condition of the other. We must add, therefore, that the spectral imaginary *can only be staged*; there is no imaginary before this staging, no imaginary before the staging-as-text.

Though it may be staged in the form of a book, the spectral imaginary is impossible to reduce to its borders, and as such, always-already overflows that staging. The spectral imaginary can therefore return, be staged again, and otherwise. We might illustrate this by saying that, though Barthes’s reading of Stendhal’s ability to express his ‘Italian

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<sup>108</sup> Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1977), p.105; *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975), p.109.

passion' is a singular response to his texts, it is also and already readable in the questions surrounding the absolute resemblance of the photograph to Barthes's mother in *La Chambre Claire*. Though a spectral imaginary can be read in both texts, neither is capable of being reduced to a comparable measure, schema or system. Between texts, there is a relation without relation, and this is due to the impossibility of delimiting their borders. Without clear borders, then, we cannot say in any definitive capacity where the spectral imaginary ends or begins, and therefore to what it might be related. We could not say where or what might be considered the 'same', or where or what might be definitively thought of as 'other'. An essential spectrality, a ghosting, *a text*, the spectral imaginary has the absolute unknowability of the other as its condition *and* its effect. Yet the notions of 'condition' and 'effect' would be ambiguous here; the wholly other would act – at the same time – as both condition and effect of the text (no text without other, no other without text). We might prove the latter by its alternative, in that, should the other be known in advance, should what is 'to come' be predicted or calculated, the horizons of expectation – the limits of the spectral imaginary – would already and undisputedly be mapped.

The spectral imaginary might be likened to a study, in that it would situate a devotion, affection, pleasure or inclination towards or for something. Yet, and referring to Barthes's notion of the *punctum*, this study would be punctured from the beginning, in that – to recall Barthes's essay on Stendhal – it would always fail in speaking of what it loves. Again, regardless of any object or horizon of study, such a study would be traumatized by a wholly other which cannot be reduced to the figure of trauma 'as such', or mastered by the concepts which approach it. As a trauma study, the spectral imaginary might suggest how all studies call for a radical re-evaluation of their approach, of how all studies might call for a scholar(ship) which could speak *with* the ghost.

An always-already punctured study, the spectral imaginary cannot form a clear horizon for its object, or calculate the object from its horizon. There must always be the possibility that what could result from such a study might always be other than what is sought. A trauma(tized) study, then, would be proper to no object, no task. But neither could it devote itself to anything whatsoever, because it must always await the other in a particular vicinity. Though the spectral imaginary may, as a staging, be comprised of

the figures of a lover's discourse, and therefore whilst it would on the one hand be expected to address itself to an object of desire, it could not be proper to that object in that its expectancy would always be imminent with the promise of the wholly other. Should a notion of trauma be one of the figures which populated the spectral imaginary, the wholly other of the *arrivant*, imminent at every turn, would mean that such a notion must also concern itself with those of love, anxiety, humour or music – amongst many others.

It could be suggested, then, that Barthes's late essay – in which Barthes suggests a point in Stendhal's writing at which it is impossible to decide between a described effect and the effect that description produces – is itself a mapping of Stendhal's journey from travel journal to novel. Barthes has shown how Stendhal moves from a Winnicottian play – a writing which attempts to recall the lost (m)other through the transitional object – to a triumphant expression of the other. As Barthes suggests, when Stendhal writes of 'Italy' in the travel journals, he 'speaks it, he sings it, he does not *represent* it; he proclaims his love but cannot express it, or, as we say nowadays (a metaphor from driving), he cannot negotiate it.'<sup>109</sup> This then shifts to the 'triumphant expression' of the novel as *the* impression of the other, a description which is the particular and singular mark of the other. As the mark of the other, this writing is also a sign of their 'might', the sign that they are imminent. For Barthes, then, Stendhal's novel produces writing which reserves a place for the other.

Barthes's essay plots Stendhal's journey; it seems to form – or 'formaterialize' – a *Bildungsroman* as the Stendhalian experience of 'Italy', which passes from the early insecurities of infancy to an imaginary which – rather than being reducible to that of an adult – is in fact irreducible to a single subject. As we have seen, Stendhal's later work is, for Barthes, informed by 'a kind of after-the-fact [*une sorte d'après-coup*] which also constitutes part of the devious logic of love'. It is also a 'novelistic lie' [*le mensonge romanesque*], which 'would be – miraculously – both the detour of truth and the finally triumphant expression of his Italian passion'. Here, a passion for the other is not their truth, but a lie which takes a turn through truth. The devious logic of love, the *après-coup* or mark/might of the other, is figured through a lie which touches on truth.

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<sup>109</sup> Roland Barthes, 'One Always Fails in Speaking of What One Loves', p.300; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. p.910.

The Novel – as writing – enacts the imaginary to such an extent that what is experienced there cannot be reduced once and for all to the experience of Stendhal alone. The imaginary is instead a transferential locus at which writer/reader, Barthes/Stendhal, text/experience cannot be formalized into normalizing categories for thinking. Barthes's essay closes by staging this figure of the imaginary. This is why Barthes's essay could never be deemed finished, even if he had amended every page and published it before he died. Barthes reads Stendhal's text as the 'triumphant expression of his Italian passion'; in Stendhal's text, 'Italy' is imminent, an imminence which is the very experience of reading, a 'passion' which could not be reduced to an experience proper to either Barthes or Stendhal, a passion for the other which could never end.

### 2.8 A virtual double act

In his essay on Proust, read at the Collège de France in 1978, Barthes asks himself if he would write a novel: 'Does all this mean I'm going to write a novel?'<sup>110</sup> Amongst other things, Barthes is uncertain as to the form of such a novel. Indeed, such a 'novel' would be a memory of what is yet to come: 'I still mean by the Novel that uncertain, quite uncanonical Form, insofar as I do not conceive it but *only remember or desire it*.'<sup>111</sup> Although Barthes figures the other as 'the reader' in this essay, the novel could not exert any pressure upon him or her, no action which would force them *to be* 'the reader': 'since its writing is mediate (it presents ideas and feelings only by intermediaries) – the Novel then, exerts no pressure upon the other (the reader).'<sup>112</sup> Barthes suggests he does not know if he will write this novel – 'How should I know?'; which in turn suggests that if it were to be written, it would perhaps not be recognized as that which he sought. What remains important is the performance and the act of writing. Barthes knows that the novel could only arrive through its imaginary or unreal staging: 'It is important for me to *act as if I were* [*de faire comme si je devrais*] to write this utopian novel.'<sup>113</sup>

<sup>110</sup> Roland Barthes, '« Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure... »', p.289; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.V, p.470.

<sup>111</sup> Roland Barthes, '« Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure... »', p.289; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.V, p.469. Emphasis added.

<sup>112</sup> Roland Barthes, '« Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure... »', p.289; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.V, p.469.

<sup>113</sup> Roland Barthes, '« Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure... »', p.289; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.V, p.470. Emphasis added.

Barthes concludes this essay with a return to method – or perhaps, to method acting. Here, the subject is not studying *something*, but is rather the staging of a production which – with the arrival of the novel imminent – is ghosted by the very thing to come. Barthes poses this production as an amateur dramatics, but it is also ‘vaguely oriented’ towards a science to come. The production would therefore be a working towards that future, whilst attempting to resist deciding – either professionally or legitimately – upon it in advance:

[...] here I regain, to conclude, a method [*je retrouve ici, pour finir, la méthode*]. I put myself in the position [*Je me mets en effet dans la position*] of the subject who makes something, and no longer of the subject who speaks about something: I am not studying a product, I assume a production; I abolish the discourse on discourse; the world no longer comes to me as an object, but as writing, i.e., a practice: I proceed [*je passe*] to another type of knowledge (that of the Amateur), and it is in this that I am methodical [...] I postulate a novel to be written, whereby I can expect to learn more about the novel than by merely considering it as an object already written by others.<sup>114</sup>

Barthes closes by suggesting that such a production, such writing, as the horizon without horizon of the novel, may also be an intimacy with the subject’s absolute particularity (a subject he has put himself in the position of). Through a conditional double-act, in acting *as if* he were the subject who writes, *as if he were* the one who might write a ‘novel’, the one who virtually or quasi-acts – an ‘almost’ acting which might also be real – would be the one who proceeds ‘to another type of knowledge’, a knowledge where a practice and theory of the ‘novel’ remain undecidable. In turn, such amateur method acting might also be the vague recognition of a new science which might express – at once – the brilliance and suffering of the world. Such a double-act might perform the writing of what is, at once, both the particular and the universal, and of what is, at once, the most loved and most feared:

Perhaps it is finally at the heart of this subjectivity, of this very intimacy which I have invoked, perhaps it is at the “pinnacle of my particularity” that I am scientific without knowing it, vaguely oriented toward that *Scienza*

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<sup>114</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘ « Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure... »’, pp.289-90; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.V, p.470.

*Nuova* Vico spoke of: should it not express at once the world's brilliance and the world's suffering, all that beguiles and offends me?<sup>115</sup>

It might be possible to conclude by passing on some further figures; figures for a lover's discourse or even a trauma study – for players or actors to come. Such figures might be vaguely oriented towards a new science; half finished, modest supplements, fragments, they might await an amateur science which can think both brilliance and suffering (a psychoanalysis 'to come' perhaps). In their essential repetition, their originary double-act, these figures may suggest the impossibility of reducing the figure to itself, to a concept, to a space, location or position of locution. Furthermore, in any recognisable associations with pleasure, *jouissance*, comfort, affirmation or indignation, they may also affirm the spectrality which undermines any imaginary which would seek to decide upon these figures in advance:

*now now*

*here here*

*there there*

*come come*

*yes yes*

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<sup>115</sup> Roland Barthes, '« Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure... »', p.290; *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.V, p.470.



## 3.

**ADDRESSING ARRIVANCE:**  
*LE JOUR OÙ JE N'ÉTAIS PAS LÀ*

Now ghosts and spirits are undoubtedly Powers, but it does not follow that all Powers are ghosts and spirits, even if they tend to become so.

*R. R. Marett.*<sup>1</sup>

‘I have just been all omnipotence, all savage. That’s how one must do it if one wants to get something done.’

*Sigmund Freud.*<sup>2</sup>

‘For some weeks I have been pregnant with the germ of a larger synthesis, and will give birth to it in the summer.’

*Sigmund Freud.*<sup>3</sup>

Being born doesn’t end.

*Hélène Cixous.*<sup>4</sup>

Hélène Cixous’s *Le jour où je n’étais pas là* [*The Day I Wasn’t There*] is narrated by a woman attempting to address the life and death of her son.<sup>5</sup> Born with Down’s syndrome, her child dies in a maternity clinic in Algeria, a clinic run by the narrator’s mother, to whom she has relinquished his care. Although Cixous also had a son who died very young, *Le jour où je n’étais pas là* is not an autobiographical consideration of that event. Nor is it a ‘fictionalized’ account of her son’s death. Rather, this text addresses the event in such a way that any border between author and narrator, reality and fiction, or life and writing remains incalculable.

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<sup>1</sup> R. R. Marett, ‘Pre-Animistic Religion’, *Folklore*, vol.11, no.2 (June, 1900), pp.162-184 (p.170).

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Sigmund Freud to Sándor Ferenczi, referring to the writing of *Totem and Taboo*; December 31st, 1912; Freud–Ferenczi Correspondence, Freud Collection, LC. Cited in: Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life For Our Time*, p.325.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Sigmund Freud to Carl Jung, referring to the writing of *Totem and Taboo*; February 12th, 1911. Cited in: Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life For Our Time*, p.326.

<sup>4</sup> Hélène Cixous, ‘Without End no State of Drawingness no, rather: The Executioner’s Taking off’, trans. Catherine A. F. MacGillivray, *New Literary History*, vol.24, no. 1, ‘Culture and Everyday Life’ (1993), pp.91-103 (p.92).

<sup>5</sup> Hélène Cixous, *Le jour où je n’étais pas là* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2000); *The Day I Wasn’t There*, trans. Beverly Bie Brahic (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2006).

*Le jour où je n'étais pas là* opens with a question: '*Comment enfouir le souvenir d'une faute qui revient d'un lointain passé?*'<sup>6</sup> This asks how it might be possible to bury, or 'tuck away' – a notion which the verb '*enfouir*' can also suggest – the 'memory of a fault' which returns from a remote past. The question doesn't ask how to bury the fault itself, but the 'memory of a fault'. Rather than a *loss* of memory, what is *remembered* is a fault or a lack, a deficiency, flaw or imperfection. And when this 'memory of a fault' does return, burying it is imperative: '*C'est l'aube, elle revient encore, il faut absolument l'enfouir* [It is dawn, it is back again, it is absolutely necessary to bury it].'<sup>7</sup> What is most necessary is burial, what cannot be denied is the necessity to inter the 'memory of a fault'. There is a certain power here, one which demands that the narrator bury. With the return of the 'memory of a fault' comes an obligation; the power of the '*il faut*' – of what is necessary – seems to overpower all other commands. This obligation, to bury 'the memory of a fault', will be both experienced and interrogated in *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*.

To bury is to conjure away, to summon the magic which allows one to make something disappear before their very eyes. The narrator will conjure away the 'memory of a fault' in an 'improvised coffin' which is itself buried:

Then I shoved it – a pot about as big as a little quart kettle – into the ground – and I covered it up again for a long time with earth, with ice, in spite of the presence of passersby and children who had no idea what I was ridding myself of [*je faisais disparaître*] in the little improvised coffin.<sup>8</sup>

The 'memory of a fault' calls for a conjuring trick, for the making or the production of disappearance, the making, production, or appearance of disappearance. The burial is a dissimulation of forgetting, the burial of a burial, a feigning-absence which remembers to forget the 'memory of a fault'. Cixous's text will make any opposition between what is acknowledged and what is denied, between what is kept and what is lost, tremble. Indeed, *Le jour où je n'étais pas là* sketches an *acknowledgment* of what is buried; it suggests the safekeeping of what is lost. Moreover, this burial scene takes place despite passersby; they have no idea what is being buried here; this is a making disappear in view of everyday life – paradoxically, an *open* secret. Here, then, the double operation

<sup>6</sup> Hélène Cixous, *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, n.p.; *The Day I Wasn't There*, p.3.

<sup>7</sup> Hélène Cixous, *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, n.p. (translation mine).

<sup>8</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn't There*, p.3; *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, n.p.

which addresses the ‘memory of a fault’ immediately opens onto the aporia which structures the text: how to suffer and survive what both returns and is abandoned, what is both kept and lost, both acknowledged and denied.

*Le jour où je n’étais pas là* opens with the burial of what keeps returning (‘*elle revient encore*’). That the ‘memory of the fault’ has returned ‘again’ suggests a previous burial has failed or is incomplete, or perhaps that what it means to bury is not to be thought of through the oppositions of forgetting or remembering, of failure or success, completion or incompleteness. Indeed, what it means to bury will be a central question for this text, a question which also concerns the notions of abandonment, repression, loss and denial, as well as attachment, acknowledgement and responsibility. *Le jour où je n’étais pas là* stages this question from the beginning; as the text opens by asking how to bury the ‘memory of a fault’, and then proceeds to describe a burying of that memory, it also forms the very recollection it is asking how to bury, whilst burying it. Through a strange intertwining of denial and acknowledgment, memory and forgetting, this text will go on to *experience* the ‘fault’ which it is burying, whilst at the same time asking how to bury it.

It is impossible to completely identify such a ‘fault’, firstly because we only have the ‘memory of a fault’ – its trace – and consequently because what is alluded to through the ‘fault’ is both a happening or an event, and a failure, lack, deficiency or unaccountability. In the context of *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, this ‘event’ appears to be the death of the narrator’s son, and the circumstances, chances and responsibilities which surround it. The ‘fault’, then, also signifies guilt; it suggests that a culpability or blame is there to be assigned, accepted or taken responsibility for. The ‘fault’ has been committed, but it is yet to be accounted for. *Le jour où je n’étais pas là* concerns the narrator’s relationship with her son, who, born with Down’s syndrome, dies in the care of her mother, a midwife. This act of abandonment – and subsequent guilt – is a central concern for the narrator. Transferentially extending into associations impossible to reduce to the limits of the book, the difference between what is kept and what is lost is a fault-line which divides every element of the text. *Le jour où je n’étais pas là* is almost too personal to read, but at the same time it belongs to no-one; this is a text which recounts an impossibly intimate event, an event which is at the same time irreducible to those who encounter it. The otherness of the event punctuates this story from the

beginning; it haunts the ‘memory of a fault’, a burial which is at the same time a recovery, as well as the question of *how* to recover.

*Le jour où je n’étais pas là* is the return of a day ‘I’ wasn’t there. The day in question is most likely to be the day of the child’s death, a day the narrator was elsewhere. But as the members of the narrator’s family are reluctant to speak of the events of that day, the title of this text could equally refer to both the narrator’s mother (the midwife) and brother (himself a doctor, and who may have also been present at the clinic on that day). Yet, as ‘là’ can also mean ‘here’, ‘*Le jour où je n’étais pas là*’ can also refer to the ‘the day I wasn’t here’. Moreover, ‘où’ [literally, ‘where’] refers to a spatial dimension, therefore ‘*le jour où...*’, although an everyday idiomatic phrase in French, also combines both temporal (*jour*) and spatial (*où*) dimensions: ‘the *day where* I wasn’t here/there’. On the day in question, therefore, somewhere between here and there, the ‘I’ is irreducible to a definitive space-time. Thus the text also asks what happens when a spatio-temporal position cannot be relied upon to situate and structure our experiences of the most significant events. Cixous’s text is a meditation on what it means to never have been there – or here – where one ought to be or have been, on what it means to suffer and survive the irreducible gap between life as living on and a being-there where an ‘I’ should have been, there where an ‘I’ could have done justice to, account, or take responsibility, for a ‘fault’ – the memory of which has once again returned.

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This chapter reads Derrida’s *H. C. pour la vie, c’est à dire...* in order to ask how *Le jour où je n’étais pas là* addresses the radical unknowability of the *arrivant*.<sup>9</sup> It will read how Cixous’s text *gestures* towards the wholly other, how the *arrivant* is welcomed in the text without arriving ‘as such’. I want to argue that Cixous’s text is the very *happening* of what it nevertheless remains at a distance from; that it is both an

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<sup>9</sup> As Chapter Two discussed (see §2.3 onwards), the *arrivant* is what – or who – must remain wholly unexpected and unpredictable; irreducible to any determinable identity or place, and awaited without waiting. It is interesting to note that the word *arrivant* came to Derrida as an uncanny figure, as something which became – only after the fact – a strangely familiar notion. The text in which this uncanniness had been in hibernation is Cixous’s *La*, and its adaptation, the play *L’Arrivante*: ‘I was recently taken by this word, *arrivant*, as if its uncanniness had just arrived to me in a language in which it has nonetheless sounded very familiar to me for a long time.’ Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p.33 and p.86, fn. 14.

experience of the event and a considered study of that event. The doubling of this intimate experience with a distanced commitment would render the text's study of the event as the possibility of the impossible; that is, the study of the event would always-already be compromised by the very experience of that which it purports to stand at a distance from. Such an intimate distancing might be the definition of a 'trauma study'; a collision of experience *and* study as that which could never be reduced to a definitive position on the subject, nor to a field, a discipline, science or theory. In turn, I want to suggest that a 'trauma study' could not be a concept *in advance* of the text; rather, a 'trauma study' could only take place as an essentially experimental gesture.

### 3.1 *Faute de langue*

In *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, the 'memory of a fault' is impossibly overdetermined. Though the 'fault' can be thought of as the abandonment of the child, or the guilt over not being present at his death (the narrator's 'fault'), it could also refer more literally – as Cixous suggests – to the boy himself, to a child born with Down's syndrome and therefore to a child who might be thought of as manifesting a deficiency, lack, or 'fault'. This double structure of the fault means that, when the narrator faces the child, the notions of being and having, or leaving and returning, are overtly problematic. Indeed, facing the child results in a linguistic collapse:

With *him* [*Devant lui*] I thought, all the words of being, of having, of being able, of going, all of them wavered and collapsed [*vacillé et plié*]. That's why it was always hard for me to talk about it, for want of a language [*il me fut toujours difficile d'en parler, faute de langue*].<sup>10</sup>

'*Faute de langue*' can mean the fault of language (the insufficiency or deficiency of language) as well as a lack of language, for want of language. Language cannot comprehend the fault, but, as that insufficiency, it is that which produces the fault; thus language also *describes* the fault. And for this, language is guilty – it is 'at fault'. The '*faute de langue*', therefore, is both irreducible to language and produced by language; language says there is a fault/deficiency/lack of language *in order to describe* that fault/deficiency/lack; language says there is something beyond language whilst producing that very thing which nevertheless remains beyond it. To complicate matters further, that the '*faute de langue*' is a lack of language suggests that where there is a

<sup>10</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn't There*, p.6 [translation modified]; *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, p.12.

fault of language there is no language; paradoxically then, there is no fault *of* language. Thus there both is and is not a fault, and that fault is both inside and outside of language.

Here then, Cixous's text *produces* the fault (it *writes* the fault so as to make it appear available to study), thus suggesting that there is no fault, whilst maintaining that the fault remains irreducible to language. Writing is and is not responsible for this fault, it is and is not guilty of a '*faute de langue*'; it *produces* the fault as something yet to come to language, it marks the very point where what is irreducible to language – the deficiency, lack or mistake of language – *comes* to language. Essentially unstable, language is at once able to comprehend and account for the fault *and* that which sustains the fault as the absolute other of language, *as well as* that which says there is no fault. Language is both adequate to the event and that which sustains the event as an otherness which remains to be thought. In this sense, language is the very marker of its absence or its inadequacy. This is the logic which gives us the 'memory of a fault'; *Le jour où je n'étais pas là* will demonstrate that the *memory* of a fault will always suggest there is more to be remembered, that the 'fault' has not yet arrived in language 'as such', and so in some sense, memory and language still remain adequate to the fault, still remain the possibility of recalling what could never be remembered once and for all. Both adequate *and* insufficient, language marks the 'memory of a fault', the trace of a lack as no lack. The question of how one might think the occurrence of the fault is, therefore, a question which concerns a deficiency which language denies in its very affirmation of the fault.

The 'fault of language' occurs at the very point at which language touches on the event, upon the other. The narrator considers her relation to the child through this strange logic of the fault. Though destined to forever remain the 'memory of a fault', a trace of a lack forever fossilized in language, the 'unfledged' child rubs itself against language as though it has no idea it has been denied, or that denial, forgetting or abandonment are even possible; this ghost (of language) has no concept of absolutes:

Feather-headed fossil of an unfledged child [*Fossile de faucon niais*], that's *what it is*; but still it shifts around there and it rustles softly without violence

the way a spectre gropes for the latch that's been changed in the meantime, rubbing itself against the door, never suspecting it's been denied.<sup>11</sup>

Throughout the text, the narrator refers to the child as '*niais*'. As an adjective this word means 'silly' or 'inane', as a noun it refers to a 'simpleton'. Its homophonic relation is '*nier*', which is the verb 'to deny'. Hence '*le niais*' (the simpleton) echoes *le nié* (the denied). Furthermore, '*un faucon niais*' refers to a young falcon which hasn't yet left the nest, hence Beverley Bie Brahic's translation: 'unfledged child'.<sup>12</sup> We find, therefore, that the word '*niais*' can refer to both a simpleton and an unfledged bird, as well as to what has been denied. When the first sentence of the main body of the text states: '*Tu te gardes du niais* [You keep (yourself away from) the unfledged/denied simpleton]'<sup>13</sup> what is denied in the 'memory of a fault' is also and at the same time, acknowledged:

Did I know when I turned away [*Est-ce que je savais moi lorsque je me gardai de le regarder partir*], denying everything, denying the necessity, denying the event, denying the prediction, denying the error and the truth, denying the cruelty, denying the innocence, denying the patient, the hopeful words, denying each and every fault, denying the facts, the features, the eyes, the mouth the tongue the hands the nose, did I know I was denying who I was denying [*est-ce que je savais que je niais qui je niais*], did I know I kept him in me out of me [*est-ce que je savais que je le gardai dans moi hors de moi*], from then on in the out of me [*dans le hors de moi*] which makes, in the mined hollow of my nights, a nest where my little nestling forever broods? [*un nid où couve pour toujours mon petit niais ?*]<sup>14</sup>

What the narrator cannot bring herself to acknowledge – to see leave – is the denial of the fault. What leaves, or what is denied, is also kept and watched over – 'in me out of me'. The untranslatable phrase '*tu te gardes du niais*' thus performs this double structure of denial and acknowledgment; what can be read as 'you keep yourself away from the unfledged/denied simpleton' might also be translated as 'you keep the unfledged/denied simpleton'. Nestled in the 'out of me', what is denied is also preserved. Jacques Derrida's introduction to Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's

<sup>11</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn't There*, p.6; *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*; p.12.

<sup>12</sup> See 'Translator's notes' in: Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn't There*, p.101-03.

<sup>13</sup> Hélène Cixous, *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, p.11 (translation mine). Beverley Bie Brahic suggests: 'You are warding off the dim nestling the nestled dimling', *The Day I Wasn't There*, p.5.

<sup>14</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn't There*, p.5; *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, p.12.

*Cryptonymie: Le Verbier de L'Homme aux loups* speaks of a similar instance of impossible incorporation in relation to their notion of the crypt.<sup>15</sup> Abraham and Torok's text explores the psychoanalytic elaboration of a crypt effect in relation to one of Freud's most intriguing cases, the 'wolf man'. Abraham and Torok suggest that the wolf man encrypts a 'magic word' of immense signification around which he must construct a security system capable of touching upon it whilst never revealing it. Such a movement allows him to indulge in the illicit pleasure which the word symbolizes without ever having to speak or reveal that word. Derrida's deconstruction of this notion of encryption can be seen in his use of the phrase '*sauf en moi*', which can mean both 'safe in me', and 'save in me' (except in me).<sup>16</sup> Though I do not want to read *Le jour où je n'étais pas là* in terms of Abraham and Torok's *Cryptonymie* (if anything *Le Jour* is a meditation on the impossibility of ever reducing a 'magic word' to theoretical knowledge, and therefore a profound challenge to both psychoanalysis and 'theory'), the incalculability of '*sauf en moi*' is helpful in allowing us to think the essential spectrality of the (linguistic) partitions between what we keep and what we keep ourselves from, in that it marks an undecidable threshold between keeping and losing, acknowledgement and abandonment, denial and acceptance.

For the narrator of *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, denying the fault is the denial of the mistake/lack/deficiency, and therefore an acknowledgment of what is denied. But the narrator is unsure if she knew about this double operation:

[...] did I know I was denying who I was denying, did I know I kept him in me out of me, from then on in the out of me which makes, in the mined hollow of my nights, a nest where my little nestling forever broods?

[...] *est-ce que je savais que je niais qui je niais, est-ce que je savais que je le gardai dans moi hors de moi, dès cet instant dans le hors de moi qui fait, au creux miné de ma nuit, un nid où couve pour toujours mon petit niais ?*<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See: Jacques Derrida, 'FORS: Les mots angles de Nicolas Abraham et Maria Torok' in: Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *Cryptonymie : Le Verbier de L'homme aux loups* (Paris : Editions Aubier Flammarion, 1976), pp.7-73. The English translation by Barbara Johnson: 'Fors: The English Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok' in: *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, trans. Nicholas Rand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp.xi-xlvi. For further work on Abraham and Torok, and Derrida's reading of their work, see: Mark Dawson (ed.), *Inscr(i/y)ptions, Parallax*, issue 50, vol.15, no.1 (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, January-March 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'FORS', p.17.

<sup>17</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn't There*, p.5; *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, p.12.



The narrator remains unclear as to what happened in the ‘aftermath’ of this event; the return of a ‘memory of a fault’ is not reducible to a knowledge of the event; (knowledge of) the event remains to come, and the narrator must in the meantime learn to live with this ambiguity – an experience which the text also performs. Here, then, the narrator keeps the unknown, keeps the denied, in an uncanny relationship with the other ‘*sauf en moi*’; this requires both an infinite distance from, and intimacy with, the other, at once the complete abandonment of what one keeps most safe. What it is important to remember is that this experience remains incalculable because it is an experience of writing, of the trace, of ‘the book’. *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, therefore, is a text whose narrator *experiences* the event through a writing to which neither the authority of the narrator, nor a knowledge of the event ‘as such’, can be reduced. From the moment that what is abandoned is also kept, that what is denied is also acknowledged – ‘*dès cet instant dans le hors de moi*’ – what comes to the text as the ‘memory of a fault’ presupposes an essential disjoining of time and space. I return to this below.

For the narrator, thinking is indirect, in that it comprises detours and delays, as well as transferential circuits:

I never think of my son the dead, I thought towards my cat who was smiling at me with her minimissimal overwhelming smile, while she watched me think on her, bearing the unspeakable mess of my mental images with the compassion that comes to her aid with my convulsions.<sup>18</sup>

*Je ne pense jamais pas à mon fil le mort, ai-je pensé vers ma chatte qui me souriait de son sourire minimissime bouleversant, tandis qu’elle me regardait penser sur elle, supportant le brouillon innommable de mes images avec la compassion qui lui vient au secours de mes convulsions.*<sup>19</sup>

Such a movement takes time; the cat – with her ‘minimissimal overwhelming smile’ – forms an enigma *upon* which the narrator casts her thoughts. This projection of thought can also be seen in the construction of the verb itself: ‘I could say that it’s all the fault of the verb *to think* [penser]; it is because of the way it is constructed, its manner of taking an indirect object, by which it means to signify its circuitousness and precaution to us, it is a verb that roams [*rôle*], a dreamy sort of action.’<sup>20</sup> The ‘fault’, then, may

<sup>18</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, p.25.

<sup>19</sup> Hélène Cixous, *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, p.45.

<sup>20</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, p.25; *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, p.46 (translation modified).

come down to this verb, a verb which wanders, and a verb which goes via enigmas and aporia. Even when her son is foremost in her mind, the narrator cannot ‘budge toward my son the dead’<sup>21</sup>: ‘And even at this moment when my son the dead was the direct object of my thoughts, indirectness reigned and I did not try to curtail it.’<sup>22</sup> Here, the stasis of not thinking her son is thought; the impossibility of thinking what would be the direct object of her thoughts is thought *indirectly* towards her cat. With this stasis in movement, the ‘fault’ is acknowledged – thinking towards her cat recalls the object she cannot contemplate directly. An impossible logic of transference, this thinking towards her cat allows her to (not) think of her son, and the enigma of the cat bears this approach as its unreachable destination. In moving towards the cat, then, what is unthinkable – her son – is recalled as the ‘fault’ of the verb ‘to think’.

Via its classical Latin root ‘*ponderāre*’ [ponder], the narrator compares *penser* (the verb ‘to think’), to ‘*peser*’, which means ‘to weigh’, ‘to weigh up’, or ‘to lie heavy on’. For the narrator, ‘*peser*’ refers to a direct weighing up of a problem. Although the narrator never thinks directly of her son, their relation remains within the wanderings of *penser*; though she thinks she never directly thinks of him, a dream-roaming towards the other – her dream-roaming towards the enigma of the cat – also means their paths will be held together in suspension: ‘One must go towards the dead son and that takes time in my case it is going to take decades’; ‘when it comes to my son I have always been indirect and vice versa, we were fated. Fate is what we have in common.’<sup>23</sup> To weigh the son, therefore, would be to decide upon him, something the narrator is unable to do:

*I was never able to weigh [peser] my son, I could not weigh him, without being caught up and overcome by an invincible terror, with the result that after a few months three or four I believe I’d given up weighing him, because weighing him for me it was as if each time I was sentenced anew, weighing him was to hear the pitiless word of the scales all over again why bother consulting them, they prophesied to me in vain.*<sup>24</sup>

To measure his life would be to prophesize the future death of this sick child. In turn, the narrator would also be sentenced. To weigh the child would be to sentence them

<sup>21</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, p.25; *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, p.45.

<sup>22</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, p.25; *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, p.45.

<sup>23</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, p.25; *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, p.46.

<sup>24</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, p.26; *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, p.46-7.

both to a calculated death. As if in defiance of this sentence the narrator begins to weigh her son indirectly: ‘perhaps that’s when I began weighing him indirectly and without noticing it became perpetual’.<sup>25</sup> It is through this perpetual indirectness that the ‘memory of a fault’ will continually haunt the narrator’s dream-roaming.

An indirect weighing would be the distancing, or deferral, of the final decision of the scales, of what is prophesized by them. This ‘indirect’ weighing, then, might be considered the complication of what is thought of as fate. Fate, necessity, and death would take a circuitous path via a dream-wandering. What is inevitable, what cannot be avoided and/or is beyond our control is somehow manipulated – if only ever so slightly – by the indirect path of an indirect thought. Although I will come back to this (im)possibility of producing what is deemed beyond our control, it is enough to mark at this point that the narrator’s gesture both acknowledges and denies what is deemed necessary or inevitable: death. As the child reaches four and a half kilos, the narrator, ‘terrorized’ by the ‘word of the scales’, finds she must hand him over to her mother ‘[i]n order to set between us a space for thought [*la pensée*].’<sup>26</sup> As if in an attempt to defy his inevitable death, the narrator seems to need the space to dream-roam towards her son, to weigh/think him indirectly without the direct prophesying of the scales. In turn, the narrator hands the job of weighing *directly* to her mother; the final word will now remain with her: ‘I gave him to my mother to weigh, without consciously knowing that I was giving my mother the whole child including the final act, exit, and epilogue.’<sup>27</sup>

The narrator’s handing over of the final act is just one instance of how *Le jour où je n’étais pas là* considers the relation between destiny, fate, death and end. As the narrator tries to discover what happened to her son after she had unknowingly handed over his final act – that is, the circumstances surrounding his death – the contradictions between how her mother recounts this time, along with the testimony of her brother, suggest the possibility that the end might never be reached. Moreover, in *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, ‘the book’ also has a certain stake in this outcome; ‘the book’ is itself

<sup>25</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, p.26; *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, p.46-7.

<sup>26</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, p.26; *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, p.47.

<sup>27</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, p.25; *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, p.47.

searching for the facts, weighing things up, and eager to decide things.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the text suggests that ‘the book’ has an unimaginable power, it is a figure of unimaginable authority: ‘the authority of a book is unimaginable: It is a judge [*On ne peut pas imaginer l’autorité d’un livre: c’est un juge*].’<sup>29</sup> The power of ‘the book’ is unthinkable, its capacity to decide knows no limits, and it drives the narrator on in her search for answers. Yet *Le jour où je n’étais pas là* must also exceed ‘the book’, it must exceed the jurisdiction of ‘the book’ at every step. If it is impossible to imagine the book’s authority, that book must also have the capacity to remain open even after it has been closed, hence any resolution, any *imaginable* decision, is at the same time the promise of one yet to be imagined. An unimaginable authority exceeds itself at every point at which ‘the book’ seems to assert its authority; at every point that it attempts to weigh up the event and decide (to close the book on the event), ‘the book’s’ *unimaginable* power demands that it also remain open to the possibility of another explanation, another decision, another reading.

*Le jour où je n’étais pas là* is a writing which both forms the book and survives ‘the book’; this writing has the capacity – the power or might – to both comprise and exceed ‘the book’. Such an essentially double movement would mean that *Le jour où je n’étais pas là* stages the possibility of decision as that which is always-already exceeded by what remains unimaginable. Yet, as it is *written* on the horizon of the unimaginable, the text’s impossibility – its ‘unimaginable’ authority – would be the very possibility of imagination and decision. *Le jour où je n’étais pas là* is at once both the impossibility and possibility of ‘the book’s’ authority; it is the possibility of decision as the imagining of the unimaginable, or the possibility of the impossible. Moreover, this double structure is the condition for thinking the event without being able to reduce it to any fixed categories or concepts of knowledge. It is an engagement with the event (its tracing or marking), which, through that engagement, ensures that the event remains to be thought ‘as such’. Cixous’s text, therefore, might be thought of as the eventness of the event, or the coming of what remains to come; it is both the ‘happening’ of the event – its record, archive or trace – and a mark of its radical excess (an excess which cannot be reduced to a ‘happening’). In the sense that the event is an otherness which cannot be reduced to the text, the text’s addressing of the event is the very act which means the

<sup>28</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, p.99; *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, p.188.

<sup>29</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, p.99; *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, p.188.

event will ‘survive’ it. The text’s experience of the event, then, is not one of the event ‘as such’, rather, it writes the very ‘eventness’ of the event, a writing which sustains an irreducible distance from the event as that which is always ‘to come’.

We might think this (im)possible tracing of the event as the narrator does, through the verbs *penser* [to think] and *peser* [to weigh], verbs which, in sharing *ponderāre* [to ponder] as their root, are haunted by each other. Hence the indirect dream-wandering of *penser* is also the weighing up of *peser*, and the juridical scales of *peser* recalls a giving oneself over to the fate of *penser*. We might say that ‘the book’ weighs, that ‘the book’ wants answers from the mother in order to decide on events surrounding the child, whilst *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, as a text, lives on; it survives the decision upon the event as the indirect dream-wandering of a thinking given over to fate. It is important to remember that the border between closing and opening, decision and fate, or ‘the book’ and its excess, remains precarious at every moment; this excess demonstrates the logic of the supplement which resides in all textual dimensions, a logic which suggests the trace cannot be reduced to itself, but presupposes an other which is both essential to it *and* more than it can account for. *Le jour où je n’étais pas là* is rendered precarious by ‘the book’s’ desire to decide, a desire conditioned by the unimaginable surplus which always-already exceeds it. It is a text that both describes and performs this impossible manoeuvre. Moreover, it is important to stress that the notion of an excess which *lives* on or *survives* suggests that Cixous’s text is the very stuff of life as living on. The capacity to decide once and for all between writing and living is eradicated by this text; rather than life-writing, we might think of this text as writing which lives on. That the text is the very return of the ‘fault’, that it marks or suffers this return as the (im)possibility of deciding upon it once and for all, indicates that the *text* is the place where memory, experience, and the promise of the future are irreducibly intertwined.

The writing of the book, the irreducible being-in-writing of the book means that it cannot be fully closed or fully open to the event it will nevertheless experience. For the narrator this results in her impossible relation with the ‘*faute de langue*’, where what is at once both the liability of language and the lack of language means that her child is (im)possibly ‘*sauf en moi*’: ‘did I know I kept him in me out of me, from then on in the out of me.’ This (im)possible encryption/inscription of the child can also be read in relation to his destiny. The narrator unwittingly gives her ‘whole’ child over to her

mother: ‘I gave him [*Je le remis*] to my mother to weigh [*à peser*], without consciously knowing [*sans savoir sciemment*] that I was giving my mother [*que je remettais*] the whole child including the final act, exit, and epilogue.’<sup>30</sup> As *remettre* can also mean ‘to postpone’, the narrator’s handing back of the child to her mother ‘to weigh’ both hands back and postpones the conclusion to his story. In handing back the child, she also unwittingly hands back the ‘whole child’ [*tout l’enfant*]; unwittingly, the whole child is given back to the mother, whose responsibility it is to weigh up, to decide, to conclude. The final word is given back to the mother; and in this handing back there is a handing over of control. But this is also the postponing of decision, of an end or conclusion; the giving back of fate *and* the postponing of fate. The relinquishing of what might once have been wished by the narrator is also the evasion of that surrender. As it is after this handing over that the child will die, this double manoeuvre is the surrender to, and the postponement of, that event, the surrender to and postponement of what has been decreed as necessity: fate, *Anankē*, or death.

In relinquishing the child to the mother in this (un)conscious gesture, the narrator both allows *and* postpones what is predestined. There is an oscillation of fate and volition here. Such a gesture is both a knowing and unwitting handing back of the child to the mother (the child is *knowingly* given over to ‘weigh up’, but *unwittingly* handed over in its entirety), as well as the postponement of this handing back. Fate/death/necessity, therefore, is a gift which is both knowingly *and* unwittingly relinquished to the (m)other, as well as the postponement of that handing back. Moreover, this double manoeuvre results in the fact that the mother *receives* what she can never be sure she has (as there is no sure way of accounting for – or weighing up – what may just be fate). The fate of the fault is given (un)consciously (back) to the other who can never be sure they can determine it – as that handing over has also been postponed. Destiny, the will of the gods, necessity, *Anankē*, death, fate, is what is made to/let happen, and deferred.

If this is thought in terms of the absolute authority of ‘the book’, fate is a gift which is (un)consciously and (im)possibly given, and (un)consciously and (im)possibly received. Such an incalculable writing can be read in the gesture of the narrator as she

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<sup>30</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, p.25; *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, p.47.

gives back to the other the absolute authority it can never have. The narrator gives over the authority to decide as well as delaying that handing back. An act of giving which always exceeds the jurisdiction or accountability of the ‘the book’, the unimaginable authority of ‘the book’ is to never know what it might have, to never be able to imagine its unimaginable power. The unimaginable authority of ‘the book’ receives that authority as the gift of writing; it is its own unimaginable authority. But as that authority is unimaginable, it cannot manifest or wield such power – it is powerless in relation to its unimaginable power. ‘The book’, therefore, is incapable of being reduced to its unimaginable authority, of being read ‘as such’. The book which is written, which weighs up or decides, is also *and at once* the deferral of what cannot be written, weighed up, or decided upon.

### 3.2 Arrivance/happening

With this section I want to work on a particular thread in Derrida’s *H.C. pour la vie, c’est à dire...*, in which he reads how Cixous’s work encounters what arrives/occurs/happens to/in/as writing; that is, how her writing figures its relation to what he will refer to as both the ‘experience’ and ‘experiment’ of writing. Derrida refers to this encounter as ‘the event of what comes [*l’événement de ce qui vient*], the *arrivance* of the *arrivant*.’<sup>31</sup> He states that Cixous, ‘the great magician of the letter, knows how to allow the letter to be made to arrive [*s’entend à laisser faire arriver la lettre*] – or what arrives in general’.<sup>32</sup> I want to follow Derrida’s reading of Cixous’s unique power to make/let the event happen in/to writing. This will involve a detour through Freud’s work on the ‘omnipotence of thoughts’ in *Totem and Taboo*, as it is with this text that Derrida reads Cixous’s all-powerful literature as both the most intimate of experiences and the most critical of studies. In turn, this will allow me to suggest that *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, a meditation on death and loss, is a study traumatized by the event to which it is devoted.

When Derrida refers to ‘what arrives in general’, we might translate this as ‘the event that comes to writing’, or ‘the event that is writing’. With the apparently contradictory ‘*laisser faire arriver*’, then, literally a ‘letting making arrive’, Derrida suggests that

<sup>31</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, trans. Laurent Milesi and Stefan Herbrechter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p.65; *H. C. Pour la vie, c’est à dire...* (Paris : Éditions Galilée, 2002), p.60.

<sup>32</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, p.65; *H. C. Pour la vie, c’est à dire...*, p.60.

Cixous's writing has the capacity to eradicate any opposition between 'making' and 'letting' the event arrive. The seemingly paradoxical '*laisser faire arriver*' is an important notion to think in relation to *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, because in this text the narrator suggests a distance between occurrence and happening, where the happening of the event (as distinguished from its 'actual' occurrence) resonates with Derrida's 'event of what comes', or the '*arrivance* of the *arrivant*':

"Deceased in Algiers" perhaps but not dead at all not yet, no. It takes time. Things don't happen on the days they occur [*Les choses n'arrivent pas aux jours où elles se passent*], neither events, nor the people. My son didn't happen to me when he first arrived [*Mon fils ne m'arrivait pas lorsqu'il est advenu*] neither he to me nor I to him, he happened to me but later, already later. The day I wasn't there.<sup>33</sup>

What arrives – or happens – is not what occurs. What arrives – 'already later' – is the coming of what is yet to come. For the narrator, the coming of the event is what happens 'already later'; this is the happening of the occurrence. Following Derrida, I will refer to this coming of what is yet to arrive as the '*arrivance*' of the *arrivant*. Moreover, what does happen happens 'to me [...] The day I wasn't there'; what can be thought of as the *arrivance* happens to the narrator on the day she is not present. The *arrivance*, therefore, happens as an essential disjuncting of time in which an 'I' is always somewhere else. What happens, 'already' happens to a 'me' or an 'I' which is not present at the moment of the happening. What happens always-already happens at a distance and at a delay, a distance and delay which rents happening from occurrence, *arrivance* from *arrivant*. What happens cannot be reduced to what occurs; *arrivance* cannot be reduced to the *arrivant*. We might say that *arrivance* addresses, but can never deliver or determine, the *arrivant*, a suggestion which echoes the messianicity without messianism with which Derrida is increasingly concerned in his later texts.<sup>34</sup>

For Derrida, Cixous's writing makes/lets this *arrivance* happen, it says 'come' to what remains 'to come', a making/letting come via a unique 'might' which cannot be reduced to either activity or passivity:

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<sup>33</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn't There*, p.85; *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, p.160.

<sup>34</sup> I discuss the notion of 'messianicity without messianism' in Chapter Two of this thesis.



If I manage to make you hear what the mighty power of this ‘might’ [*la puissance de ce « puisse »*] is, then you will see the difference between *make come* [*faire venir*] and *let come* [*laisser venir*] vanish at infinite speed. Between what one glibly calls activity and passivity, provocation and expectation, work and passion, power and receiving, giving, taking, and receiving. And this miracle would come about in the writing of her own language, whose coming, event, and *arrivance* would lie precisely in this effectiveness, in this *coup*, which abolishes the difference between *making come* and *letting come*. The grace, the address, would lie in making while letting, in making come while letting come, in seeing come without seeing come.<sup>35</sup>

In ‘seeing come without seeing come’, Derrida suggests that Cixous makes/lets what is wholly unexpected arrive. On the one hand, Cixous sees what cannot be predicted or allowed for, or what is *unforeseeable*, arrive. On the other hand, in *not* seeing what she sees come, what arrives is also yet to come. Cixous sees that not everything can be accounted for, and that what happens might also happen otherwise and again as the very condition of the future. We might say that what happens in/to her writing cannot happen any other way, though it still *might* happen otherwise. What is destined or fated to happen, may still be otherwise; destiny, what comes to pass, might also be volition, what is willed or made otherwise. Derrida appears, then, to be suggesting that the power of Cixous’s work resides in a writing which addresses the event in such a way that the unbridgeable gap between fate and volition – between what is let come and what is made come – is made precarious. Moreover, the (im)possible border between fate and volition means that what may be the very *experience* of the event may also be the possibility of it being thought otherwise.

When Derrida suggests that this ‘miracle would come about in the writing of her own language [*ce miracle adviendrait dans l’écriture de sa langue*]’, he is referring to at least two things: on the one hand, that Cixous’s writing is the ‘coming, event, and *arrivance*’ of her most intimate and idiomatic language, on the other, that this absolute intimacy is also the language of her most intimate other:

Naming thus the writing of her language, I ask myself whether I am not already summoning, before her father, her mother, whose presence radiates over all of us here – and not her mother tongue, which was French, but her mother’s language [*la langue de sa mère*], which she knows like no one else,

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<sup>35</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, p.65; *H. C. Pour la vie, c’est à dire...*, p.60.

and in which, as you well know, the difference between *making come* and *letting come* remains at times indistinguishable: *kommen lassen* means at once *letting come* and *making come*, letting arrive and ordering to come.<sup>36</sup>

The ‘writing of her language’ is therefore her most personal and singular intimacy, as well as what she inherited from her most singular and intimate (m)other. Neither the French of her ‘mother tongue’ nor the German language of her mother (both of which she ‘knows like no one else’), Cixous’s ‘writing of her language’ is a singularly double *coup* of self and other, of absolute idiom and cultural inheritance, of most familiar and absolutely other; an *(un)heimlich* writing which Derrida demonstrates in the indistinguishable difference between making and letting come in the German phrase ‘*kommen lassen*’. Cixous’s writing of her ‘mother’s language’ refers to an irreducible otherness to Cixous’s writing, an originary foreignness, which haunts all writing and to which we are all foreigners, but of which Cixous’s address is the most intimate and singular making/letting come.

Of course, Cixous’s writing incorporates several other languages than French and German, but again, these inflections make it impossible to reduce ‘the writing of her language’ to a native or mother tongue. Rather, this writing is the pure idiom of an infinite inheritance, the affirmation of a double tongue – of both self and other – whose all-powerful authority is exceeded in advance by its omnipotent (m)other. Thus ‘the writing of her language’ marks an incalculable threshold between pure idiom and inherited culture, where what may be the all-powerful authority of the writer might also be the most impotent of submissions to the language of her (m)other. That this impotence can be thought on the same side as omnipotence is essential to Derrida’s reading of Cixous: ‘just as the possible is not on the other side, on the side opposed to the impossible, impotence is equally not the opposite of might or potency; it is impotence itself that makes the impossible and that becomes omnipotent [*c’est l’impuissance elle-même qui fait l’impossible et qui deviant toute-puissante*].’<sup>37</sup> Here, impotence *makes* the impossible; thus impotence is also a productive force, an inactivity which makes not what is possible – a possibility that a regular *activity* would produce – but the impossible. Hence the undecidable making/letting come of the (im)possible: the *arrivance* of what is yet to arrive. And this impossibility is that which

<sup>36</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, pp.66-7; *H. C. Pour la vie, c’est à dire...*, p.61.

<sup>37</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, p.75; *H. C. Pour la vie, c’est à dire...*, p.68.

Cixous makes/lets arrive on the same side as the possible. Such alchemy gives us a writing which is at once formed, sculpted, ornate, whilst also being the most originary, primordial, prehistorical and unrefined of utterances; a writing in which each beautifully crafted element, syntagma or sentence is always-already haunted by its barely formed other. A writing, perhaps, in which what are thought of as life and death survive on the same side; a writing which survives (as) the other, where ‘surviving the other’ would mean at once both to live on after the other and to make/let the other live on.

For Derrida, to make or let come involves the ‘homonymic *address* [*adresse*] of the letter in language’<sup>38</sup>; this homonymic – and therefore untranslatable – ‘*adresse*’ (referring to a notion of deftness, readiness, adroitness, finesse, as well as to the destination of what or who is addressed) addresses the other with a dexterity of gesture, a gesture which destines the other to the letter (destining the *arrivance* of the *arrivant*). Derrida suggests this ‘homonymic *address* [...] forms a powerful tautology [*une puissance tautologie*], an effective magic, a tautology that makes or lets happen/arrive what happens/arrives [*qui fait ou laisse arriver ce qui arrive*].’<sup>39</sup> This powerful tautology suggests a gesture which addresses – at infinite speed – what arrives at/as that very address:

This is everything but a formal tautology that would spend itself in reiterating the identical. This tautology engenders the event, it is even, as if the same, might itself [*la puissance*]. The mighty power to make or let come about [*La puissance de faire ou de laisser advenir*], graciously to accord [*d’accorder*] the event with letting/making come about [*laisser faire advenir*].<sup>40</sup>

The grace, skill, dexterity of the *adresse* destines the *arrivance* of ‘what comes about’. This is a mighty and irrational tautology which grants [*d’accorder*] the happening of what remains radically unforeseen. As an ‘effective magic’ which ‘engenders the event’, Cixous’s writing is a mighty and magical life-force, a writing which gives birth to what remains to come, which makes/lets come as the *arrivance* of the *arrivant*. Derrida will trace such a ‘might’ in Freud’s *Totem and Taboo*, in which a quasi-

<sup>38</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, p.67; *H. C. Pour la vie, c’est à dire...*, p.61.

<sup>39</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, p.67; *H. C. Pour la vie, c’est à dire...*, p.61.

<sup>40</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, p.67; *H. C. Pour la vie, c’est à dire...*, pp.61-2.

originary life-force will be the magical dimension all religion, science and theory must presuppose.

### 3.3 Belebtheit; *art, study, arrivance*

As it is critical to a thinking of *arrivance*, of how Cixous makes/lets the *arrivant* arrive, it is necessary to follow Derrida's reading of this 'infinitely active and infinitely passive' might.<sup>41</sup> Though a great deal of Derrida's *H. C. pour la vie, c'est à dire...* discusses the notion of a mighty power to Cixous's work, I'm going to concentrate on an instance where it is discussed in relation to Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, because it is here that Derrida goes via Freud to touch on the relationship between the power to engender the event – to make/let the event 'happen' – and our complex and paradoxical relations to death. Returning to Derrida's reading of Freud will show how the latter associates a relation to death with the birth of theory, a theory of death which will acknowledge it whilst also appearing to deny it. This double operation demonstrates a contradictory relation to death, in that death is both produced (theorized) and – as the unthinkable opposition to life – deferred. Derrida will read how this apparent contradiction is made/let happen on the same side of life, and what is more, how Freud indicates this in his reading of the various anthropological studies concerning magic, animism, and the omnipotence of thoughts. Concentrating on Derrida's reading of *Totem and Taboo* will take us back to *Le jour où je n'étais pas là* and allow me to read the relation between death, *arrivance* and the possibility of thinking Cixous's text as both the experience and the study of what must remain wholly other.

Whilst reading *Totem and Taboo*, Derrida catches himself on a half-buried 'snag' ['*arête*'], a half-formed, half-buried moment in Freud's work on animism and the 'omnipotence of thoughts'. Indeed Derrida will stumble across three such snags in Freud's text. The first snag concerns the point at which Freud discusses the exception of art in the evolutionary stages of human civilization. For Freud, art has slipped out of the progression which sees an animistic 'omnipotence of thoughts' develop into a religious phase which then – with a resignation to death's inevitability – assumes a scientific phase. In contrast to this development, Freud states that, '[o]nly in art does it still happen that a man who is consumed by desires performs something resembling the

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<sup>41</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, p.67; *H. C. Pour la vie, c'est à dire...*, p.62.

accomplishment of those desires and that what he does in play produces emotional effects – thanks to artistic illusion – just as though it were something real.’<sup>42</sup> Freud suggests, then, that it is only in art that the animistic residue of an ‘omnipotence of thoughts’ persists as the narcissistic desires of the artist-magician. Derrida asks why Freud fails to explain the fact that art has remained, and why he seems to hesitate in his reduction of this survival to the remnants of an infantile narcissism:

There are at least two signs which testify to this failure: *on the one hand*, the inability to account for the residual persistence of what would only be a remnant and a survival in the evolutionism; *on the other hand*, an utterly insufficient and inconsistent, traditional concept of art, which would be at once an “illusion” (it is Freud’s word: an “illusion” that produces effects of the affect [*Affektwirkungen*] “as if it were something real” [*“als wäre es etwas Reales”*]), and, as an illusion, purely and simply a representational and reproductive mimicry.<sup>43</sup>

For Derrida, then, this first ‘snag’ concerns the relation between Freud’s notion of art as a residual ‘omnipotence of thoughts’, and the mimicry or illusion of ‘effects of the affect’. As my argument concerns Freud’s apparent opposition between a resignation to death as the beginning of theory and research (the scientific phase of civilization), and an ‘art’ which insists upon the residual persistence of an ‘omnipotence of thoughts’, it is important to spend some time with Derrida’s reading here. Following him, I want to argue that Cixous’s work marks the collapse of this distinction, and suggests a point at which a literary creation – what Freud might reductively read as the ‘illusion’ of art – is also the most analytic and scientific study of what is made/let arrive; a point at which the borders between science, theory, religion, magic and art collapse into a (im)possible writing where each of these terms haunt, and are haunted by, the other. I want to think of this ‘collapse’ as an essentially precarious ‘study’, where the most vivid, intimate, and perhaps traumatic *experience* of what is made/let arrive is also its most scientific and critical analysis. Such an incalculable line between science and omnipotent magic is perhaps what was most uncanny for Freud, and why he leaves art alone, or at least tries to confine the notion of ‘art’ to the residual element of an equally reductive conception of desire and narcissism as an animistic – and infantile – omnipotence of thoughts.

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<sup>42</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, p.90; *Totem und Tabu*, p.111.

<sup>43</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, p.111; *H. C. Pour la vie, c’est à dire...*, p.97.

Moving on to the second of the three snags, Derrida suggests that:

Whereas he has just reduced the phantasm of the omnipotence of thoughts to narcissism, to infantile megalomania, to animism and its technique, magic (*Die Technik des Animismus, die Magie*, he says), Freud thinks it necessary to specify that the presuppositions (*Voraussetzungen*) of magic are more originary and more ancient (*ursprünglicher und älter*) than the doctrine of spirits (the theory of ghosts: *Geisterlehre*), which forms the kernel of animism. There would therefore be a pre-animism.<sup>44</sup>

For Freud, the axiom which most lucidly describes the principle of magic is the association of ideas, the mistaking of an ‘ideal connection for a real one’. Of course, the capacity to suggest such an axiom relies upon a clear opposition between ideational and real content. What Derrida refers to as the ‘presuppositions of magic’ are what Freud terms its ‘imitative’ and ‘contagious’ systems: acts of magic which depend upon a similarity to the result desired (Freud gives several examples, such as ‘the fertility of the earth [being] magically promoted by a dramatic representation of human intercourse’<sup>45</sup>), and those which demand contiguity, ‘or at least imagined contiguity – the recollection of it’<sup>46</sup> (examples of this might include the idea that by ‘incorporating parts of a person’s body through the act of eating, one at the same time acquires the qualities possessed by him’<sup>47</sup>). Of course, what Freud is reading here will return at various points in his psychoanalytic science; indeed, the metaphoric, metonymic and homonymic ‘principles of processes of association’ that imitative and contagious magic employ appear in the structure of the unconscious as revealed by dreams – a ‘magic’ of the unconscious which Freud will attempt to theorize.<sup>48</sup> These ‘principles of processes of association’ are what Freud umbrellas under the term ‘contact’, though when he states that ‘use of the same word for the two kinds of relation [...] no doubt accounted for by some *identity* in the psychical processes concerned which we have not yet grasped’<sup>49</sup>, we get a hint of how difficult it will be to rid even theoretical language from its own ‘contact’ magic.

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<sup>44</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, p.112; *H. C. Pour la vie, c’est à dire...*, p.98.

<sup>45</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, p.80; *Totem und Tabu*, p.99.

<sup>46</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, p.83; *Totem und Tabu*, p.102.

<sup>47</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, p.82; *Totem und Tabu*, p.101.

<sup>48</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, p.83; *Totem und Tabu*, p.102.

<sup>49</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, p.85; *Totem und Tabu*, p.105 (my emphasis).

Following R. R. Marret's essay 'Pre-animistic Religion', Freud names these pre-animistic 'principles of association' as an instance of 'animatism', which he describes as a general theory of living – the 'doctrine of the universality of life' [*Lehre von der allgemeinen Belebtheit*].<sup>50</sup> Derrida is interested in this term '*Belebtheit*' – in the sense of a 'being-alive, of livingness [*vivance*], of universal being-for-life' – and suggests that this 'reviviscence of life would be the element, the only one, a universal element, since it has no limits or no other side.'<sup>51</sup> For Derrida, *Belebtheit* would be such a complete 'livingness' that there would be 'no side for nonlife'<sup>52</sup>; everything would be comprised of this 'universal element' of *Belebtheit*, and therefore both life and death would be capable of being thought on the same and only side (which is also a non-side as it has no opposite). There are echoes here of Freud's suggestion that the unconscious 'does not believe in its own death; it behaves as if it were immortal. What we call our 'unconscious' – the deepest strata of our minds, made up of instinctual impulses – knows nothing that is negative, and no negation; in it contradictories coincide.'<sup>53</sup> Indeed, this comparison with the unconscious is helpful in thinking *Belebtheit*. Though its one-sidedness might seem to align it with Freud's notion of the unconscious – and indeed there does seem to be a series in Freud which runs: primitive man/infantile narcissism/omnipotence of thoughts/unconscious, with each stage relating to his evolutionist notion of progression – *Belebtheit* cannot be reduced to any part of this series. Rather, each presupposes an originary *Belebtheit* of which even the latter stages of evolutionary progression – scientific theory for example – could not imagine itself free. Indeed, Derrida reads Cixous's texts as *experiments* in this life-force, texts which let/make this most primeval of forces arrive in the midst of the most refined of theoretic or scientific discourses. Cixous's texts call, therefore, for the most radical re-thinking of what notions such as 'primitive', 'infantile', 'narcissism', 'omnipotence' and the 'unconscious' might mean.

What Freud refers to as '*Belebtheit*' is derived from Marrett's search for evidence of a pre-animism, evidence of what Marrett describes as a 'fundamental Religious

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<sup>50</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, p.91; *Totem und Tabu*, p.112.

<sup>51</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, p.112-13; *H. C. Pour la vie, c'est à dire...*, p.98.

<sup>52</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, p.113; *H. C. Pour la vie, c'est à dire...*, p.98.

<sup>53</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Our Attitude Towards Death' [1915], *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol.XIV (London: Vintage, 2001), p.296.

Feeling.’<sup>54</sup> For Marett, this ‘feeling’ is one of ‘Power’, of ‘Awe’, or the ‘Awful’, and if its ‘true nature’ is to be found, it will be found ‘not so much in the shifting variety of its ideal constructions as in that steadfast groundwork of specific emotion whereby man is able to feel the supernatural precisely at the point at which his thought breaks down.’<sup>55</sup> It is important to note that, though Marett sees an opportunity for experiencing this ‘Power of Awfulness’ at the point at which thought collapses, the notion of ‘Awfulness’ must be thought of as an emotion more complex than one deriving from fear alone:

Of all English words ‘Awe’ is, I think, the one that expresses the fundamental Religious Feeling most nearly. Awe is not the same thing as ‘pure funk’. ‘*Primus in orbe deos fecit timor*’ [‘Fear first made gods in the world’] is only true if we admit Wonder, Admiration, Interest, Respect, even Love perhaps, to be, no less than Fear, essential constituents of this elemental mood.<sup>56</sup>

A ‘Power of Awfulness’ is, for Marett, an ‘elemental mood’, an fundamental ‘awe’ which is also reverence, but a reverence which is also respect and interest. It could tentatively be suggested that such an ‘Awe’ is both the experience of this ‘religious sense’ as well as its consideration, a thinking which takes place at the point at which thought breaks down. In Freud’s reading, Marett’s pre-animistic ‘Religious Feeling’ (what Marett thinks of as a ‘loose sense’ of animism, or animatism), has become a ‘doctrine of the universality of life’ [‘*Lehre von der allgemeinen Belebtheit*’]. But ‘*Lehre*’ can also refer to a ‘lesson’ or ‘teaching’, or even a ‘profession’ or ‘apprenticeship’. There remains in Freud’s description, then, a sense of ‘Animatism’ as both an unthinkable experience of *Belebtheit* and its consideration, its experience as an experiment or quasi- or proto-theorization. In relation to animatism, the ambivalence between experience and experiment has survived from Marett’s essay, through both Freud’s reading of Marett, and Derrida’s reading of Cixous via Freud.

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<sup>54</sup> R. R. Marett, ‘Pre-Animistic Religion’, p.170.

<sup>55</sup> R. R. Marett, ‘Pre-Animistic Religion’, p.170 & p.182. Of course, there are definite echoes of Kant’s notion of the ‘Sublime’ here, echoes which continue into Derrida’s reading of Cixous. Indeed, there is much to suggest a relation to the ‘Sublime’ in Cixous’s work more generally. Whilst a reading of a relation to Kant would be of great interest here, I do not feel there is the space to even begin to do it justice. I can only hint, therefore, at what would be an immensely useful postscript to both this chapter and the thesis.

<sup>56</sup> R. R. Marett, ‘Pre-Animistic Religion’, p.170.



We might also note Derrida's insistence on the fact that Freud sees Marett's notion of animatism as a 'sense' of the 'Power', 'Awe' and the 'Supernatural' which has not yet resulted in a *theory* or *doctrine* of ghosts. Death has not yet been considered as the precipitating reason for a theory of ghosts. The latter would, for Marett, suggest the shift from animatism to animism, and therefore to the system of thinking which provides a theory of ghosts as the attempt to account for the death of a loved one. Freud's 'doctrine of the universality of life [*Lehre von der allgemeinen Belebtheit*]', then, would be an experience and experiment of the supernatural, of awe and awfulness as 'Wonder, Admiration, Interest, Respect, even Love' in which the unthinkable – the point at which 'thought breaks down' – cannot be analogous to death, but the encounter with an all-powerful livingness. Marett's animatism, then, might be thought of as the study *and* experience of life, the study and experience of the awe of the awful, of a 'Power of Awfulness' which is also a 'Wonder, Admiration, Interest, Respect, even Love' for that super-natural livingness which cannot be reduced to thinking as such, but remains within the vicinity of the thinkable. If the unthinkable provokes traumatic effect and affect, to think the unthinkable in terms of an encounter with an all-powerful livingness might lead to a re-consideration of what the term 'trauma' might mean.

By relating Derrida's reading of *Belebtheit* to Cixous's homonymic power of *adresse*, it might be possible to think of Freud's 'doctrine of the universality of life [*Lehre von der allgemeinen Belebtheit*]' as a making/letting come of what could never arrive to thinking. Such an experience would be an originary and interminable apprenticeship, where what is learnt is at the same time unlearned by its experience being irreducible to thinking. Hence the 'doctrine' of a universal life-force would always-already be traumatized by the *experience* of that life-force; this 'trauma study' could only be an affirmation of what remained irreducible to it. This would resemble the *arrivance* of the *arrivant*, a making/letting come of the eventness of the event, or – following Derrida's allusion to 'reviviscence' – a quasi-originary *reviving* which does not presuppose death; at once the series *arrivance/vivance/reviviscence* or, what it might be possible to refer to as *arrivance*.

Derrida is also concerned with what Freud does not say about *Belebtheit*, for it is this (in)capacity to speak of this 'universal being-for-life' which will determine what Freud

finds to be the limits of experience as determined by anthropo-ethnological practice. Freud says nothing about *Belebtheit*, or at least:

He says there is nothing to say, or that there is very little to say about this pre-animism, almost nothing else (*wenig mehr*), at least from experience (*aus der Erfahrung*, a point forgotten by the French translation). What experience is he speaking of? It is very simple in his mind: of anthropo-ethnological experience. One has yet to encounter a people lacking any representation of spirits (*Geistervorstellung*), that is to say, a people that has not determined pre-animism or animatism as religious animism.<sup>57</sup>

As far as experience (*Erfahrung*) is concerned, there is no evidence of a people or culture which has not determined Marett's *animatism* as religious *animism*. For Derrida, Freud is suggesting that 'any people, as a people, any culture known and determined by experience, has its own *Geistervorstellung*, a theory of revenants'.<sup>58</sup> The very condition of positively or empirically identifying a culture or people presupposes, therefore, that *Belebtheit* has been rationally determined as a religious animism. By implication, this suggests that *Belebtheit* is irreducible to 'anthropological, culturalist, or ethnological experience', that the potential of what *Belebtheit* might have been is irreducible to such empirical and/or positivist sciences. Derrida describes this as

a *Belebtheit* of which we can say nothing by anthropological, culturalist, or ethnological experience, and which is not even a philosophical doctrine (as is hylozoism, which the French translation talks about), but a quasi-originary *Belebtheit* that must, if not present itself, at least announce itself to some pre-empirical or pre-positive experience.<sup>59</sup>

Freud has little to say about what cannot be reduced to the experience of empirical, positive or culturalist science and/or philosophical doctrine. Indeed, Freud wants to believe that his project of psychoanalysis will itself be a theoretical or doctrinal reduction of 'contact' magic's 'telepathic disregard for spacial distance [a disregard which] also treats past situations as though they were present [*wie gegenwärtigen behandeln*].'<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, p.113; *H. C. Pour la vie, c'est à dire...*, p.98-9.

<sup>58</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, p.113; *H. C. Pour la vie, c'est à dire...*, p.99.

<sup>59</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, pp.113-14; *H. C. Pour la vie, c'est à dire...*, p.99.

<sup>60</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, p.85; *Totem und Tabu*, p.105.

There is one further point to make here before going on to how Derrida reads this notion of *Belebtheit* in relation to Cixous, which is that what Derrida is suggesting to be Freud's intimation of a pre-animistic theory of life cannot be reduced to the megalomaniacal head of the subject. If animism's magical technique is an omnipotence of thoughts reduced to 'narcissism, to infantile megalomania', then admitting *Belebtheit* might allow for another way to experience *and* experiment with this all powerful thinking; a theory which is not reducible to the thinking subject as such, but, is instead an experiment in, and experience of, a 'might' which survives the categories, concepts and rationalities of cultural-anthropological theory, empirical science, and philosophical doctrine. In turn, this allows us to ask what might be thought of as theory, science and doctrine, if they were to acknowledge their relation to the all-powerful desires which Freud reduces to the residues of an animistic 'omnipotence of thoughts' or infantile narcissism. And as this residue is only found in the 'field of our civilization' where 'the omnipotence of thoughts [has] been retained', that is, the field of art, Freud's brief digression via *Belebtheit* might be a point at which 'the presuppositions (*Voraussetzungen*) of magic' refer to an 'art' which survives any reductively simple definition, an 'art' which cannot be aligned with an infantile or megalomaniacal narcissism as Freud suggests.

### 3.4 On narcissism

Derrida refers to the narcissism which 'blocks off love for the other' as a 'petty narcissism.'<sup>61</sup> However, though he suggests we should not get carried away by thinking we know what narcissism 'is and means', he also suggests that Freud was on the right lines when he associated narcissism with omnipotence. As an all-powerful might, '[n]arcissism has no contrary, no other side, no beyond, and love for the other, respect for the other, self-denial in favor of the other do not interrupt any narcissistic movement.'<sup>62</sup> Here, the 'omnipotence of thoughts' which Freud will confine to primitive, neurotic or infantile heads, a narcissism which demands an ego-centrism as its principal source, is exceeded by its very omnipotence. Narcissism's all-powerfulness, therefore, would be capable of generating a surplus of unimaginable power to the extent that an omnipotent love for the self would also be the most humble privileging of the other.

<sup>61</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, p.115; *H. C. Pour la vie, c'est à dire...*, p.100.

<sup>62</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, p.115; *H. C. Pour la vie, c'est à dire...*, p.100.

For Freud, ‘a human being remains to some extent narcissistic even after he has found external objects for his libido.’<sup>63</sup> Narcissism actually allows for the projection of a self-love onto the other, a stage of Freud’s theorization at which the amount of libidinal energy used to cathect the other is inversely proportional to that which cathects the ego. Before the point at which an *external* love-object is chosen, however, narcissism’s first love-object is found in the cathexis of the ego:

At this intermediate stage, the hitherto isolated sexual instincts have already come together into a single whole and have also found an object. But this object is not an external one, extraneous to the subject [...] it is his own ego, which has been constituted at about this same time.<sup>64</sup>

Narcissism is here the identification of an internal love object, an object which, in the process of that identification, becomes the ego.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, the ability to conjure the ego lets or makes the other arrive *as the very experience* of the ego. As *Belebtheit* would be the omnipotent theory of life from which an ego-centric omnipotence is wrought, we might say that one particular instance of our experience or experiment with this ‘omnipotence of thoughts’ is its rationalization and reduction into an ego-centric narcissism.

For Derrida, Freud’s brief reference to *Belebtheit* is enough to read that its pre-animistic omnipotence of thoughts is a narcissism which, though reduced to the animistic and ego-centric narcissism of Freud’s infantile/primitive/artist psyche, in fact survives that reduction at every turn: ‘*Belebtheit* is narcissistic, life lets itself be lived and outlived [*survivre*] in accordance with originary narcissism.’<sup>66</sup> As ‘originary narcissism’ *Belebtheit* survives life; it is irreducible to a lived life, but at the same time it is what lived life presupposes in its living. *Belebtheit* is a sur-living or hyper-living which outspeeds, doubles and overtakes life at every moment. Earlier, whilst reading Cixous’s *O R, les lettres de mon père*, Derrida comments that her ‘address outspeeds

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<sup>63</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, p.89; *Totem und Tabu*, p.110.

<sup>64</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, p.88-9; *Totem und Tabu*, p.109.

<sup>65</sup> Of course, Jacques Lacan will go on to theorize this process in his ‘Mirror Stage’ essay: ‘The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience’, *Écrits* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), pp.75-81.

<sup>66</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, p.115; *H. C. Pour la vie, c’est à dire...*, p.100.

the letter, well, the absolute speed is in some way gained a priori.’<sup>67</sup> Here the suggestion is of a complex doubling of speed and address, where her address (the gesture which both addresses and destines the event, writing, or the letter) is at once overtaken and overtaking. Here is another instance of what Derrida sees as her power to make/let happen, her power of *arrivance*. Cixous’s address makes or lets the letter arrive without arriving; this is the ‘*arrivance* of the *arrivant*’, which itself requires ‘contact’ magic’s ‘disregard’ for the logic of space-time:

The address outspeeds the letter, but the letter outspeeds time, it goes faster than time, if one may say so and if one can make this impossible thing happen or arrive: to outspeed time, to go faster than speed itself, to outspeed speed, thus to overtake space and time, to pass or “double” space and time, as one says about passing a vehicle in French.<sup>68</sup>

The event of writing is therefore the reception of the letter before it arrives. For Derrida, Cixous’s work is the *adresse* which generates this gain, the homonymic doubling which overtakes and is overtaken in advance, that which makes/lets arrive what remains to come.

For Derrida, it is in the work of Cixous that a ‘quasi-originary’ *Belebtheit* announces itself ‘to some pre-empirical or pre-positive experience.’<sup>69</sup> Cixous’s address makes or lets *arrive* an all powerful excess which is irreducible to an ego-centric omnipotence of thoughts. Her magic is to make/let come the quasi-originary narcissism of *Belebtheit*, the omnipotent theory of life which survives, doubles or overtakes all petty narcissisms. The experience of this writing would refer to the ‘performativity of a writing that travels and crosses the continental distances at full speed and on all possible rhythms (which “experience” or “experimentation” or even “expertise”, or *Erfahrung*, means).’<sup>70</sup> With this expertise, we are returned to the untranslatable homonym ‘*adresse*’, a word which, whilst suggesting a gesture towards the other, is also the very experience of what it addresses. Such is the expertise of Cixous’s writing, a writing which, for Derrida, performs an experimental *adresse* which goes via a quasi-originary *Belebtheit* in order to make/let happen the very experience of that livingness [*vivance*]:

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<sup>67</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, p.63; *H. C. Pour la vie, c’est à dire...*, p.58. See: Helene Cixous, *O R, les lettres de mon père* (Paris: Des femmes, 1997).

<sup>68</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, p.63; *H. C. Pour la vie, c’est à dire...*, pp.58-9.

<sup>69</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, pp.113-14; *H. C. Pour la vie, c’est à dire...*, p.99.

<sup>70</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, p.114; *H. C. Pour la vie, c’est à dire...*, p.99.

This signed experience does what it says; it puts this *Belebtheit* to work and to the test, tries it out: to see, out of a living desire and an experimental curiosity, by provoking the event, by making-letting it happen [*en le faisant-laisant arriver*], before any philosophical, scientific, or cultural thesis on being as life or on the essence of the living.<sup>71</sup>

It is at this navel of experience and experiment that the positivist and empirical sciences, as well as philosophical doctrine and theory, collide and collapse half-sunken into the lava of their pre-history. This is a point at which what is considered, studied and experimented upon is revived – *arrivivified* – through an experience which shatters that study. I want to suggest that this navel represents the nodal point at which any border between study and experience would be rendered precarious, the point where the experience of experiment and the experiment of experience makes/lets happen the eventness of the event. Following Derrida's reading of Cixous, this experiment and experience – '*Erfahrung*' in the language of her (m)other – would be the *arrivance* of the *arrivant*, the making let come of what is always yet to come. I want to argue that it is possible to read such a navel of experience and experiment as the knot of a trauma(tized) study, a study/experience which is tied to an event from which it could never be untangled, but a knot which also maintains that event at an infinite distance.

### 3.5 Acknowledging denial – an '*undecidable gesture*'

For Derrida, the third '*arête*' in Freud's text concerns a gesture which denies whilst acknowledging. This gesture is identified when Freud reads what he refers to as 'man's first theoretical achievement – the creation of spirits'.<sup>72</sup> As we shall see, what Freud reads as man's surrender of his omnipotence – the construction of a theory of spirits to account for death – is in fact a denial of that loss of power. Hence the assigning of power to an external spirit or ghost is in fact a safeguarding of that power; the thought that one might have desired or willed the death of a loved one – due to the ambivalent attitude towards that loved one (a reaction to them always remaining 'partly strangers'<sup>73</sup>) – is projected as the whim of a spirit which one can then avoid or assuage, with that spirit remaining within the control of those who encounter it. Thus, man's first

<sup>71</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, p.114; *H. C. Pour la vie, c'est à dire...*, p.99.

<sup>72</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, p.93; *Totem und Tabu*, p.114.

<sup>73</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Our Attitude Towards Death', p.298.

theory of death, indeed, man's first theorization of trauma, is also a denial or deferral of that unthinkable event. It is this paradoxical relation to death that Derrida finds most interesting, in that Freud's reading of 'man's first theoretical achievement', the acknowledgement of the necessity of death, is also the appearance of its denial; acknowledging the death of a loved one, therefore, requires a fiction which *seems* to deny it. Derrida will read this combination of theory and fiction in relation to Cixous's texts, and to their *adresse*, which makes/lets come what is thought of as fate. As experience and experiment, the text makes/lets come the events which might nevertheless seem beyond our control. However, and as I will demonstrate, whilst man's first theory of ghosts reveals a desire to deny death in its very acknowledgment, Cixous's omnipotent texts make/let the other come; thus affirming a quasi-originary narcissism – or *Belebtheit* – through which the desire to contain and control the other is exceeded by a mighty passivity which gives itself over to it.

For Freud, the surrendering of our control over death is intertwined with the prohibition against incest: 'man's first theoretical achievement – the creation of spirits – seems to have arisen from the same source as the first moral restrictions to which he was subjected – the observances of taboo.'<sup>74</sup> An omnipotent desire – as would be fulfilled by the killing of the (primal) father – results in the construction of a law against it, as well as the denial of that death (the erection of a totemic god to symbolize the father). The limits of omnipotence and desire are self-prescribed, with what appears to be a handing over of power or curbing of desire – the intervention of the law – remaining within the control of a 'fraternal' omnipotence.<sup>75</sup> With man's theory of ghosts echoing the development of an Oedipal law which circumscribes the possession of women, it is easy to see how 'man's first theoretical achievement' is in fact the denial of what it appears to acknowledge. Thus it is also easy to see why what appears to be the surrender of narcissistic desire to the supremacy of the other is in fact the reinforcement of control:

If the survivors' position in relation to the dead was really what first caused primitive man to reflect, and compelled him to hand over some of his

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<sup>74</sup> See: Sigmund Freud, 'Return of Totemism in Childhood', *Totem and Taboo*, p.144; *Totem und Tabu*, p.174.

<sup>75</sup> See: Sigmund Freud, 'Return of Totemism in Childhood', *Totem and Taboo*, p.144; *Totem und Tabu*, p.174, *passim*.

freedom of action, then these cultural products would constitute a first acknowledgment of *Ανάγκη* [Necessity], which opposes human narcissism. Primitive man would thus be submitting to the supremacy of death with the same gesture with which he seemed to be denying it.<sup>76</sup>

The acknowledgment of the inevitability of death – the necessity of *Anankē* – also sustains a power over it. This double gesture, however, results in an increasingly complex notion of narcissism: on the one hand, what seemingly opposes ‘human narcissism’ is in fact a product of it, on the other hand, what might be thought of as narcissism – the denial of anything beyond our control or power – can also result in an absolute surrender to the other. For Derrida, it is that Freud ‘allows a double, apparently contradictory or undecidable gesture’<sup>77</sup> which proves most striking here, for it is a point at which both fiction and omnipotence survive even in the apparent renunciation of power to – and subsequent theorization of – the other. The omnipotence which Freud tried to confine to the residues of an ‘infantile’ art is in fact essential to the institution of theory and the law. Moreover, the sustenance of that omnipotence demands an art of the ‘as if’, something which, paradoxically, may also allow for that excess of narcissism which gives oneself over to the other. The very possibility of the latter seems to point towards why Freud saw it necessary to try to confine omnipotence to a reductive notion of both the infant and art, and further, why theory and the law find it necessary to *act as if* they were untouched by fiction.

For Freud, the act of handing power over to spirits or ghosts ‘prepares the way for the construction of a religion’<sup>78</sup>, in that religion is the subjectification of oneself to an all-powerful god. In turn, the shift from this religious animism to a complete acceptance of the absolute and uncontrollable necessity of death would mark the move into a scientific phase, a phase in which ‘men have acknowledged their smallness and

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<sup>76</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, p.93; *Totem und Tabu*, p.114.

<sup>77</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, p.116; *H. C. Pour la vie, c'est à dire...*, p.101. The ‘undecidable’ and ‘undecidability’ are important terms for Derrida. We might be able to think of the ‘undecidable’ in terms of the inappropriable element which haunts all decision, or which decision incorporates, in order for decision to be possible at all. The ‘undecidable’, then, makes decision resemble a certain ‘madness’. As a gesture implies a carrying, address, or attitude of the body, an ‘undecidable gesture’ would be a gesture always-already haunted by what cannot be gestured towards, an inappropriable otherness which makes all gestures possible. Derrida works on the notion of the ‘undecidable’ in several texts, in particular see: Jacques Derrida, ‘Force of Law: The “Mystical Foundation of Authority”’, bilingual text, trans. Mary Quaintance in: *Cardozo Law Review*, vol.11 1990, pp.919-1047, and: ‘Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion’, trans. Samuel Weber in: *Limited INC* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), pp.111-60.

<sup>78</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, p.92; *Totem und Tabu*, p.112.



submitted resignedly to death and to the other necessities of nature.’<sup>79</sup> However, though Freud suggests it is only in art that a residue of a primitive omnipotence of thoughts has persisted, he also states that ‘some of the primitive belief in omnipotence still survives in men’s *faith* [Vertrauen] in the power of the human mind, which grapples with the laws of reality.’<sup>80</sup> Indeed, this short statement is the admission of a residue of ‘primitive’/infantile omnipotence (what Freud conceives of as the omnipotent desire to create art) in religion, and, in turn, a residue of that religious ‘*Vertrauen*’ [trust/faith] in science. Indeed, it is this return of an omnipotent power, a power which both takes in and questions the notions of art, religion and science, which interests Derrida in his reading of Cixous.

Freud’s claim that primitive man submits to the ‘supremacy of death’ [*Übermacht des Todes*] is read by Derrida as a submission to ‘*la surpuissance de la mort*.’<sup>81</sup> For Freud, death is an *overpowerful* power, an unimaginable excess of power to which no power can conceivably be equal. Any acknowledgement of this power would always be inadequate to it; one could never fully acknowledge what one cannot fully conceive of, and thus any acknowledgement of this power would also figure its denial. At the same time, any denial of death must in part be its affirmation; as one cannot fully deny what one cannot fully conceive of, a denial of death would also sustain an acknowledgement of death’s all powerful otherness, a surrender to or acceptance of death’s unimaginable excess. Derrida notes that Freud appears to pick up on the necessity of this pretense (or fiction) when he states that ‘[p]rimitive man would thus be submitting to the supremacy of death with the same gesture with which he *seemed* to be denying it’<sup>82</sup>:

Freud did not say that this gesture consists in acknowledging and denying *at the same time*, but that the acknowledgement of *Anankè*, of what is effective, takes place in the same gesture through which the first man *seems* [my emphasis (M.D.)] to deny it. He does not deny, since he acknowledges, but he seems to deny; it is *as if* he denied what he acknowledges. This same gesture comes to the same thing without doing so, and it is in the direction of this “as if” that we should have the courage to continue.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, p.88; *Totem und Tabu*, p.109.

<sup>80</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, p.88; *Totem und Tabu*, p.109 (my emphasis).

<sup>81</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, p.118; *H. C. Pour la vie, c’est à dire...*, p.102.

<sup>82</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, p.93; *Totem und Tabu*, p.114.

<sup>83</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, p.118; *H. C. Pour la vie, c’est à dire...*, pp.102-3.

For Derrida, it is on the threshold or limit of necessity, of (*Anankē*) as death, that this denial (which is also an acknowledgment), performs an ‘undecidable gesture’, a gesture which generates both its own power and an excess. Such a gesture would generate a narcissistic omnipotence of thoughts (*Allmacht der Gedanken*), which is also an absolute surrender to the superior might of its deathly excess (*Übermacht des Todes*). It is on the precarious border between omnipotence and its excess that Derrida wants to situate the work of Cixous; a work which both is and is not all-powerful; a work which generates a mighty omnipotence/narcissistic power which at the same time is the conjuring of its excess, an excess which is necessary if it is at all possible to put the other before oneself:

The mightier narcissism is, the more it loves the other. And in order to love the other as oneself more than oneself (introjection and incorporation), this surplus of might is needed, always more of it, this more than possible that is the most impossible.<sup>84</sup>

*Plus le narcissisme est puissant, plus il aime l'autre. Et pour aimer l'autre comme soi-même plus que soi-même (introjection et incorporation), il y faut ce plus de puissance, un toujours plus de puissance, ce plus que possible qui est le plus impossible.*<sup>85</sup>

Derrida’s ‘*plus de puissance*’ – as ‘surplus of might’ and ‘no more might’ – would here perform the essential undecidability of a gesture which acknowledges what it seems to deny. Cixous’s all powerful address would be the omnipotent/narcissistic power to think death which, with that same gesture, would also be the absolute surrender of power to the other. Such is a gesture which, at once, makes and lets come the *arrivance* of the *arrivant*. Derrida works on this undecidable gesture through the notions of *connaissance*, *re-connaissance* and *méconnaissance* (knowledge, re-cognition and misunderstanding), as well as the term ‘*dénégation*’, which might refer to both denial and, as *dé-négation*, a denial of denial. Here, the gesture of acknowledgment and denial is at once an acknowledgment of the necessity/*Anankē*/death which provides the source for ‘man’s first theoretical achievement’, and the very lack of that threshold; it is a gesture in which both the limit and the border are encountered and dissolved:

<sup>84</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, p.115.

<sup>85</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. Pour la vie, c’est à dire...*, p.100.

To acknowledge is to deny [*dénier*] or to renege [*renier*]. To acknowledge is not to acknowledge. Conversely, not to acknowledge, to deny, to renege, is to acknowledge, I will say *de-negate* [de-renier]. In the enigma of this acceptance of death, of this knowledge that acknowledges (*Anerkennung*) death, but of this re-cognizing knowledge [*connaissance re-connaissante*] as negation and of this negation as denial [*dénégation*], *Verleugnen*, in this acknowledgment that denies and misunderstands [*méconnait*] what it knows and re-cognizes [*re-connaît*], well, this is where the side, the other side of the life without sides, precisely takes itself away [*justement s'enlève*].<sup>86</sup>

Of course, Freud works on the duplicitous notion of denial or disavowal (*Verleugnen*) at several points in his psychoanalytic project. In 'Studies on Hysteria', Freud states that '[t]he deeper we go [into the stratification of psychical material] the more difficult it becomes for the emerging memories to be recognized, till near the nucleus we come upon memories which the patient disavows even in reproducing them.'<sup>87</sup> However, what Derrida is pointing out in his reading is that, on the one hand, the gesture which acknowledges what it also denies presupposes an element of the 'as if'; the gesture which acknowledges the limit is also its apparent denial, what affirms the absolute supremacy of death also acts *as if* it did not. On the other hand, the gesture which seems to deny death also sustains its supreme power. The element of the 'as if', then, generates the omnipotent power which also submits to an all powerful other; it both makes and lets come as the *arrivance* of the *arrivant*, the mighty power of what might come. Fiction generates what it has no control over; its genius is the generating gesture which gives birth to the eventness of an event to which it cannot be reduced, and as such, which it cannot be assigned or confirmed as its source or origin.

A further point to take from Derrida's reading is that at the moment at which the 'undecidable gesture' denies/acknowledges the limit, at the point at which that limit is self-administered, where 'creation creates the revenant and phantasmatic theory by subscribing, by subordinating itself to its own limiting prescription'<sup>88</sup>, that limit is spirited away. At the point of theory – and as we've seen, the fiction of the 'as if' – that which is deemed irreducible to thinking is the very place of thought. In other words,

<sup>86</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, p.116; *H. C. Pour la vie, c'est à dire...*, p.101.

<sup>87</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Studies on Hysteria' [1893-95], *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol.II (London: Vintage, 2001), p.289.

<sup>88</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, p.117; *H. C. Pour la vie, c'est à dire...*, p.102.

theory acts ‘as if’ it denied what it acknowledges, thus, theory thinks death (denies its otherness to thinking) with the same gesture that it defers it (acknowledges its radical otherness); theory acts ‘as if’ death were thinkable whilst acknowledging its otherness to thinking. With this gesture, however, ‘the other side of the life without sides, precisely takes itself away [*justement s’enlève*]’; thus the gesture which seems to deny what it acknowledges, which makes/lets come the *arrivance* of the *arrivant*, makes/lets that other side of life vanish, *as if* it were never there. Here, the ‘undecidable gesture’ of denial and acknowledgement not only thinks what is irreducible to thinking, it also suggests that there is nothing which is irreducible to thinking. Cixous’s ‘*faute de langue*’ returns here, language marks that which is irreducible to it, that for which there is a lack of language, language is both responsible and not responsible for this fault, both guilty and not guilty of the ‘fault’. There is no other side to the living on which survives the opposition between acknowledgement and denial, or life and death. For Derrida, Cixous’s work affirms this ‘undecidable gesture’ as that which both marks and submits itself to the radical otherness which it makes/lets come.

Before returning to Cixous’s work, we should note the questions and possibilities which this thinking of/at the limit has for what I am referring to as a ‘trauma study’. For Derrida, Cixous’s work is a gesture of ‘experimental experience’; in its complex encounter with a limit which Freud described as the source of ‘man’s first theoretical achievement’ – that is, death – Cixous’s work requires a much more nuanced consideration of both experience and theory. As an experiment, her work would be both experience and theory, or, the point at which theory is the very experience of what it purported to stand at a critical distance from. Derrida engages with this complexity when he discusses the varying implications of her ‘gesture’ and her ‘experience’, a gesture which is at once an infatuation for the other (*gestio*), the very possibility of the other (*gesto*), and a movement of the other (*gestari*):

[...] her *gesture* and her *experience*, a double and coordinated gesture, capable of doing things with words, of carrying with a gestation that is also a gestation and a birth: *gestio* means to be carried away with desire, to burn with desire, and *gesto* means to carry, and *gestari* to be carried, to travel; and her experilous, experimental experience, the dangerous journey (*Gefahr*, *Fahren*), the expert crossing of her experience (*Erfahrung*), her experimentation, her test of originary *Belebtheit*, are gestures and an experience, operations and an opus, a putting to work, which hold together

and are held by the tight dovetailing of experimental technique (always a bit ironic: one must do it just to see, to try it out) and of magic, knowledge, know-how, and enchantment, at the point where, for the oppositionless narcissism of *Belebtheit*, there is no longer any contradiction between the experience of magic and the experimentation of the most objective techno-science.<sup>89</sup>

Cixous's 'undecidable gesture', as experience and experiment, is the making/letting come of a quasi-originary *Belebtheit*, the all-powerful production of what exceeds and outspeeds that production in advance. Such an address, such a gesture, one which says 'come' to the absolutely unpredictable other, would subject (or subjunct) itself in advance; such a command would always-already be the most powerless of advances, the most unexpected of experiences.

I want to take Derrida's suggestion that in Cixous's work 'there is no longer any contradiction between the experience of magic and the experimentation of the most objective techno-science' in order to ask how Cixous takes up what was, for Freud, the first trauma theory (the theory of revenants and spirits as an acknowledgment and denial of the death of a loved one). By reading Cixous via Freud's 'undecidable gesture' of acknowledgement and denial, Derrida's text might help us to think her work as an instance of this 'undecidable gesture' which, rather than assume some theoretical, doctrinal or juridical control over the event, gives itself over to the all-powerful fiction which is at the heart of its thinking. We might say that Cixous's work returns to this 'undecidable gesture' at an almost primordial point where art, religion, science and philosophy are only half-formed; a point, then, at which a theory or doctrine of trauma might also be an experience of living. What might constitute art, religion, science or philosophy, therefore, is yet to be decided, as is what determines the concepts of fiction and reality. Moreover, as the 'undecidable gesture' makes/lets the event come, this *arrivance* – or *arrivivance* – may engender the most narcissistic of fictions, the most incisive of theories, as well as the most unexpected of others. I want to suggest that what is at once the rawest of experiences and the most objective of theories, is also an experiment in the *might* which exceeds it. As the word 'experiment' can also mean to feel or *suffer* something, such an experiment would feel or suffer – as experience – the

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<sup>89</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, p.119; *H. C. Pour la vie, c'est à dire...*, pp.103-4.

possibility, potentiality or *might* of the impossible.<sup>90</sup> I want to suggest that, on/at the threshold between experience and theory, Cixous's work produces an 'experimental experience', a trauma study which is also the most magical of arts.

### 3.6 To be almost – the story of 'o'

The final two sections of this chapter will return to *Le jour où je n'étais pas là* in order to read the birth and the death of the narrator's son, or more precisely, how the son's birth and death occur, but are yet to arrive. This will demonstrate how Cixous's text might be read to function in terms of *arrivance*, how it makes/lets the 'event of what happens' come to/as writing. *Arrivance* is the coming of the *arrivant*, not the *arrivant* itself. Yet Derrida's suggestion that Cixous's texts are encounters with this *arrivance* does seem to mark her work as an experience of, and experiment with, the *arrivant* which is distinct from most other literary works. We might say that although the *arrivant* must remain to come, Cixous's texts are most welcoming to this absolute unexpectedness.

*Le jour où je n'étais pas là* might be thought of as the story of what *almost* arrives, what is almost finished, almost present, almost born. The narrator asks if such a state exists, if it is possible that one might be 'born without being born yet? [*Est-ce que cela existe d'être né sans être encore né ?*].'<sup>91</sup> She asks if one can be 'almost': '*D'être presque*'<sup>92</sup>; for this is how she experiences her son: as the one who has arrived 'incorrect'. Her son is the event which has arrived without arriving 'as such', occurred without happening, or happened but still to come:

What has happened is that the child in the cradle has not arrived yet, at least he hasn't been informed of his arrival. He believes he is drifting, he hasn't yet landed. "What has come to pass." How to describe it, how to describe, this to come which has already come and which is still on the way, which hasn't finished, which isn't finished, which doesn't commence, which is all mixed up. Because if *this* happened, it has happened but if it is still coming it's that *this* hasn't happened [*Parce que si ce est arrivé, c'est arrivé mais si ça vient c'est que ce n'est pas arrivé*], which is what renders the child still intangible though in the cradle. Morphologically it is a present, but curved

<sup>90</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed online: 12/03/10.

<sup>91</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn't There*, p.30; *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, p.55.

<sup>92</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn't There*, p.30; *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, p.55.

[*fléchi*], melting, receding [*fuyant*]. Missing. The child has arrived, incorrect.<sup>93</sup>

Neither present nor absent the child *is* ‘almost’. Both still to come and fleeing [*fuyant*], yet to be formed but ‘melting’, the child arrives on a double trajectory: thrown from what is ‘still to come’, it also recedes towards that incalculable horizon; both approaching from and receding into a wholly other future. This passage in the text asks ‘how to describe’ whilst describing what it is not yet possible to describe. Writing makes/lets come what remains ‘to come’, whilst asking how to make/let come. Here we have the ‘*faute de langue*’, both the impossibility of description and the very *arrivance* of the ‘fault’ – the making/letting come of the ‘incorrect’ child.

Cixous writes the ‘*faute de langue*’; what is at once the narrator’s fault – the guilt over abandoning her child as well as the fact that this incorrect child remains hers – is also that of language (the inadequacy of language). The faults of language and life coincide with a writing which makes/lets them arrive without arriving. This is the experimental gesture which combines experience and theory with the magic of a ‘fiction’ it is impossible to oppose to reality. The passage above is the experiment of what is still to come; it is the eventness of the event, the *arrivance* of the *arrivant*. The text generates a narcissistic omnipotence which is so powerful that this all-powerful literature – a literature which can say anything – is also subjected to the wholly otherness of a secret which is yet to be told. What has happened here, what is referred to as ‘*this*’ [‘*ce*’], also refers to what is still to come [‘*ça*’]; the liaison between ‘*ce*’ and ‘*est*’ has not yet been made – it is not yet joined to the verb to be, it is not yet ‘*c’est*’ but an undecidable *ce/ça*. What has happened might also be still to come; therefore, *ce/ça* remains both coupled to, and detached from, the order of being, it is not yet finished, incorrect, there remains the trace of a fault. Furthermore, this sentence does not refer to the child as ‘*il*’ [he]; the child remains a ‘*this*’ rather than the ‘*he*’ which might be expected. Here the child is referred to indexically and ambiguously rather than determined by the sexually determined personal pronoun.

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<sup>93</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn't There*, pp.29-30; *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, p.54 (Translation modified).

What has arrived is a ‘ce’ which remains in the process of coming, an undecidable *ce/ça* which is almost, an almost-being, an almost-knowledge. *Ce/ça* is what may still be coming with the ‘morphological’ presence of the missing, unfinished and receding child, yet it is also what is *recalled* to writing; thus what remains *to be* is made to arrive as this undecidable *ce/ça*. *Ce/ça* marks a memory of the future here, the very *arrivance* which reserves a space for what has happened and is always to come. In turn, *ce/ça* marks the point at which memory and being are made to arrive without arriving; both are *written*, both arrive/happen [*arrivé*], but they remain to come, to be written, to arrive, to happen. The text’s undecidable *ce/ça* also marks a return to Derrida’s reading of ‘*Belebtheit*’, as that which ‘is not a position on the essence of being as life’: ‘The life of this *Belebtheit* is not, it is not an “entity” [*étant*]; it is a mighty power of the “might” without another side [*c’est une puissance du « puisse » sans autre côté*], without a contrary.’<sup>94</sup> We could say that the *ce/ça* of *Le jour où je n’étais pas* is of the order of *Belebtheit*, that it marks a differential of power, a differential of might in which what *might* have arrived *might* also be to come. There are always, therefore, at least two degrees of might, two speeds in which one always outruns the other: what might ‘be’ is overtaken or gained on in advance by what might also be to come. Such is the ‘*puissance du « puisse »*’, a great subjunctive *might* in which what *might* be all powerful *might* also submit to a power which outspeeds and overpowers it. As this ‘might’ could be the (*im*)*puissance* of a ‘quasi-originary’ *Belebtheit*, what is called life could not be reduced to being, or to an ontology; rather, both life and death would be traces of this mighty differential, a differential in the order of which what we think of as presence and knowledge might be better thought of in the vicinity of almost, nearly, hardly [*presque*].

When the narrator decides that such an undecidable *ce/ça* must be written more clearly – that is, when she attempts to name her half-finished child – she finds she must attempt this from his incalculable side, the ‘side of the vague [*le parti du flou*].’<sup>95</sup> The narrator assumes the ‘side of the vague’ in order to call him from it: ‘Now she takes sides, the side of the child. The side of the vague.’<sup>96</sup> The narrator seeks to call her child from *his* side, from the wave – *vague* – which oscillates towards and away from any stable

<sup>94</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, p.114; *H. C. Pour la vie, c’est à dire...*, pp.99-100.

<sup>95</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, p.30; *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, p.55.

<sup>96</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, p.30; *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, p.55.



shore. The narrator does not assume she can call him from the side of the vague to a side on which all is clear, rather, she puts her faith on his side, and if he is to exist at all – even ‘almost’ – he must be called on *his* side. For the narrator, this side is the side of life; the ‘side of the vague’ is the side on which she will call her child from the waters in which he is both receding and approaching, waters in which he is floating, but barely [*presque*]. For her, this ‘slippery fish’ must be caught in the ‘net of very old, strong, safe, faithful names, her secret and sacred names’; with this net the narrator will attempt to ‘pull him gently out of the water he has drawn around himself up to his chest.’<sup>97</sup> The narrator must here enter the waters of his side of the vague in order to draw him from it. Hence the text must also be on his side; the text is a naming of the child which plunges into the undecidable waters from which the child is pulled. The text enters the water as it pulls from the waters. The text is itself this waveform, oscillating both towards and away from the child. The naming of this child will allow him to gain in might, yet this gain can only occur through the differential weave – or net – of a text which must remain on the side of the vague – a vague side, ‘almost’ no side at all.

So how does the narrator name this half-sunken child? With half-sunken names. The names she will choose for her ‘unfinished’ child are names which themselves may be thought of as unfinished. Of course, these names remain ‘very old, strong, safe, faithful names, her secret and sacred names’<sup>98</sup>; these are names of great power, mighty names. Yet as secret names they will mark something that is yet to be brought to the surface; these names sketch a secret, a secret yet to be told, still to come. What these names mark is a certain *arrivance*, in that they name, and indeed engender, the absolute singularity which has occurred and yet is still to come:

First she calls him Adam; second she calls him Georges the name of her dead father who had been waiting for years to be called back among the living [*parmi les vivants*]. Third she calls him Lev for the complicated, inexplicable Prince.<sup>99</sup>

These three names recall three immense texts; the first appears to be a biblical reference to Adam, Eve’s partner. Naming him ‘Georges’ recalls the narrator’s dead father, which

<sup>97</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, p.30; *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, p.55.

<sup>98</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, p.30; *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, p.55.

<sup>99</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, p.30; *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, p.56.

in turn points to Cixous's undecidable weave of life and text as Cixous's mother is called Eve, and her father Georges. This is an obvious point at which the narrator and author of *Le jour où je n'étais pas là* become entwined, entwined in the same transferential relationships which are also netting the child. Here we find a point at which the notions of maternity and memory combine in writing, a writing in which what is recalled is given birth to *as if* for the first time. The third name, Lev, is taken from Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*, the reference being to his protagonist, Prince 'Lev' Nikolayevich Myshkin. The narrator had been reading Dostoyevsky's text 'on the eve of the day she gave birth'<sup>100</sup>; this act, then, is itself a magical or telepathic prophecy of what is about to come: the arrival of an 'inexplicable' Lev as much at the heart of Dostoyevsky's text as it is Cixous's.

Each of the names the narrator assigns the child catches the child in the text it recalls, yet the weave of them together divides and defers the moment of naming: 'It's that *now* he's called. *Now* Adam, *now* Georges, *now* Lev [*C'est que maintenant il s'appelle. Tantôt Adam, ou Georges, ou Lev*].'<sup>101</sup> Each of these names snag themselves on a secret they could never name absolutely, because this secret is also that of the other. The naming of the child recalls the dead father (Georges), the partner of Eve (Georges/Adam), as well as Dostoyevsky's enigmatic prince – all three surfacing on the side of the vague. Each name arrives but is divided by the other; a male lineage battling to inherit the secret. Yet the narrator's net is a weave of this history, a re-writing where each name stands for the other and none are reducible to themselves. This is a maternal text, history rewritten *for the first time*, a magical gesture and gestation of what comes to an essentially divided 'now', a now which is also yet to come, to be written again. Her child/text is the return of this secret history, a history which is made to/let arrive *as if* for the first time – a maternal fiction, a 'writing of her language'.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn't There*, p.30; *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, p.55.

<sup>101</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn't There*, p.30; *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, pp.56-7 (my emphasis).

<sup>102</sup> Gill Rye suggests that '*Le jour où je n'étais pas là* serves to recontextualise Cixous's 1970s work in which maternity is a metaphor for writing itself. In those texts, maternity was always more than a simple creation metaphor, taking in, in Cixous's usage, the full extent of both the extreme pleasures (*jouissance*) and the pains of maternity and of writing.' Rye also suggests that *Le jour où je n'étais pas là* takes this recontextualisation further, 'enabling us to understand how the metaphor [of maternity] also potentially includes tragic loss'. Gill Rye, "'*Maternité rendue, maternité perdue*': the return of/to the past in *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*"; *Parallax*, vol. 13, no. 3, July 2007, ed. Eric Prenowitz, pp.104-111 (p.107). I would suggest that Cixous's work complicates loss in two interrelated ways: it *renders* what is wholly incalculable, and, as such, marks the notion of loss as the promise of a secret which remains to come (also see §3.7 of the current chapter).

It is clear that the three half-sunken, sacred and secret names allow the narrator to recount a history which is irreducibly both literary and familial. Life and text are woven together in this naming to form a net with which she almost pulls the ‘slippery fish’ from the unfathomable waters. But we remain on the ‘side of the vague’ here, though netted in a vast, strong literary weave the child still ‘makes no sense.’<sup>103</sup> Here the child remains as ‘inexplicable’ as Dostoyevsky’s prince: ‘He is smooth, abstract. As if he hadn’t risen. Pale, as if he hadn’t finished baking [*Il est lisse, abstrait. Comme s’il n’avait pas levé. Pâle comme s’il n’avait pas foncé*].’<sup>104</sup> Though landed, the child remains unfinished; he/it is abstract, a ‘fault’ without flaw, unmarked and yet inexplicable, the very essence of the secret. The child has been swept up in a literary net – a net into which *Le jour où je n’étais pas là* is also woven – but that net has also augmented a secret; though arriving to the letter, the inexplicable child remains to be delivered or finished – his smooth, abstract, unlined face remains to be written. The book, the child, and the event intertwine here. As this drifting child allows the narrator to recall drifting names, and the drifting names allow her to recall her drifting child, each marks the *arrivance* of the other; each marks the *arrivance* of the irreducibly secret event as the possibility that the arrivant *might* arrive (or the *might* of the arrivant). As the possibility of the ‘im-possible’ (Derrida’s hyphenated and ‘non-negative’ use of the term<sup>105</sup>), this is an experience, or experiment, of/in the subjunctive *might* which, with the power of a mighty address, generates an excess of might which rubs itself against the text as the promise of what remains to come.

We can read this promise of the text with the figure of ‘o’. This ‘slippery fish’ of a child, who glints on the surface of the text, mouths the figure ‘o’ as if gasping to be returned to the depths from which he’s almost been pulled:

What a surprise this child, this child which doesn’t seem to be hers, who differs, who doesn’t look like, this fish gasping as if it needed to go back in the water, one expects a surprise but instead of the expected surprise it’s an entirely different one, **o** mysterious power of the new arrival who evades the millions of expectations of millenniums of images [*ô mystérieuse puissance*

<sup>103</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, p.31; *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, p.56.

<sup>104</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, p.31; *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, pp.56-7.

<sup>105</sup> See: Jacques Derrida, ‘Psychoanalysis Searches the States of Its Soul’, pp.238-280 (p.276). I also refer the reader to the Introduction of this thesis.

*du nouveau venu qui déjoue des millions d'attentes des millénaires d'images*], o eternally astonishing natural phenomenon forever never seen before.<sup>106</sup>

The 'o' can be seen as the mouth of the gasping fish-child; moreover, it remains a figure of the text – 'o mysterious power', 'o eternally astonishing natural phenomenon'. The 'o' marks what remains to be pulled from the waters, what remains to be pulled into the safety of secret names. Alternatively, it pleads to be returned to the depths which lie beyond this aquarium-clinic, the depths where the narrator also stands with her face pressed against the window, her 'mouth *round* with curiosity.'<sup>107</sup>

With a passage of the text which is infinitely complex, the narrator is describing what did and did not happen at the time. What is described here is what the woman who has just given birth 'doesn't think'. Indeed, the passage which describes this event is *itself* punctuated by the gasping 'o', an 'o' which is yet to be thought. Moreover, the narrator finds herself outside the aquarium-clinic, looking in with her mouth forming the same 'o' that the child gasps as he hesitates on the threshold between naming and evasion. The narrator is here a similar half-rendered figure; neither the actual author, nor the author's fictional invention, this figure is only half-caught up in these inadequate literary terms, and the 'o' overflows from the child to the narrator as she gasps and gapes between motherhood and the waters of indeterminacy. As the narrator – 'tipped out of' her aquarium-clinic – looks in through the window onto herself the day she was not 'there', mouthing the 'o' between mother and other, she is placed *en abyme* by a scene staged in a temporality which also gasps 'o', an 'o' which trembles between an 'ill-attached' and 'ill-detached' present:

She, that's me that day who just got tipped out of myself [*vient de basculer hors de moi*] and no way to climb back into the house of me from which I have fallen. Time pivots and falls. There is no more past. The future not yet. What remains is a hesitation of ill-attached ill-detached [*mal-attaché mal-détaché*] present hanging over the two beds the big one and the little. Outside the fish swim round the aquarium.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn't There*, pp.28-29; *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, p.52 (Translation modified; my emphasis).

<sup>107</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn't There*, p.28; *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, p.51 (my emphasis).

<sup>108</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn't There*, p.28; *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, pp.51-2.

Ill-attached and ill-detached can be thought of as what is inadequately kept and badly abandoned. A dis-jointed present structures time: there is no past, or there is nothing in the past, and the future is still to come [*‘Le futur pas encore’*]. What is seemingly forgotten, or considered to be remembered, is badly done so; forgetting is half-remembered and memory is half-forgotten, nothing is completely forgotten and nothing completely remembered. Rather, the disjointed present which hesitates over the two beds – the mother’s and the child’s – also gasps between memory and oblivion. Here, the text marks time in the same oscillating frequency of ‘o’; a frequency between arrival and the unfathomable depths of the secret.

As the narrator tries to read – and therefore also write – this moment that she ‘doesn’t think’, the ‘o’ which gasps for its determination is the same figure which secretes oblivion. Such is writing’s augmentation of the secret; as Cixous has stated elsewhere: ‘the secret is not a diamond, it is in a state of continual secretion, it constantly augments itself: never can an author reach its heights.’<sup>109</sup> For Cixous, ‘[a]s soon as one writes to exhume one secretes secrets’.<sup>110</sup> For her, as soon as one attempts to uncover the secret, or the truth of the event, that secret is also buried. The text both secretes and secrets the secret away, the secret both hides from and shows itself in/to/as writing. Thus the act of calling what gasps ‘o’ – the act of naming or producing it – is also that which secrets it away; thus the act which attempts to think the event is always-already compromised by the secreting away of that event. As fast as one can think the event it is always-already overtaken and outsped by its secreting away. In this sense, a writing to exhume is always-already at the threshold of what is ill-attached and ill-detached; an essentially ambiguous present with no past and a future which is always yet to come, a future whose im-possibility is the very condition of the secret.

But to secrete is also to extract life, it is to separate life from life, for example, to secrete milk from blood. If writing secretes the secret then it gives life to the secret. Therefore, as writing also keeps the secret hidden, it secretes an excess of life which resists being shown. What exhumes also buries, writing gives life to what resists coming to light; writing is all powerful to the extent that it generates the very thing

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<sup>109</sup> Hélène Cixous & Jacques Derrida, ‘From the Word to Life: A Dialogue between Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous’, trans. Ashley Thompson, *New Literary History*, 2005, no.37, pp.1-13 (p.13).

<sup>110</sup> Hélène Cixous & Jacques Derrida, ‘From the Word to Life’, p.12.

which is stronger than it, the very thing which resists it. Yet it is because these two radically heterogeneous powers function as an omnipotence which can overpower itself in advance, that it is possible to make/let arrive what can never arrive 'as such'. Freud's *Belebtheit* again returns here, as a *vivance* whose all-powerful and originary *survival* of the opposition between life and death is the very condition of submitting to the other, and therefore of making/letting the other come via a mighty subjunctive power. Such a quasi-originary *survival* of life and death – a suffering as the bearing or marking of the other – would be the only possibility for thinking what is im-possible to think, for making/letting come what remains to come.

Bearing this in mind, the passage from *Le jour où je n'étais pas là* which marks the *arrivance* of the child is both the coming to terms with what was (not) experienced at the time, and the experience of *not being able* to come to terms with it. Power and impotence collide here; the text is punctuated – punctured by 'o' – in its movement towards the im-possible, it traces what is irreducible to thinking, it experiences and experiments on the threshold between memory and forgetting, keeping and abandonment, possible and impossible. The passage marks a point at which the 'I' of 'the day I was not there' is also 'there' in its 'ill-attached ill-detached present'; the text is where the 'I', as the subject of experience, is both there and not there. Moreover, the text itself is also there and not there, the text is both the very experience of the event – the interruption of the 'o' is just one instance of this – as well as remaining at a distance from it, a distance of delay and difference as generated by the differential inscription of the trace. Memory, experience and oblivion irreducibly intertwine as what is experienced is also remembered, but what is remembered is also forgotten, what is remembered is punctured and punctuated by the return of its essentially secret experience. Such a spectrum of undecidability takes place as the differential field of *(im)puissance*, a mighty omnipotence which also generates an absolute submission to the other. This non-negative experience of the im-possible suffuses the text on all levels: the condition of memory is that which it is im-possible to recollect, the condition of writing is a secret which it is im-possible to exhume once and for all, and the condition of study is that which it is im-possible to devote oneself to in advance.

At the point at which the narrator finds herself watching herself tipped out of herself, at a point after a woman who is and is not the narrator has just given birth to a child which

hasn't yet arrived, the 'narrator' states that the child 'evades her absolutely, she doesn't remember him at all. She doesn't conceive of him. She has come to a stop. Where? At the stop [*Elle ne le pense pas. Elle est à l'arrêt. Où ? À l'arrêt*].'<sup>111</sup> The woman who has given birth finds herself stopped at the point where she cannot conceive of [*penser*] the child, where – recalling that *penser* is 'a verb that roams [*rôde*], a dreamy sort of action'<sup>112</sup> – she cannot think/roam/dream towards her child. In a sense this 'arrêt' is a weighing up, in that the word can also mean a 'decision' or 'judgement'. To be 'à l'arrêt' would see the woman stopped at the point of decision, as opposed to wandering in thought. She cannot think the child as she must decide upon him, but this point of decision is devoid of both thought and memory; she can neither remember nor think the child at the point of decision, suggesting a radical heterogeneity between these two notions. At the point of decision both memory and thought fail, and therefore, what must be decided upon, the child, evades the decision 'absolutely'.

At this point of decision, however, a point where what is to be decided upon evades memory and thought, there is a dance of undecidability, a space where both woman and child are being-almost. Described here is a point where an earthly text – a terrain of commonality – is being slowly shared out, slowly negotiated, shared or sketched out between two cats, two beasts who are *not yet mother and son*:

I see the woman do silent battle with the child, this is in one of those worlds where on the threshold a spell is cast over whoever strays or ventures in, where the laws of metamorphosis reign, where one never knows who pursues whom for dozens of light-years, where one cannot not hunt as one breathes. I see the woman and child beasts, held alive in the burning frost of a face-to-face the way two cats caught in the last two meters of a kingdom stand still for hours guarding the last two meters with the patient tenacity of gods measuring out between them their last chance at immortality.

The way two heroes advance towards the final instant slowly sharing [*en partageant lentement*] the taste of each inch of white sand, which is what they have in common, this morsel of earthly fabric [*tissu terrestre*] which kisses their feet, they do not run they revel together in what unites them in a loving hostility [*ils jouissent tous les deux de ce qui les rassemble dans une hostilité aimante*], this space which is not going to last, which they are going to cut, unequally, this solemn diminution.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>111</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn't There*, p.29; *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, p.52.

<sup>112</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn't There*, p.25; *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, p.46 (translation modified).

<sup>113</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn't There*, p.29; *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, pp.52-53

With the *arrêt*, then, at the stopping and the decision, we also find a world where magic and metamorphosis reign. At the very point of decision we are returned to what is undecidable.

This is a world where what evades memory and thought is also the *jouissance* of a face-to-face which unites woman and child beasts in a ‘loving hostility’. A space, then, where ‘they stare at one another, distractedly’<sup>114</sup>, where the most intense fixation is also a looking away, a world in which negation and opposition are read on the same side of a kingdom whose last two meters marks the difference between two omnipotent gods. On the one hand this space suggests that the most intense, devoted, critical or accurate inquiry is also a misrecognition; this is an ‘ill-attached ill-detached present’ in which what is seen face to face is also veiled. On the other hand, however, there remains a myopic clarity of vision, a space in which what is almost, barely or hardly sketched is perhaps most accurately rendered. These two gods are locked, paradoxically, in a battle between two omnipotent forces; each an all-powerful force which happens to share the same common ground with the omnipotence of the other. What is shared, then, is also in the process of division, where a common terrain will be woven into a text which will separate them forever. Moreover, these ‘white sands’, in which the ‘laws of metamorphosis reign’, are themselves generated by the text. In other words, *this battle did not exist before the text*, the commonality of its earthly fabric is always-already transported metonymically – and at a speed faster than light – to the scene of writing, a scene which keeps forever secret the magic world it has just revealed. The text which marks the return of this secret world is the only possibility of thinking and experiencing the promise of its common fabric, the only possibility of welcoming or making/letting this im-possible world arrive at our shores.

The child which is caught up in the net of names is brought to a single shore; he arrives (*il est à-rivé*, he is shored). But this is an undecidable shore where he is cast as one of the literary characters of the narrator-author’s very real life. The child arrives on a shore *already* half-sunken with the half-living half-literary, ill-attached ill-detached names of Adam, Georges and Lev. The child doesn’t arrive once and for all; this landing is instead an *arrivance*; or, with the borrowing of his half-life from the other, an

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<sup>114</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, p.29; *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, p.53



*arrivance*. But this *arri(vi)vance* will remain gasping for survival; no matter how much oxygen he can swallow, the tiny hole at the very heart of Georges will see to it.

### 3.7 *Eve – her might...*

Though never arriving completely, the child dies in the care of the narrator's mother. A meditation on the child's birth, *Le jour où je n'étais pas là* is also the attempt to think the events surrounding his death. Whilst doubting the right to ask her mother what happened on the day he died, the narrator is drawn towards rendering the secret of that day in the same manner that she attempts to net her son in the weave of life and literature.

There are at least three generations of mothers in the text: the narrator, her mother (surrogate-mother to the narrator's child), and the narrator's grandmother, Omi. As the narrator tentatively broaches the subject of the child's death with her mother, the mother describes the possibility (or not) of her considering euthanasia:

I was afraid you'd ask me questions, says my mother, asking me when he died or of what how and that I would get all muddled up in your questions which always tack another question on to the question, I was afraid to let the cat out of the bag, I was afraid you'd blame me for it one day, something I'd done wrong meaning to do right, kill, die, or on the contrary that you wouldn't ask any questions which would have kept me hanging indefinitely.– Besides I wouldn't have done it because a child that's alive one can't just do away with it, says my mother, therefore I didn't have the possibility, only the idea might have crossed my mind, added my mother, as if years had gone by while she was talking and brought everything she might have thought sliding down like sand.<sup>115</sup>

Freud suggests that it was in considering the death of a loved one that 'man's first theoretical achievement/performance [*Die erste theoretische Leistung des Menschen*]' took shape. An ambivalent attitude towards the death of a loved one gave rise to a gesture which accepted the necessity of death whilst seeming to deny it. This gesture was demonstrated in a theory or doctrine of spirits. What is necessary or inevitable (a 'natural' death), is seemingly denied with the same gesture that acknowledges it. In turn, one's belief in omnipotence – that the death of a loved one might have been willed – is *kept* in the renunciation of responsibility for that death to the spirits. An excess of

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<sup>115</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn't There*, p.41; *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, pp.73-4.

omnipotence is made to/let arrive in a submission to the necessity of death (what Freud calls death's 'supremacy' [*Übermacht*], its surplus, its 'more than' power). The acknowledgement of death's supremacy, then, is also the narcissism which denies it. I want to suggest that this *making/letting* come of what is wholly unknowable and to which one is in complete submission – what Derrida sees in Cixous's (*im*)*puissance* to make/let come the *arrivance* of the *arrivant* – is the very (*im*)*puissance* that the narrator's mother experiences with the death of her loved ones. With an 'undecidable gesture', the mother makes/lets come the supremacy of a death which is wholly beyond her control. As *Le jour où je n'étais pas là* is our only evidence for this *arrivance*, it addresses the precarious border between 'originary' and 'recollected' experience, between the event 'as such' and its arrival in/to writing. The text, therefore, is both an experience and the most devoted study (or theory) of an excess which remains resistant to thinking; the text is a sketch of the secret to which it cannot be reduced. We might say that, like the mother, the text will let the cat out of the bag with the same gesture that it keeps that bag closed.

The mother states that she was afraid of being blamed for the child's death, but also that there would be no opportunity to account for it: 'I was afraid you'd blame me for it one day, something I'd done wrong meaning to do right, kill, die, or on the contrary that you wouldn't ask any questions which would have kept me hanging indefinitely.'<sup>116</sup> There remains, however, a question over what actually happened; with the next sentence the mother begins to complicate the account of what she was thinking at the time: 'Besides I wouldn't have done it because a child that's alive one can't just do away with it, says my mother, therefore I didn't have the possibility, only the idea might have crossed my mind'.<sup>117</sup> As the narrator suggests, it is as if years have passed with these two sentences, years in which what should have seemed firm decisions, slide into the shifting sands of doubt and uncertainty. Rather than a forgetting of what really happened, what is rendered is the complexity of the event, a sketch which allows itself more strokes of the pen, seeking to describe accurately, but in fact going via the inviolable secret of the event. *Le jour où je n'étais pas là* is a sketch book, a collection of sketches which approach an event that requires – as Cixous describes the slow

<sup>116</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn't There*, p.41; *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, pp.73-4.

<sup>117</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn't There*, p.41; *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, pp.73-4.

process of rendering what will always outrun her – ‘two years and two hundred pages in order to recount it’.<sup>118</sup> The text secretes the secret of ‘the day the I wasn’t there’ – it is the study and the experience of the mother’s undecidable gesture, the experiment of what she keeps as she reveals, and of how she makes/lets happen what is beyond her control.

It becomes clear that the mother’s reactions to the child’s deteriorating condition may have been informed by what she did or did not do for her dying mother. Omi’s faltering health resulted in an impossible situation the mother could hardly bear: ‘I go up to the bed and hear Omi moaning, it’s a crime, to hear the moans of one’s own mother and not hear them is also another crime.’<sup>119</sup> As if in response to both her own and her daughter’s suffering, Omi asks of her the impossible: ‘Give me something and don’t tell me about it.’<sup>120</sup> With this phrase the daughter is asked to give something to her mother of which she will know nothing. The daughter asks how to think this when the only person she can confide in is the person asking for this unspeakable gift, when the only one to whom she can say everything is the one who asks her not to tell:

Give. But what? Who to ask? Ask to give what? You have no one to confide in. You haven’t confidence in anyone. There’s no one. I never have anyone to talk to. And that’s why I didn’t answer Omi. She would have been spared two falls and two operations which were totally useless to arrive at the same point. The only person I had confidence in.<sup>121</sup>

Omi asks her daughter to give her what she can’t acknowledge as being given; this would be a gift of death which, in not giving it, is also the gift of life. From this point on, both life and death are undecidably wrapped in a gift it is impossible to acknowledge. Even if she didn’t give her anything, and had let death come ‘naturally’, this instance of fate would also be the gift of not giving an earlier death. What is thought of as fate, then, is made/let come by the radical (*im*)*puissance* of not acting at the request of the other (which is also, of course, an acting on that request). The power to engender what is wholly beyond one’s control is of an order of narcissism so mighty that it gives itself over to the other. Here, the mother’s act is of this order of narcissism,

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<sup>118</sup> Hélène Cixous, ‘Without End no State of Drawingness no, rather: The Executioner’s Taking off’, p.102.

<sup>119</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, p.43; *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, p.78.

<sup>120</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, p.43; *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, p.78.

<sup>121</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, p.43; *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, p.78.

it is an instance of the quasi-originary *Belebtheit* which makes/let death come *on the side of life*; what is irreducible to life is made/let arrive on the side of life – death arrives here as a gift of life. The narrator suggests that Omi may have thought that her daughter had given her the death she wanted without telling her, but for her mother ‘this hypothesis is to be ruled out, Omi never thought that my mother had given her *something* because she wanted not to know.’<sup>122</sup> Here the mother gives without giving; Omi asks for the impossible because the possible ‘*something*’ would be knowable, Omi would know that her daughter had given her ‘something’ and she precisely asked to not be told, that she didn’t want to know. Death would be ‘something’ that it would be possible for her daughter to give; rather, she asks for a gift more powerful than that, a gift in the order of the im-possible, a gift which exceeds the opposition between life and death. In a sense, the mother understands this demand for the im-possible as, according to her, ‘that is what [Omi] wanted because she wanted to stop living but without this being dying [*parce qu’elle voulait arrêter de vivre mais sans que ce fût mourir*].’<sup>123</sup>

The narrator has her own reading of this situation: ‘Omi might have thought that my mother would never tell her and she could have received without acknowledging what my mother hadn’t given her, so that even without having given anything, my mother had nonetheless given Omi something.’<sup>124</sup> The narrator believes that Omi knew that she was asking for the im-possible, and that this would make it possible for her daughter to act in that same order of the im-possible and give her a death without doing anything; to give her an end to life which remained on the side of life. For the mother, however, this hypothesis is purely the narrator’s invention: ‘According to her Omi knew that my mother wasn’t going to do it otherwise she would have ordered her to do it, but she had only asked for her to keep it secret.’<sup>125</sup> Yet these two readings are not in opposition, indeed, they make/let the eventness of the event come to writing. The mother’s (non)action could only be thought via the difference between these two hypotheses, between possibility and impossibility, an *im-possible* ‘might’. With a might that exceeds the impossible, which functions in the order of a non-negative im-possible, the event arrives without arriving to the text of *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*; an event which returns as the secret of a text which – at once – will experience, study and secrete it

<sup>122</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, p.43; *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, pp.78-9.

<sup>123</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, p.44; *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, p.78.

<sup>124</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, p.44; *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, p.79.

<sup>125</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, p.44; *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, p.79.

away. Cixous's text makes/lets come the mother's secret, which is in turn an experience of, and experiment in, Omi's undecidable gesture – a gesture which said 'give but don't tell'. Hence the secret is an effect of Omi's im-possible phrase, a phrase which made/let come the gift of death as a surplus of life, a death on the side of an originary *Belebtheit*. From the mother to the daughter to the text, *Le jour où je n'étais pas là* inherits the secret at the point where it is experienced as the most singular and originary event. This recalls what Derrida referred to as the 'writing of her language', where '*sa langue*', her 'language' and her 'tongue', is neither her 'mother tongue' (French) nor her mother's language (German), but the most singular and originary gesture which affirms both in a writing that makes/lets come what is at once intimately familiar and wholly other. In *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, it is this 'writing of her language' which marks the *arrivance* of what remains secret and to come.

There are two versions of what happened on the day of the child's death; one from the narrator's brother (a doctor who may have been at the clinic where the child was being cared for), and one from the mother (a midwife at the same clinic). The brother's story is that, on the day of his death, the child grew very ill, and rather than let him administer a shot of digitalis which might prolong his life, the mother stops him and lets the child die. At least two deaths haunt the mother's actions on that day: that of her husband, named Georges also, and that of Omi. The mother has already intimated that she thought her husband might have lived longer had he fallen ill during a different stage of medical history: 'all the same it's a shame at the time of Georges yourfather he had to die whereas these days they keep the old ladies going who are not all there anymore.'<sup>126</sup> Therefore, the decision as to whether to keep Georges the son alive or not is informed by both the possibility of prolonging her husband's life, and a regret over the belief that she did not give Omi the 'something' that she asked for: an earlier death. As with the death of Omi, however, the mother gives more than it is possible to acknowledge, and the strength of her gesture is that it demonstrates an all-powerful might which makes/lets come what it submits to in advance. The mother's gesture – to stop the brother from saving the child – is of a might which denies destiny in the very gesture which makes/lets it come, an im-possible might which overtakes thinking, acknowledgement and perception in advance:

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<sup>126</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn't There*, p.41; *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, p.73 (translation modified).

–She’s a strong woman says my brother. It is summer. We are barefoot.

For me the strongest is that she didn’t say it. Never. Forty years she managed to conceal her strength. Quite the contrary in my brother’s opinion.

–She didn’t say tell you because she didn’t even realize it says my brother, you think? I say, realize what? I say, it wouldn’t have surprised me says he, the extent to which she doesn’t realize has always astonished me, she didn’t realize that it was a strong action, for me yes for her no, for her it was not even a strong action says he, that’s precisely her strength say I, and afterward she doesn’t even remember and yet he was astonished, for my mother never stopped surpassing our thoughts [*ne cessait pas de dépasser notre pensée*], without even knowing it and for that very reason, because she doesn’t realize it, it wasn’t an action, it was her way of following life’s thread, right to the very end.<sup>127</sup>

The mother’s might is that she acts without acting, that her strength exceeds or overtakes – ‘*dépasser*’ – the thoughts of her son and daughter, both of whom cannot catch up to her, a chase which is at the very heart of the text as they try to name what astonishes them about her radically incomprehensible strength: ‘[...] she didn’t even realize it says my brother, you think? I say, realize what? I say, it wouldn’t have surprised me says he [...]’. The mother’s might is found in following ‘life’s thread [*le fil de la vie*]’ to the very end; her strength lies on the side of life, even if that leads to death, and even if it means keeping that strength secret to the point of not realizing it. Whilst the brother is on the side of medical knowledge, a knowledge which would almost involuntarily demand that he race against the child’s death, the mother is on the side of an (*im*)*puissance* which makes/lets death arrive on the side of life: ‘[...] mother stopped me saying you have to let him die to my astonishment she stopped me saying let him die saying let Georges go she stopped me in my race with death, it was a very close fight and mother stopped me choosing her side she told me let him go [...]’.<sup>128</sup> The mother acknowledges destiny – *Anankē*, death – whilst denying it; her (non)action, her *im-puissance*, makes what is beyond her control arrive. Such is her impossible gift, a gift she gives without giving; and it is here that the narrator realizes that this undecidable gesture once again responds without responding to Omi’s request for the im-possible:

<sup>127</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, pp.98-9; *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, p.186.

<sup>128</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn’t There*, p.97; *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, p.183.

And it comes back to me Omi's phrase when she still had her wits about her: "Give me something and don't tell me," she said, my mother would say. And I didn't give her and I didn't tell her and I blame myself for that. But this phrase, isn't it also my phrase? Didn't I say that but not in so many words? I didn't even tell her give me and hearing what I did not say she gave me and didn't tell.<sup>129</sup>

The mother hears what is not said, she hears a request that remains unspoken, and therefore she gives without giving, and without realizing that her 'strength' is her secret gift, her power to make/let death and destiny arrive without arriving. The mother is silent around this strength because it isn't something that could ever be acknowledged as being possible. Nothing has been consciously given with this gesture that makes/lets come the child's destiny; indeed, it is the very im-possibility of the gift – that it is impossible to be reduced to an economy of accountability and/or exchange – which makes this impossible gesture 'possible'.<sup>130</sup> The mother cannot account for what she makes/lets arrive; she makes/lets happen what might also be fate or destiny. She knows she had 'to take the death that Destiny handed her.'<sup>131</sup> The mother knows how to submit to a destiny with an all-powerful address that also *makes* it arrive. As an act of *arrivance*, death is made to/let arrive on the side of life. This is not death 'as such', death is both here (on the side of life) and yet to come: essentially divided as that which occurs, but also as what remains to be thought.

But the mother has her own version of the event; she claims that the brother wasn't present on the day of the child's death. The mother describes how she had left the child in the staff's care, and upon returning, found that 'he had that high fever I found it strange just the day I go out he catches his death and of course if he has a raging fever like that the heart can't keep up [...] right away I understood that Destiny had knocked. I go out. Destiny enters.'<sup>132</sup> This version of the event suggests that both the brother and the mother are absent at the point the child 'catches his death [*attrape la mort*].' However, the mother makes space for destiny to arrive; as she leaves, 'Destiny' – the capitalization of the word naming a very real character in this story – enters. Destiny comes in with the exit of the mother; the mother makes space for the other as a gift

<sup>129</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn't There*, p.99; *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, p.187.

<sup>130</sup> As Derrida has shown, the notion of the gift must remain radically secret, and the experience of giving and receiving the very possibility of the im-possible. See: Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), *passim*.

<sup>131</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn't There*, p.100; *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, p.190.

<sup>132</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Day I Wasn't There*, p.99; *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, p.188.

which is given without giving, as the *arrivance* of the *arrivant*. The mother makes way for Destiny as it enters the stage, and with this gesture Destiny is made/let arrive as the gift which is irreducible to any 'I' which gives or receives it; indeed, this gift is given without giving on the 'day I wasn't there'.



## CONCLUSION

It is possible that this project stemmed from a reading of a play by H el ene Cixous. That play was *L'Histoire terrible mais inachev ee de Norodom Sihanouk roi du Cambodge*.<sup>1</sup> It might even have originated from a passion for the title, indeed for the word 'histoire', with its capacity to signify both 'history' and 'story'. Cixous's text concerns a terrible but unfinished *histoire* of Cambodia as figured through one of its most enigmatic kings. It takes in the turbulent twenty years leading up to 1975, a period which saw the fall of Phnom Penn and the ascendancy of the Khmer Rouge, a period which is most immediately associated with genocide. Reading this text led me to ask how it might be possible to write on such unthinkable events, and in turn to consider what a study of trauma might resemble if it could touch on these immense histories, stories, events, languages, others – how it might be possible to make all this come to writing. In a sense, the title of Cixous's play tells us all we need to know, in that what are at once terrible events are also 'unfinished', still to come, still to be thought. It is, therefore (and what I didn't realize at the time), a question of 'might', of a writing which addresses what might remain beyond writing, or a writing which suffers and survives – which is, indeed, wounded by – this 'might' as the force and potential of what remains to come. What is remarkable, then, is that the very title of Cixous's play demonstrates this; it marks a *histoire* as that which, however terrible and traumatic, is a story which remains, and which remains to be written (on).

The question of how to write (on) trauma opened onto questions concerning the academic phenomenon of 'trauma studies', of its relation to writing, to literature, to the North American humanities' amalgamation of deconstruction, psychoanalysis and literary theory from which it emerged, and to its position in the 'university'. I wanted to ask if it might be possible to reconsider trauma studies as something which could survive the label of a discipline, or the ties of an affiliation, and instead be read in terms of something which experimented with what appeared to be a particular relation to writing. This would not be a search to identify trauma in writing – of which there are innumerable remarkable encounters and studies – but to ask if it might be possible to

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<sup>1</sup> H el ene Cixous, *L'Histoire terrible mais inachev ee de Norodom Sihanouk roi du Cambodge* (Paris: Th e tre du Soleil, 1985); *The Terrible but Unfinished Story of Norodom Sihanouk, King of Cambodia*, trans. Juliet Flower MacCannell, Judith Pike, and Lollie Groth (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994).

think of trauma studies in terms of what marks, wounds, or inscribes what remains irreducible to its study ‘as such’. I suggested, then, the distinction between Trauma Studies, as a particular field or discipline, and a trauma study, as that which would always-already disrupt or make precarious the limits which might circumscribe it in terms of a field or discipline. This notion of a ‘trauma study’, then, might be in each instance a singular experiment in study, each time an affirmation of reading and writing *otherwise* on and through trauma, each time an experiment in studying and experiencing trauma.

An attempt to reconsider Trauma Studies might also prompt the question of what it might resemble in the UK, or in Cambodia, if each time – with each trauma study – this *quasi*-discipline was written *as if* for the first time. What could be structured or programmed by the university – and particularly the North American university – might instead be expressed otherwise, each time the writing – or *histoire* – of another universe, or the universe of the other, one perhaps terrible and unfinished, but each time a writing in the hope of doing justice to the other, a writing marked or wounded by the ‘might’ of the event, marked or wounded by what exceeds the text at every step. I hoped that this thesis might be able to consider a trauma study – and in turn the *im*-possible possibility, or quasi-discipline, of Trauma Studies – as that which affirmed such a might. Such a might would, paradoxically, always outrun or exceed that which it marked or which inscribed it. Such writing, then, might always be too late, the after-effect of what has always-already happened, the mark or wound of what has been and gone too quickly to be perceived, experienced or studied. And yet as that which touches on what exceeds and outspeeds the text, such writing might also touch on what is still to arrive, a potential which is yet to come to writing. A writing which appears to move too slowly, then, is also moving too fast; if what outruns or exceeds the text might also be on the verge of arriving, perhaps in being too late we are also a little too early. Too fast and too slow, too early and too late, this writing, these histories and stories, which recount what remains to come, would function as memories of the future. I hoped that it is as the possibility of this *im*-possibility that the notion of a *trauma study* might live on.

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*Chapter One* of this thesis suggested that Chris Marker’s film *La Jetée* is ‘essentially’ marked by what returns from the future. Following Jacques Derrida’s reading of cinema as an art/science/séance of ghosts, an art/science/séance which engages with a certain

‘something’ of psychoanalysis, I argued that *La Jetée* can be read as a text which welcomes the ghost, which allows what has never been present ‘as such’ to return. With its premise of a man both experiencing and witnessing his own death, I suggested that the film *experiences* the traumatic event as that which inscribes *and* exceeds it, that the traumatic event marks or wounds the text as a memory of the future. In this chapter I suggested that the impossibility of reducing the traumatic event to a logic of the present is the condition of its thinking, and therefore that *La Jetée* suffers, survives, or *lives on* by bearing the mark or might of what remains to come. I argued that, although this paradoxical structure is the possibility of all film – indeed of any attempt to mark or inscribe the event – *La Jetée* attempts to *affirm* such an impossible logic, a logic which makes the borders between fiction and reality, life and text, precarious from the beginning.

Derrida’s notion of a theoretical ‘jetty’, a structure which extended into and incorporated the other in order to ‘speak’ before it, also provided an uncannily prescient reference for this chapter. Such a structure would, by coming *before* what nevertheless marks it, speak of or on the other as that which remained to come. By suggesting that this structure could be read in terms of both the plot *and* the composition of *La Jetée*, Chapter One suggested that, in order to ‘be itself’, the film was marked by the might of what exceeded it. As Marker’s text shares many thematic concerns with the work of Alfred Hitchcock, particularly his film *Vertigo*, Tom Cohen’s reading of Hitchcock’s films allowed me to demonstrate this incorporation of the other in *La Jetée*. With a reading of the scenes in *La Jetée* and *Vertigo* which feature the cross-section of a Sequoia tree, I suggested that the repetition of this image pointed to a ‘spectrographic’ textual dimension in which each film extended into the other, rendering precarious any border between the two. I argued that, though apparent in both films, this ‘jetty-effect’ permeated both the plot and – with its incorporation of still images – the structure of Marker’s film.

Focussing on the Sequoia scenes also allowed me to read the relation between trauma and sexual difference which is apparent in both films. Both *Vertigo* and *La Jetée* figure death through the image of woman. Although this is a common trait of phallogocentric narrative, I suggested that, as a film which can be read to welcome the ghost, a film which is ‘essentially’ marked by the other, *La Jetée* might provide an opportunity to re-

consider the relation between trauma and sexual difference, a suggestion I demonstrated by reading how *La Jetée* redeploys the notion of castration as an essential marking, interruption or cut as the very condition of the future.

If, as Derrida suggest, all events are traumatic,<sup>2</sup> if all events are the markers of what cannot wholly be reduced to thought, and thus remain to come, Chapter One demonstrates how a text might live on with this force and potential of the future. Rather than taking the conventional idea of survival, in which a traumatic event is suffered, survived, and recovered from, Chapter One argued that *La Jetée* is *essentially* marked or wounded by what remains to come. Referring to Derrida's reading of the term 'survivre', this chapter suggested that *La Jetée* can be thought in terms of a quasi-originary dimension of survival, or *living on*. In turn, it suggested that *La Jetée* is *traumatized* from the beginning, that it survives or lives on as a text marked, traced or wounded by the ghost of the future. Moreover, Chapter One argues that if we are maintain the possibility of a trauma study, the possibility of writing (on) trauma, that study must also affirm this essentially textual dimension as its point of departure.

Whilst Chapter One considered *La Jetée* in terms of a text essentially marked by what remains to come, *Chapter Two* takes this up in terms of *imminence*. This chapter asked how we might await without awaiting – without predicting or pre-programming – what remains to come, and how a trauma study might be the site of this im-possible arrival. Here I considered Roland Barthes's reading of Stendhal, a reading which suggests a shift in Stendhal's work between the early travel journals and later novels. I argued that Barthes saw in this shift a transition in Stendhal's relation to the lost and loved object: whilst Stendhal's early travel journals attempted a reconnection with what had been lost through capturing the figure of 'Italy' (an overdetermined figure of woman as maternal loss and maternal love), his later novels situated 'Italy' as a space reserved for what must remain wholly other. Stendhal's 'Italian' imaginary, therefore, shifted from one which tried to recall and preserve the presence of a lost other, to one which *lived on* as its very promise. I argued that, through a reconsideration of the imaginary, Barthes begins to sketch a writing which reserves a place for the other, a *spectral* imaginary which, rather than being reduced to the head of the subject, was in fact an effect of the

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<sup>2</sup> See: Jacques Derrida, 'Typewriter Ribbon', p.159, and the Introduction to this thesis.

text. I argued that such an imaginary, an imaginary which reserved a space for the wholly other, was *wounded*, and thus traumatized, by what remained a radical unpredictability. Through this, Chapter Two suggested that Barthes was approaching what I term a trauma study as a suffering of the ‘might’ of the im-possible.

As in *Vertigo* and *La Jetée*, the relation to the feminine is central to the work of both Barthes and Stendhal. As Stendhal’s fantasy of ‘Italy’ is overdetermined by the fantasy of his mother (who died when he was very young), Barthes’s reading of Stendhal is also overdetermined by the loss of his own mother. Both Barthes and Stendhal are attempting, therefore, to write about their relation to a maternal love. And yet what Barthes reads in Stendhal, and what he himself is attempting to develop, is a writing which, rather than attempting to *account* for loss (to reduce absence and death to an economy of knowledge), instead expresses a passion for the (m)other. What Barthes reads in Stendhal, therefore, and what I suggest is attempted in several of Barthes’s later texts, is a writing in which an expression of the (m)other is figured in terms of what remains imminent to the text, a writing which, rather than trying to recollect an originary loss, *promises* that to which it cannot be reduced. The shift Barthes reads in Stendhal is from an attempt to capture the lost mother, to live again in the security of her presence, to a writing which *welcomes* the (m)other, a writing whose very *experience* is structured in terms of what remains imminent. In reserving a place for the (m)other, then, Stendhal’s ‘Italian’ imaginary allows for the *expression and experience* of what remains to come. The chapter concluded by reading the relation between Barthes’s re-reading of the imaginary and my notion of a trauma study in his *Fragments d’un discours amoureux*, a text which I claimed was a study *imminent* with – and thus marked, wounded and traumatized by – the arrival of what must remain wholly other. By concluding that Barthes attempts a writing of the (m)other in this text, I suggested that this is a text in which failing to speak of the (m)other makes way for their wholly unpredictable arrival.

*Chapter Three* of this thesis reads Hélène Cixous’s *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*. It considers her text in relation to the notion of ‘*arrivance*’, Derrida’s formulation for how Cixous’s writing makes/lets arrive that which nevertheless remains to come (the *arrivance* of the *arrivant*, the latter remaining the wholly other which is imminent or ‘to come’). In doing this, I suggest that *Le jour où je n’étais pas là* forms both an

experience and the study of the events which surround the death of the narrator's child, but that the writing of this traumatic event also maintains that the event remains in excess of the text. Cixous's text, then, makes/lets the traumatic event arrive without arriving 'as such', a writing which *touches on*, or is *touched by* the traumatic event as the mark or wound of its potentiality *to arrive* (with this active/passive binary *essentially* undecidable). Following Freud's identification of – what Derrida refers to as – an 'undecidable gesture' as the condition of 'theory', I argue that Cixous's work affirms this undecidable gesture to such a degree that what might be read as a fictional, theoretical, or even biographical text, is also *experiential*. What might be thought of as fiction, theory, or biography, then, would also be a writing which *experiences* the very excess of these genres or categories.

As Cixous's text is reducible to neither experience nor theory 'as such', *Le jour où je n'étais pas là* remains imminent with a *might* which exceeds it, an excess or power which remains to be decided or formulated, and is thus a highly experimental address. I traced this might or power through Freud's reference to animatism or '*Belebtheit*' in *Totem and Taboo*, a quasi-originary life-force – or omnipotence – through which even death is made to/let arrive. For Derrida, Cixous's work experiences and experiments with this side of life, her texts summon this might as the ability to address what remains wholly other, to make that other arrive to the text without arriving as such. Paradoxically, then, Cixous's text has the power to make what exceeds this power – the might of what might arrive – arrive. Hers is an all-powerful address which makes/lets what exceeds that omnipotence come to writing. Chapter Three argues, then, that Cixous's experimental address, her power to make what exceeds that power arrive, would resemble a trauma study, a writing which – as both the experience and study of the event – forms an *experiment* in the possibility of the im-possible.

I concluded Chapter Three by focusing on Derrida's reference to Cixous's work as a 'writing of her language'; 'her language' being both her most intimate tongue, and the language of the (m)other. I demonstrated that, in relation to *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, it is with the 'writing of her language' that Cixous makes/lets come her mother's undecidable and secret power, a 'writing of her language' which acknowledges as it denies, exhumes as it buries, and confesses as it keeps the secret of what happened to her son on 'the day I wasn't there'. As the writing of *her* language, Cixous's text can be

thought of as a feminine text, which leads to the suggestion that Freud's reading of an 'undecidable gesture' as the condition of phallogocentric theory was itself pointing towards a 'writing of her language'. A 'writing of her language', then, is a writing which exceeds 'man's' theoretical achievements. Cixous's texts demonstrate this, in that, should they generate a 'theory', it would be a 'theory' which welcomes – or, in terms of Chapter One, incorporates – the other. What may at once be a theory, then, is also a fiction, but an *experimental* fiction, one which survives or lives on amongst the precarious borders between reality and fiction, theory and fiction, and theory and experience. This thesis must conclude, then, by suggesting that what remains is the question of how to affirm such experiments without reducing them to the formulaic, of how to countersign such texts without deriving from them the power to sustain theories or principles which would localize or contain them, how to suffer and survive the *might* of these texts as the force and potential of the other, the force and potential of the future. What remains, then, is the question of how to read and write (on) the im-possible, of how to countersign these texts as experiments in the im-possible, as experiments in the 'writing of *her* language'.

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