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The radical reconfiguration over the last three decades of critical studies and what constitutes 'knowledge', whereby 'theory' and writing, literature and the 'social', poetics and politics have crossed each other's path, has led to an irreversible interrogation of previous autonomies. It would be simple to reduce this trajectory to a superficial social history that commences around 1968 and develops, above all, through the writings, both theoretical and literary, of new historical subjects distinguished by gender, ethnicity and minority status. However, these are also symptoms of an altogether deeper current that, to use the unfashionable concept of egemonia, *draws our attention to the limits and crisis, both intellectual and institutional, of a particular historical-cultural formation and its subsequent arrangement of disciplines in the western academy. The confident nineteenth-century positivism and/or idealism that cultivated and established the present day divisions and distinctions of the social sciences and humanities (and the critical and historical sense of such terms are themselves to be investigated) is exhausted. Confronted by nervous retrenchment into orthodox backwaters or else the continual adjustment of the inherited discipline in order to continue to converse with change, the initial* dispositif *is now clearly in crisis.*

Yet crisis is, of course, the very basis of criticism. This is to suggest a theoretical modality that is neither conservative nor merely accommodating. But if positivism and idealism are no longer able to mirror the world in their languages, if the confidence of a subjective objectivity orbiting around the universal I/eye (humanism) is justly afflicted by doubt, then critical work, whether in literature or anthropology, becomes an altogether more exposed, more vulnerable, undertaking. Whatever the response to such a situation, which, of course, requires recognition as a critical situation and not something to be brushed under the carpet, it becomes clear that a local response, for example restricted to the field of 'English literature', cannot be divorced from a wider comprehension of the crisis-criticism of the humanities and its particular tutelage of 'knowledge'. It is in this direction that the new series of Anglistica *proposes to travel, drawing critical strength, above all, from an interdisciplinary approach that has historically developed within the vicinity of English literary studies, that of cultural studies. But, precisely because it is interdisciplinary, existing between and beyond existing disciplines, neither cultural studies nor the critical perspective proposed for this journal can claim the authority of an intellectual orthodoxy nor the institutional recognition of a disciplinary regime. Being vulnerable is an uncomfortable, but necessary, position to occupy; the only comfort it provides is the perpetual aperture, the opening, through which an intellectual challenge can continue on its way.*

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Politics of Archiving and the Aesthetics of Memory
(editors for this issue: Marie-Hélène Laforest – Marina Vitale)

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REVIEWS

EDITORIAL

In the West memory is often associated with trauma. Not only the traumas which, following Freud, have grown out of familial relations, but those linked to the many dramatic events which characterized the twentieth century: two world wars, the Armenian genocide, the Jewish holocaust, the partition of India, South African apartheid, dictatorships and forced migrations. History has fractured and wounded, has dealt blows which are at times evident, at other times hidden, but which have all left their marks, especially on the victims. Many of whom have remained silent, but in increasing numbers have wanted to testify.

Traditionally looming large in Western public discourse of remembrance is the memory of the Holocaust, but at the end of the century, the horrors perpetrated in the Balkans and Africa startled the world anew: fratricidal wars in Bosnia and Rwanda transformed neighbors into nameless corpses and brothers into heaps of bones. In the meantime old wounds, which had remained agape, resurfaced in new narrative forms like those linked to slavery and its legacy.

The past which returns to haunt the present was the starting point for a series of reflections which inspired the title of the PhD seminars in anglophone cultures and literatures held during 2003-04 at the University of Naples "L'Orientale", "Politics of archiving and the aesthetics of memory". The results are collected here in a series of essays which touch on several of the aspects Edward Said indicated in his groundbreaking text, *Culture and Imperialism*: "Many of the most interesting post-colonial writers bear their past with them – as scars of humiliating wounds, as instigation for different practices, as potentially revised visions of the past tending toward a new future, as urgently reinterpretable and redeployable experiences in which the

formerly silent native speaks and acts on territory taken back from the empire."[1]

The testimonies of postcolonials have re-opened the question of the archive. As 'living memories' they have voiced their sufferings, but have also unearthed materials kept in libraries, museums, and archives with a view to redress the past, which had often been told from a single point of view. The humiliating wounds of colonial history which have stirred alternative practices of remembering the past, even if in the languages of the colonizer, are thus well represented here. But there are other wounds, those caused by marginalization and a more general *mal de vivre* which are analyzed; also, ways of circumventing the limits of official archives: the surveilled and controlled collections of materials which the West has put in place through its 'archive fever', its *mal d'archive*.[2] The title of Derrida's text, mentioned in several of these essays, points to the collection, surveillance, categorization and exploitation of historical sources, the topo-nomological power of the archive: its location in a specific space seen by Derrida as legitimating and granting the archive an hermeneutic authority deployed in the very process of gathering and classifying events.

A deconstructionist theoretical perspective is mostly employed in the analyses of the politics of archiving conducted – be the postulates Derridean or Foucauldian, they are coupled with an effort to go beyond the notion of the other as absence.

As literary and cultural scholars, the contributors face the question of the archive within the range of their disciplines, which have tended to be interdisciplinary. They thus deal with European canons and postcolonial exclusions, with borders aimed at containing and imaginary maps which open outwards, with narrations which are caught in the tension between remembering and forgetting, with personal memories transformed into collective ones.

The methods of official remembering, needless to say, clash with the personal memories which are pouring out of all corners of the globe. The 'living memories' of today have their own agendas, their

[1] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 31.
[2] Jacques Derrida, *Mal d'archive* (Paris: Galilée, 1995).

stories are of survival, acts of self-fashioning aimed at empowerment in a world which has hesitated to recognize them. They have recreated themselves through well-known representational modes and genres, but which they have entered with new energy, expanding and enriching the possibilities of transforming words into art: a new poetics linked to ethics, inextricable from politics, a new heterogeneous archive of the formerly silent or 'unheard'.

Be they former colonial subjects or women, the need to archive differently is expressed by all those who have been kept at the margins. Several of the essays reveal the partiality of the archive as in the discovery of new material buried in the musical archives as explained by Serena Guarracino who uncovers the presence of countertenor voices which had at times been obscured, at others utilized, to produce a nationalist, masculinist discourse. Paola Sallei, on her part, starts from the inception of the Vatican library to point to the bond between the very foundation of libraries and imperialism, analyzing the regime of truth to which the colonial libraries had given rise. In a similar vein, the collusion between academic disciplines and the literary canon is examined by Laura Fantone. Through Gayatri Spivak and Mahasweta Devi she examines one of the core issues posed by postcolonial scholars today; that is, the limits imposed on postcolonialism by its current academic status in the midst of the current globalizing process.

Globalization is certainly a force to be reckoned with in this context, as the traumatic memories and experiences of many an elsewhere are being collected in the West. As Sonia Torres indicates in her essay, the large Chilean population in exile in Canada is archiving the memory of the dramatic events, which took place during a dictatorship like Pinochet's, in northern cities: a re-enactment of the violence which has remained inscribed on the body of the victims. Trauma, after all, refuses "to be simply located," as Cathy Caruth writes, its characteristic being precisely "its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of a single space and time".[3] Violence reappears also through simulation as Fiorenzo Iuliano explains.

[3] Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 9.

Calling to his help Judith Butler and Jean-Luc Nancy, Iuliano's essay discusses the body as archive during the 1980s AIDS epidemic which stigmatized the male gay body, coupling it with death. The constant presence of death in the process of archiving and in the very choice of writing autobiographical texts is analyzed by Tiziana Rosapane in her reading of Sarah Kane's plays.

It is the very reliability of memory which is questioned by Bianca Del Villano through the analysis of Christopher Nolan's film, *Memento*; whereas the use to which memory is put – its politicization and mediatization – appears in Angelo Ferrillo's analysis of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission caught in the process of constructing a new national identity.

Many identitary issues are raised in the collection and are mostly reworked through the aesthetic. Laura Sarnelli's discussion of Isaac Julien's film, *Frantz Fanon* draws attention to the fragmentary and mixed media aesthetics used by Julien to challenge the traditional approach to Fanon and his legacy, re-situating him in a psychiatric ward engaged in the treatment of traumatized French soldiers.

The desire to undo the archive, to reveal what has been concealed, has been central to deconstructionist practices, but the wish to recall differently and to make textuality work for change is also a powerful force behind some of the essays. Thus it is proposed that women can write female archives through the primary elements of earth, water, and air as Manuela Esposito does in her reading of Woolf, Irigaray and Zambrano; or that a matriarchive can be created, "a mother's lore to replace the father's law" as Jane Wilkinson shows in her study of Joan Metelerkamp's poetry; or again that archives can be dispersed, multiple and immaterial to avoid a unified *telos* of memory as Claudia Buonaiuto hypothesizes in the case of the African diaspora. Marina Vitale, instead, starting with a reading of H.D., lays claim to a rich female genealogy by confronting history and stories, by placing together words like 'gift', 'pact', 'palimpsest' and 'mosaic' which evoke a relational approach by women writers which has, alas, remained marginal in Western thought.

Marie-Hélène Laforest

POLITICS OF ARCHIVING

Claudia Buonaiuto

Archival Sounds: Caryl Phillips' Atlantic Story

ZOMBIE na go go
Unless you tell 'em to go

ZOMBIE na go stop
Unless you tell 'em to stop

ZOMBIE na go turn
Unless you tell 'em to turn

ZOMBIE na go think
Unless you tell 'em to think
(Fela Kuti)

This being-with specters would also be, not only but also, a politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations.
(Jacques Derrida)

The archive

The Atlantic Sound (2001) by Caryl Phillips offers a complex overview on the question of the African diasporic archive in the new millennium.[1] The diaspora of people of African descent in the West has not satisfactorily been recorded by official history, since it has often been considered as a marginal aspect of European modernity.

[1] Caryl Phillips, *The Atlantic Sound* (London: Vintage, 2001), hereafter cited in the text.

Frustration for such an absence has urged the black British writer, who is western educated, to testify the historical and personal inheritance of his diasporic past.

The limited number of internal records by diasporic subjects, added to the 'silence' of their ancestors and the absence of monuments in the countries involved in the African diaspora, troubles Phillips' narration of diasporic history. The confrontation with the past often gives space to 'bleeding memories' when he, like other diasporic writers, is compelled to remember slavery and uprooting. Those sorrowful recollections engender 'spectres of the past', which force the author to write an imaginative account of history, in the wake of that tradition of diasporic historical narrative which has been developed by, among others, Edward Kamau Brathwaite and Toni Morrison.

Phillips records both histories and stories in a non-canonical way, mostly in accordance with his 'symptoms of memory', which impress the memory of the diaspora in a novel archival form. The texts of this archive cannot be read as an ordinary history. *The Atlantic Sound*, in fact, is a historical chronicle, but also and simultaneously a travelogue, thanks to the intermingling of archival documents with intimate recollections. This unusual African diasporic archive, which also draws from the African diasporic archives of Africa, America, and Europe offers a personal interpretation of the current diasporic condition.

The Atlantic Sound is a book that questions the sense of home, past, and community. It also links the diasporic liquid condition to a more global setting in which history has to be re-written in order to ground new forms of solidarity and brotherhood. The book is finally what Derrida would define a type of "archive fever" (*mal d'archive*) – a new politics of the archive for a promising future.

Diasporic narrative

The Atlantic Sound is centred on the travels undertaken by a narrator in the present – even if his name is never revealed, he might well be the author – and by other characters taken from the past, who metaphorically speak of the overall migrant condition of the African diasporic being. From Central America and West Africa to England,

and from England to Ghana, the geographical connections recall the historical migrations of the African diaspora during the modern era. Other journeys from London to Liverpool, or from Harlem to the Negev Desert in Israel, directly deal with present-day displacements of people of African descent.

Every trip bears its own questions in the face of history, memory, and inheritance. Compared to what Derrida has written on "being-with-spectres" as a politics of memory, inheritance and generations, *The Atlantic Sound* is Phillips' book on his personal understanding of what being a diasporic individual implies.[2]

The stories in the text go from slavery in the 'pest houses' to present-day immigration policies in England, highlighting crucial moments of the African diasporic history. Every his/story has its own spectres: a Burmese sea crew exploited on European ships in Central America; multiculturalism in Britain and its segregated societies; British imperial commerce in nineteenth century Liverpool at the detriment of Africa; neo-Back to Africa movements in the 1980's and their current ethnic essentialism; African missionaries involved in twelfth century slavery in the Gold Coast; African immigrants in the prisons of Europe; 1950's US Civil Rights Movements; eighteenth century slave barracoons in Charleston, South Carolina; a 2000 people community of African American origin living in the isolated Negev desert, on the border between Palestine and Egypt, trying to build a utopian society.

This considerable amount of facts and events, which form Phillips' archive on the diaspora, record the experience of sufferings and, above all, the dissemination of people of African descent. The fragmented historical dimension in the book provides a multifaceted vision of the diaspora: official documents and letters prove the historicity of some characters; while the intimate descriptions of several journeys are flanked by interviews and testimonies collected during the author's visits to different countries. But to these narrations, Phillips adds his poetical reflections and fictional inventions.

The erratic flow of *The Atlantic Sound* between historiography and imagination is a writing of exile, without any clear-cut distinction

[2] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), xix.

between fiction and non-fiction. The idea of travel inscribed into writing itself allows the deconstruction of the borders of genres. In other words, the book undertakes a 'travelling process' between time and space, author and community, and ultimately between writing and text. As Evelyn O'Callaghan has written, it is a process of writing which "voyages between": "I mean this [process of voyaging between] in the widest sense: physical, spiritual, historical voyages, and, of course, through writing, textual journeying".[3] Moreover, according to O'Callaghan, when faced with the sense of homelessness and unbelongingness, writers like Phillips not only write by mingling history with imagination, but they foreground the experience of the Middle Passage, as the most relevant moment in the diasporic history of rootlessness.

Phillips definitely situates his writing between the physical, the spiritual, and the historical. He is a citizen of no place, he never stops travelling, and he metaphorically writes to deal with the historical displacements of diasporic identities through memories of forced or voluntary voyages. As Wilson Harris would say, the use of memory in diasporic literature: "[is] an art of memory, which dislocates, in some measure, an idolatrous plane of realism by immersing us in a peculiar kind of ruined fabric".[4] Phillips' "art of memory" is about the history and imagination of the African diaspora, since he declares that his goal is to look at history from the point of view of those "who have been written out":

> It's to look at that history from a different angle – through the prism of people who have nominally been written out of it, or have been viewed as the losers or victims in a particular historical storm. You take something which people presume they know about and you make them look again from the point of view of people who have been written out.[5]

[3] Evelyn O'Callaghan, "The 'Pleasures' of Exile in Selected West Indian Writing Since 1987", in Glyne Griffith, ed., *Caribbean Cultural Identities* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2001), 80. O'Callaghan illustrates this point in reference to recent texts by Caribbean writers like V.S. Naipaul, Jamaica Kincaid, and David Dabydeen.

[4] Wilson Harris, "Interior of the Novel: Amerindian/European/African Relations", in K.L. Goodwin, ed., *National Identity* (London/Melbourne: Heinemann, 1970), 14.

[5] Maya Jaggi, "Caryl Phillips talks to Maya Jaggi", in *Wasafiri* 20 (Autumn 1994), 26.

Liquid dwelling

The Atlantic Sound is constructed as a transoceanic map of movements of people to highlight the liquidity of diasporic identity. Phillips is, after all, a son of the Windrush generation: born in St Kitts, emigrated to England with his parents in the 1950s as a four-month old child, and currently a US resident.

The inheritance of the past gives the diaspora a fluid, mobile, and migratory dimension. Phillips records the sounds of time throughout the Atlantic space and it is the instability of that history which forces him to be homeless. As he affirms in *A New World Order* (2002), home is a source of "vexing questions": "We are all unmoored. Our identities are fluid. Belonging is a contested state. Home is a place riddled with vexing questions".[6]

'Home' marks the entire development of *The Atlantic Sound*, from the very beginning in the prologue, entitled "Atlantic Crossing", when the narrator starts his first trip 'back home'. He says, "I want to go home" (20), and he crosses the sea from Central America to England on a banana boat.

> Back in my cabin I begin to wonder why anybody would willingly subject themselves to serving time on a ship that is primarily designed to carry cargo not human beings. Presumably the only reasons to travel in this fashion are because (a) it is cheap; (b) you have nothing else to do; and (c) perverse curiosity. (17)

The reason for this long and tedious trip does not seem to have plausible motivations, apart from the fact that his family had taken the same journey fifty years before with their four-month child from the colony of St Kitts to the mother country. England, the imagined homeland for many colonized people, would never host them as her children, and Phillips comments, "In fact, much to their dismay, they discovered that the mother country had little, if any, desire to embrace her colonial offspring" (11). Loneliness is the main feeling on the boat. Phillips knows that he is going home to England but he has none of the expectations that marked his parents' trip:

[6] Caryl Phillips, *A New World Order* (New York: Random House, 2002), 6.

> I fully understand the world that will greet me at the end of the journey, but for the West Indian emigrants of an earlier generation the Atlantic crossing was merely prelude to a larger adventure – one which would change the nature of British society. (7)

The present voyage on the banana boat is a way to recover his own origin. The Atlantic crossing from the Caribbean to Great Britain in the 1950's was the greatest wave of migration of people from those ex-colonies to the mother country. It has changed the social and political aspect of Britain, and Phillips knows he is the proof of such profound transformation. He reruns the experience of travel of former generations to rescue the uncertainty of the future that marked his parents' voyage. He states, "For me this will be no Atlantic crossing into the unknown" (7), he knows what awaits him after the crossing:

> Before we have even hoisted the anchor I am longing to see the taxi in Dover that will whisk me towards the system formerly known as British Rail. And from Dover Priory station to Charing Cross, and from there a black cab to West London. (7)

Yet, besides the feeling of an ordinary trip, the Atlantic crossing becomes the experience of unfamiliarity for him – the '*unheimelich*' of places and identity. That crossing is a symbolic representation of watery migrations from the Caribbean to Great Britain, but also from Africa to the New World. It is the origin of the diasporic history and in fact the Middle Passage is echoed in the story. At the end of the section when the boat arrives in Dover, the author comments, "Overhead the gulls wheel and circle as though inspecting this new arrivant; the ship, that is, not me"(22).[7] Britain is not home, though he is a British citizen. He still feels he is a new arrivant, even if he projects this sense of foreignness onto the ship.

[7] "Arrivant" is not a common term in English. It recalls the famous trilogy by Barbadian poet Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *The Arrivants. A New World Trilogy. Rights of Passage, Islands, Masks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), dedicated to the travels of the Caribbean man in search of his identity. The reference is not arbitrary, as Phillips often quotes the trilogy in the titles of his books; for instance, *Crossing the River* (1993) is taken from a section in *Masks*. Moreover, slavery, death, and the African bond are common elements in Brathwaite's poetry and Phillips' narrative.

The ship represents here a recurrent theme in every un/desired arrival for the African diaspora. It is, in fact, a topos in the diasporic literary imagination that encages the migrant's dreams, as Brathwaite brilliantly affirmed, "We was there in the dream of the ship".[8] Paul Gilroy, too, has defined the ship as the chronotope of the diaspora, recognising that it is the preferred metaphor in the representation of the Black Atlantic to recollect the memory of people transported from one side of the ocean to the other.[9] The ship is, indeed, the starting point in Gilroy's conceptualisation of counter-modernity, with its circular movement that responds to the rhyzomatic idea of the international and transcultural Black Atlantic. He refers to the centuries of migrations, contacts, and transformations within the Atlantic region between the cultures of Africa, Europe, and America, which have characterised the formations of modernity, but which have not been sufficiently recorded by official history.

> The ship provides a chance to explore the articulations between the discontinuous histories of England's ports, its interfaces with the wider world. Ships also refer us back to the middle passage, to the half remembered micro-politics of the slave trade and its relationship to both industrialisation and modernisation.[10]

The ship had given Britain the opportunity to transport goods and human beings, and had a fundamental role in the modernization project of the empire. But, as Gilroy maintains, it also recalls the other side of modernity: the Middle Passage, slavery, the exploitation of the colonies, and all those underestimated atrocities involved in European progress.

Ports, ships, and, above all, the sea are historical elements in *The Atlantic Sound*. As Joahanna K. Garvey puts it: "The sea itself often serves not only as catalyst but as repository for the memories of the Middle Passage".[11] The sea frames many journeys in the book: the

[8] Kamau Brathwaite, *Dream Stories* (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1994), 94.

[9] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), 4.

[10] Ibid., 17.

[11] Joanna X.K. Garvey, "Passages to Identity: Re-Membering the Diaspora in Marshall, Phillips, and Cliff", in Maria Diedrich, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Carl Pedersen, eds., *Black Imagination and the Middle Passage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 267.

MV Horncap and SS Mayumba, which lead into the spatial, temporal, and cultural facets of the stories in the first two chapters like the SS Windrush in Phillips' personal history, are the ships that force the author to search his memory and to visit the archives.

Gilroy affirms that: "the relationship to the sea may turn out to be especially important for both the early politics and poetics of the black Atlantic".[12] The routes, the circularity of histories, the movements, the arrivals, and "the arrivants" – maybe revenants – as in every poetics of the Black Atlantic, wash out the ideas of fixity and belonging to a single place, with their presumed singular origin, tradition, identity, and culture. Home cannot be geographically confined, but territorialized in the fluidity of the oceanic water. This non-place can finally host the liquid dwelling of the diasporic being situated in the crossing.

Spectres of the past

Besides the apparent celebration of mobility, *The Atlantic Sound* is a sorrowful text, inhabited by a multitude of spectres, not only as shadows in diasporic history, but also as actual presences in the text. In the three chapters of the book, meaningfully entitled "Leaving Home", "Homeward Bound", and "Home", the stories of the narrator are intertwined with those of historically documented figures such as John Ocansey, Philip Quaque, and J. Waties Waring. Characters and memories are marked by sufferings, and all give the sense of a present without a home to which to belong. In the streets of Liverpool, in Charleston, and in Accra, the present is always bound to those spectral figures of the past. Phillips searches for the links within the diaspora in the places he visits, guided by local people like Stephen in Liverpool and Mansour in Ghana, but he is unable to confirm that a community of people sharing the same history, culture, and identity exists.

The text goes back and forth, and every chapter has more than one story in the same setting. It has not a single beginning, but re-starts every time. Bringing the past into the present and the present into the

[12] Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 12.

past, each story is inevitably fragmented and in exile. Phillips considers exile to be a grounding aspect of diasporic history and identity:

> You were transported in a wooden vessel across a broad expanse of water to a place which rendered your tongue silent. Look. Listen. Learn. And as you began to speak, you remembered fragments of a former life. Shards of memory. Careful. Some will draw blood. You dressed your memory in the new words of this country. Remember. There were no round-trip tickets in your part of the ship. Exodus. It is futile to walk into the face of history. (275)

Exodus, somehow, has silenced the people transported from Africa to the Americas. Bloody reminders, as Phillips sees them, afflict the memories of the following generations. In the same spirit, the poet Grace Nichols defined her historical epiphanies as: "Bleeding memories in the darkness".[13] Kamau Brathwaite poetically referred to a history that bleeds.

> So for my hacked
> heart, *veins' mem-*
> *ories*, I wear this
>
> past I borrowed; *his-*
> *tory bleeds*
> behind my hollowed eyes.[14]

The past engenders spectres in Phillips' memory as in many a diasporic historical imagination, and as a result, there rises a feeling of inability to belong to a single place. When the author affirms that, "Where a man keeps his memories is the place he should call home" (116), he is referring to homes that are sites of rootlessness. All the places are presented as inhospitable, even Britain. This is to stress the sense of alienation a diasporic being feels in his presumed homes. Therefore,

[13] Grace Nichols, *i is a long memoried woman* (London: Karnak House, 1983), 5.
[14] Kamau Brathwaite (1968), "Masks", in *The Arrivants*, 148; my italics.

Phillips can be defined as an absolute guest, haunted by the dead, as Derrida argues in his book *On Hospitality* (2000).

> From birth to death. Usually, the foreigner, the foreign citizen, the foreigner to the family or the nation, is defined on the basis of birth. … "Displaced persons," exiles, those who are deported, expelled, rootless, nomads all share two sources of sighs, two nostalgias: their dead ones and their language.[15]

In *The Atlantic Sound* the memory and the identity of the author rely upon the sound, the impression, the deep, and the water.[16] The complexity of the text resides in the meanings of its title, the watery memory of the Atlantic Ocean or as Bénédicte Ledent puts it: "the fluvial nature of memory"; but also an identity situated in the Atlantic sound and the depth of waters throughout times.[17] Every trip like every story has its abyss in the author's memory and experience.

Silence seems to be the result of every journey, for all exiles experience mutism when faced with the anxiety of telling of their dissemination and dispersion. The desert as the symbol for such a static condition is the main setting of the epilogue, entitled "Exodus", where the narrator ends with the words, "I say nothing. There is nothing I can say" (275). In the southern region of Negev, in Israel, the narrator meets a community of African Americans that in the 1980's decided to leave New York to go to the promised land, inspired by the Back to Africa movements of the early years of the century.

> We are, she says, descendants of Isaac, Abraham, and Jacob. We are the true children of Israel. … African-American people. African-American children. In costumes. Who have come home to the desert. The lost tribe of Israel. Found in Chicago, Washington, New York. Come hither my children. Return! Here in the desert. Two thousand African-Americans. Free at last. (269-70)

[15] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality: Anne Defourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 87.

[16] "Sound" has more than one meaning in the OED: a) a thing that can be heard; b) an idea or impression conveyed by words; c) a narrow stretch of water forming an inlet or connecting two large bodies of water; d) in good condition; e) based on reason or judgement; f) ascertain the depth of water in the sea, a lake, etc. by means of a line or pole or using sound echoes; g) find the depth of water in a ship's hold.

[17] Bénédicte Ledent, "Ambiguous Visions of Home: The Paradoxes of Diasporic Belonging in Caryl Phillips's *The Atlantic Sound*", available at www.brunel.ac.uk/faculty/arts/EnterText/Ledent.pdf, 2.

The author seems to be confused by the folklore of these people. "Eight people in green batik costumes. Two-piece costumes. Circus clowns? Uniforms?" (268). He feels their sense of belonging to the land that they consider as their only truly home. By contrast, he knows he will never be part of a community.

The places and the people he meets always alienate him, as happens in Ghana, in the chapter entitled "Homeward Bound". When he goes to the Panafest, a music and art festival organised by a group of African American residents in Accra as part of a return movement called "Hashuvah", he cannot help but affirm, "I'm not going home" (125). Yet, when he arrives in Ghana people at the airport had greeted him by saying "Akwaaba" – welcome back home!

The same had happen to Kamau Brathwaite fifty years before.

Akwaaba they smiled
meaning welcome

akwaaba they called
aye kooo

well have you walked
have you journeyed

welcome.

You who have come
back a stranger
after three hundred years

welcome.
Here is a stool for
you; sit; do

you remember?[18]

As a lost memory that haunts the African diasporic subject, Africa leaves Phillips out of breath and out of place.

> Unable to tolerate anymore proffered hands, and exhausted by the heat, I flee through the doors and find myself in a high-ceiling lobby. Mercifully, the place is free of the lounge lizards who populate my hotel, and I am able to have a whole sofa for myself. As I sit the cushion exhale with a long, somewhat audible sigh, which causes me to feel momentarily self-conscious. (134)

The relationship to Africa for diasporic individuals is always problematic. A faraway land with its "darkface", as the poem by Langhston Hughes quoted in *The Atlantic Sound* recalls.

> Subdued and time lost
> Are the drums–and yet
> Through some vast mist of race
> There comes this song
> I do not understand,
> This song of atavistic land,
> Of bitter yearnings lost
> Without a place–
> So long,
> So far away
> Is Africa's
> Darkface. (216)

Africa is the place of bitter suggestions for Phillips: memories of origin mixed with misadventures, obscurity, and losses.

Monuments in Ghana have a peculiar fascination on the author. Just as Brathwaite reported of his visit to Elmina Castle, Phillips starts to have visions in the fort:

> Back
> through Elmina,

[18] Kamau Brathwaite, *The Arrivants*, 124.

> …I hear
> the whips of the slavers,
> see the tears
> of my daughters;
> …the castle col-
> lapses in cloud.[19]

The place becomes a source of investigation for Phillips who reconstructs the transformation of the place from a commercial site in the thirteenth century for the exchange of goods between Africa and Europe, to a fort for slaves in the sixteenth century. Elmina is described as a "holocaust site"(148), but it is not officially recognised as a monument for the diaspora, which immensely frustrates the narrator. He feels what Derrida calls a "*mal d'archive*" – an absolute desire for memory, which the archive itself and its structures cannot hold:

> The *trouble de l'archive* stems from *a mal d'archive*. We are *en mal d'archive*: in need of archives ... to be en mal d'archive can mean something else than to suffer from a sickness, from a trouble ... it is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away. It is to run after the archive ... right where something in it anarchives itself. It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement.[20]

Africa is the most meaningful place for the history of the diaspora, but it is also the place that mostly avoids the archiving of diasporic memory. The architectures of history in museums, cathedrals, or buildings, which are very representative of European material culture, are not part of the African heritage, where memories are usually transmitted orally.

Other diasporic writers have felt the absence of memory in African monuments. As George Lamming affirmed in the 1960's, after a trip to Ghana,

[19] Ibid., 132-33.

[20] Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,* trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 91.

> An American tourist in Europe is often in search of monuments: cathedrals and palaces, important graves, the whole kingdom of names and faces that are kept alive by the architecture of history. … He claims some share in this heritage. … The West Indian Negro who sets out on a similar journey to Africa is less secure. His relation to that continent is more personal and more problematic. It is more personal because the conditions of his life today, his status as a man, are a clear indication of the reasons which led to the departure of his ancestors from that continent.[21]

The relationship with monuments in Africa is for Phillips indeed a *trouble d'archive*, for buildings such as Elmina Castle do not officially testify the dramatic past of slavery. Africa itself seems to be unable to deal with its diasporas.

Indeed every country in *The Atlantic Sound* is unable to remember the history of the African diaspora properly. All cities bear the mark of suffering, but amnesia prevails on the inscription of the past. Their monuments show the history of empire, but they cannot justify the imperial devastations. As a result, Accra, Liverpool, and Charleston are disjointed or stretched on different temporalities. Phillips presents the cities in opposed historical moments with the aim of bringing to light forgotten his/stories of sufferings.

In Liverpool the disjunction is declared, "In this city, the past casts a deep shadow, yet the present seems grubby and inadequate" (116). The city is the framework for two stories in the chapter "Leaving Home". One sees an African merchant, John Ocansey, in the British port at the end of the nineteenth century. He offers an overall degraded impression of the city with its streets full of orphans and beggars, inhabited by crooks and racist citizens. The second story is set in the present: the narrator is walking trough the streets of Liverpool and is struck by the splendours of buildings, squares, markets, and statues, which testify the wealth of the empire, despite the poverty described in the previous pages. Those monuments are silent on the depredations of the colonies and do not build a critical consciousness on the injustices of the imperial past. The city still segregates blacks: "whites have their bit, and we have our bit" –

[21] George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 160.

comments Stephen, a "Liverpool Born Black" (100). The narrator is left with a sense of distaste for the city.

> I am glad that I am leaving. It is disquieting to be in a place where history is so physically present, yet so glaringly absent from people's consciousness. But where is it any different? Maybe this is the modern condition, and Liverpool is merely acting out this reality with an honest vigour. If so, this dissonance between the two states seems to have engendered both a cynical wit and a clinical depression in the souls of Liverpool's citizens. (117)

The historical amnesia renders the city cynical and depressing, but no other place in the book bears adequate evidence of diasporic history. Also in the chapter "Home", an ironic title for Charleston, South Carolina, the present is dissociated from the past when the unloading of slaves on its shores crowded the 'pest houses' where they where kept before being sold. The anxiety of memory is expressed here in fragmented sentences, which poetically translate the horrors of the past.

> Flat, marsh, grassland. An arrival in America. Having crossed the Atlantic in the belly of a ship. An arrival. Here, in America. Step ashore, out of sight of Charleston. To be fed, watered, scrubbed, prepared. To be sold. (257-8)

No ruins are left of the 'pest houses'; the absence of memory is supported by the lack of monuments as well.

> In this city which 'processed' nearly one-third of the African population which arrived in the United States, a population who were encouraged to forget Africa, to forget their language, to forget their families, to forget their culture, to forget their dances, five young black women try to remember. (264)

The only trace of Africa in Charleston which the narrator encounters is a ghostly presence incarnated by dancers in a grotesque carnival: "White men and women dancing the rhythms of Africa in the street behind the United States Customs House. … Ghosts walking the streets of Charleston. Ghosts dancing in the streets of Charleston" (265).

A new world order

Phillips is undoubtedly a homeless individual. "I am of, and not of, this place", which echoes the famous statement by Trinidadian historian C.L.R. James, is the recurrent sentence in *A New World Order*.[22] Obsessed by the places he visits in *The Atlantic Sound*, he can only desire to be moored in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.

> 'I wish my ashes to be scattered in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean at a point equidistant between Britain, Africa and North America.'
> I instantly understood that this watery crossroads lay at the centre of a place that had become my other 'home': a place that, over the years, I have come to refer to as my Atlantic home.[23]

The Atlantic Sound offers a personal perspective on the historical experiences of the African diasporic migration, which avoids any exclusive idea of nation or culture. Diaspora for Phillips means, indeed, a constitutive circularity of home and history. He critically confronts the historical perspectives, by refusing idealised or romanticised ideas of the diaspora such as those of origins and authenticity so crucial for many African American and British diasporic communities. His point of view is supported by contemporary theories on anti-essentialist or anti-nationalist thinking, mainly conceptualised by Paul Gilroy in his *The Black Atlantic*, as well as by other recent theorists.

> The persistent belief in a racial essence is one important reason why the conceptualisation of the African diaspora needs some rethinking. … The first and most obvious step would be to acknowledge that there is no one idea of "blackness" or "African" which could or should control how the histories of people of African descent are studied.[24]

[22] Phillips, *A New World Order*, 1-6.

[23] Ibid., 304.

[24] Dweyne E. Williams, "Rethinking the African Diaspora: A Comparative Look at Race and Identity in Transatlantic Community, 1878-1921", in Darlene Clark Hine and Jacqueline McLeod, eds., *Crossing Boundaries: Comparative History of Black People in Diaspora* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 109.

Dweyne Williams invites a rethinking of the African diaspora concept, which goes beyond the epistemological hegemony of "blackness" and "African" in the study of the histories and cultures of people of African descent.

Phillips constructs his historical and imaginative archive in which all the different diasporic perspectives and experiences are inscribed, even if they are often criticised or denied. Differences belong to the diasporic condition throughout countries, generations, histories, and cultures. Stuart Hall has defined the process of forming a diasporic experience as that of "diaspora-ization", which stresses the historical and cultural dilatation of the African diaspora.[25]

With its complicated feelings of memory, inheritance, and generations, Phillips offers a varied vision of the diaspora. He proposes to consider the twentieth century as "a new world order" where both the colonial and the postcolonial models have collapsed and in which new subjects such as refugees and asylum seekers claim for other not yet accorded status of citizenship.

> The New World. A twenty-first-century world. A world in which it is impossible to resist the claims of the migrant, the asylum seeker, or the refugee. I watch them. The old static order in which one people speaks down to another, lesser, people is dead. The colonial, or postcolonial, model has collapsed. In its place we have a new world order in which there will soon be one global conversation with limited participation open to all, and full participation available to none. In this new world order nobody will feel fully at home.[26]

In the current situation in which nationalisms are raising ever-stronger borders in the face of old and new foreigners, it will be increasingly compelling to think of identity and nationality beyond fixed ideas of belonging, history, and culture as *The Atlantic Sound* brilliantly does.

[25] Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities", in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, eds., *Stuart Hall. Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1996), 447.

[26] Phillips, *A New World Order*, 5.

Laura Fantone

Death of a Discipline
Other imaginary maps

> A man sets himself the task of portraying the world. Over the years he fills a given surface with images of provinces and kingdoms, mountains, bays, ships, islands, fish, rooms, instruments, heavenly bodies, horses and people. Shortly before he dies he discovers that this patient labyrinth of lines is a drawing of his own face.
>
> (Jorge Luis Borges, "The Maker")

Deaths and Archives

Death constitutes a double, inevitable relationship with the preservation of memory. Both can be read as symmetrical aspects of the same ethical and epistemological problem: the location of culture, its temporality and politics. Culture produces archives and very specific ones have been produced by the two disciplines known as comparative and postcolonial literature.[1]

In the last few years, indeed, many postcolonial and cultural critics have been concerned with strategies for keeping a movement, a suspension across disciplinary walls, in response to the creation of Postcolonial Studies as a neatly defined field, with its always-already crystallized canon. Peter Hitchcock in his recent book, *Imagined States*, interestingly engages in a critique of

[1] Perhaps today such differences are less neat, and both Postcolonial and Comparative Literature are increasingly interrelated.

postcoloniality as a literary genre, constantly struggling with the tendency towards ghettoization or canonization. Here, another death wish takes shape, a need to kill and archive the stale questions of identity and minorities, evolving especially in the Anglo-American context, around the issue of 'the power of the other'. Hitchcock uses this expression ironically to describe the variety of ways Anglo-American intellectuals address their power and their political responsibilities towards the 'others'.[2] Today Postcolonial Studies are subject to interesting reconfigurations and tensions. Maryse Condé, Ella Shohat and Rasheed Areen, among others, recently expressed the need to rethink the role of Postcolonial and Cultural Studies in relation to globalization.[3]

At the turn of each century, any archive must make room for new documents and produce new classification criteria. Thus the archive becomes a space where borders between what is relevant and what is obsolete are defined. Some of the objects contained in the archive must be disposed of, especially those considered obsolete and useless. Dusty

[2] See *Imaginary States: Studies in Cultural Transnationalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003). See also "The Genre of Postcoloniality", *New Literary History* 34.2 (May 2003), 299-330.

[3] It is certainly interesting to note how their critiques of the postcolonial canon is uttered from a different location than the Postcolonial superstars (a term used by Areen to indicate Spivak, Bhabha, Said and Hall). In particular, Ella Shohat speaks about a shift in the location of politics, naming hybrid fields of knowledge, refusing neat classifications: "We need … to reflect on the relationships between the diverse interdisciplinary kinds of knowledge constituting multicultural/transnational feminist inquiry: gender and sexuality studies, ethnic and race studies, area and postcolonial studies. … I am not interested in having a clear and neat categorization of spaces allocated to each specific region. I am more concerned with investigating the multichronotopic links in the hopes of creating an intellectual dialogue that bypasses the institutional scenario of Feminist/Queer Studies versus Area Studies. In the first, the logic and discourse of post-modernity applies; in the latter, that of modernization and development." (Ella Shohat, "Area Studies, Gender Studies, and the Cartographies of Knowledge", *Social Text* 20.3 (October 2002), 78. In another, recent space of the postcolonial archive, the realm of postcolonial art, Rasheed Areen denounces "the tyranny of postcolonial cultural theory". In the year 2000 editorial in *Third Text*, calling for "new beginnings", he pointed out the difficulties of transforming the limited discourses mapped onto the 'postcolonial subject'. Areen is concerned with the speed at which global neoliberalism appropriated the discourse on/of the other, translating it into multiculturalism, fitting the free-market exchange needs. See *Third Text* 50 (May 2000), 3-35.

shelves can be compared to the face of the aging man as described by Borges, a surface filled with images of provinces and kingdoms, mountains, islands, instruments, heavenly bodies, horses and people. The face of Borges' man, about to die, represents a complex way of storing and classifying knowledge. It made me wonder about what happens upon the white, Western man's death. What happens to those representations of the world? What do the categories underlying such representations become?

The archive is somehow, always already an impossible combination of two processes: preservation and disposal. Such is the function of archives: that of organizing knowledge in a discreet space, immune from temporal decay. In my view, the critic's work in the archive resembles an exercise in the modern discipline of anatomy: dissecting a text, a disciplinary body, in close contact with the discipline of an institution, spatially represented in the archival rooms and shelves. The literary archive has been defined to draw political, imaginary limits, in which distances and closeness to certain views, places and writings are established. When some texts are archived, when some disciplines or literatures are declared dead, what kind of work follows? What kind of memory is left of them?[4]

Literature as an archive is divided into fields, which delineate borders and organize genres, and any archive is shaped by the pre-existing archives' classificatory logic. If we think of Literature as a discipline which created its archive, we can argue that today, the literary archive is not only being rearranged to contain non-European literatures, but that it has to take into account multilingualism and the presence of postcolonial texts, inevitably crossed by multiple languages and differences. The archive (in this case, Literature) can be seen as the place where disciplines represent themselves spatially, and to do so, they must create 'dead' objects.

Death cannot but evoke the necessity to preserve some memory of

[4] Blanchot vividly describes the dead body, as a rare case of presence and absence, relating it to the process of mourning. This can be transposed, in my view, to the subject of the archive, as a displayed presence of documents, books and objects, organized to prove the value of an absent abstract piece of knowledge. The material presence of an archive stands in for an absence, such as an historical event, a body of knowledge produced by someone, or an unrepresentable national literature. See Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982).

the deceased. If we consider the deceased to stand in for a monolithic national literature, with its classification criteria based on one language, then, the dead body is its canon, and, what is left, as its residue, is the postcolonial. In this sense Derek Walcott's evocative image of a decaying house, could be used to describe the crisis of classical English literature's archive: a house riven by leaks and cracks, infiltrated by what was originally kept neatly outside, the colonial subject and its writing.[5] Such residual element can be seen as the multilingual, dislocated writings which have been gradually emerging in French and English literatures. Caribbean writer Maryse Condé recently expressed the need to accept crises, death and contamination in the context of francophone literature.[6]

Shadows and cracks in disciplinary walls

If literature is an archive, the relationship between historical formations such as the nation state and its colonies has been intertwined with the literary canon – the classificatory scheme which orders and 'makes archivable' the stories of 'the others', while killing them. Such relationships have been perceived and addressed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her provocative critiques. In 2002 Spivak declared the death of the discipline of Comparative Literature. In her view, the postcolonial geography of global capitalism begs for a different, critical, literary project. In a sense, this realization can take a

[5] See Derek Walcott "Ruins of a Great House", in *Collected Poems 1948-1984* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1986), 19-21.

[6] Condé, in 2003, declared the death of Caribbean literature, optimistically welcoming it, or rather stating that Caribbean literature is not dead, but rebirthing. In Condé's view, francophone Postcolonial Literature is already multilingual, and writers are using nationality and languages with more freedom than in the past. Such a shift is certainly a sign of deep decline of old critical categories, those which came to constitute not only the old archive of French literature, with its disciplinary divisions and its obsolete organizing criteria based on nationality, but also its border with Caribbean literature. For Condé, the postcolonial constitutes a different space to write in, a residual space in the dead archive. As a writer, Condé is aware of the fact that today language and literature have changed to the point of contaminating any previous disciplinary boundary. See Emily Apter, "Crossover Texts/Creole Tongues", *Public Culture* 13 (2001), 95.

central place in contemporary Postcolonial Studies.[7] In the attempt to create new 'literary fields' Spivak traces political-imaginary maps of memories and colonial traumas, articulating in different ways the postcolonial need to empty some dead shelves and to dispose of obsolete labels in the archive, thus making room for marginal subjects, especially non-Western women, often left in the dark corners of the literary archive.

In the following section the work of Mahasweta Devi will be analysed, underlying its relationship to Spivak's current sensibility to global justice and literary projects. The current shifts in postcolonial literatures, and the related issues of politics, freedom and disloyalty to national language, are all reflected in Indian writer Mahasweta Devi's short stories, which have been translated and introduced to English by Gayatri Spivak. These stories, which often revolve around injustice or a violent death, pay particular attention to communication between different subjects, specifically the nomadic indigenous 'tribals', living in various parts of India. Mahasweta Devi is particularly aware of the specificities of the infinitely diversified India, its casts, classes, languages, and geographies intersecting in unpredictable ways. She certainly does force open and render strange the languages she writes in, in order to create her own unique language. In addressing the complex relations of postcolonial subjects – with particular attention to women and marginal subjects – those stories become a challenge to any unitary notion of a political, authentic nationality or language.[8] Spivak indeed defines her as one of the best voices which conveys the displacement and layered sedimentation of history and languages.

[7] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak also criticized 'postcolonial reason' as an increasingly canonized field in her previous book *Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[8] Devi's work is an interesting example of writing in a politically colonized context where, however, the writer 'is free from the colonial frame of mind'. It evokes the postcolonial writer's condition stated wonderfully by Maryse Condé, "After the post-colonial approach, we are now trying to break a set of models and canons. We stopped using the colonial framework last century, and we are trying to do something very different ..... Guadeloupe is still a colony, but the writer is free from the colonial frame of mind to write." in Keidra Morris, "An interview with Maryse Condé", online document http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/caas/diaspora/research_topics/caribbean_literature.htm (last access: June 2005).

> I am learning to write on Devi as if an attentive reading of her text permits us to imagine an impossible undivided world without which no literature should be possible. ... Such permission can be earned only by way of attention to specificity. I have perhaps foolishly attempted to open the structure of an impossible social justice glimpsed through remote and secret encounters with singular figures. ... [In order to] supplement hegemonic notions of a hybrid global culture.[9]

Devi is capable of drawing the reader into a delicate space, on the threshold of undecidability, moving away from political actions and ideological readings. In her short story *Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay and Pirtha* she creates a new poetic space and captures the reader with 'remote and secret encounters with singular figures'.[10] While addressing misery and famine, her work is not a mere portrayal of the exploitation and corruption deeply affecting the tribal peoples of India. She does not give extensive historical explanation of the places and people portrayed, – such literalism is unnecessary – instead, she conveys an awareness of multiple languages used to describe the 'tribals' situation. In doing so, she moves the reader to the limit of communication, decentering the positionality of the well meaning Western reader, in search of the right political causes to endorse. What she narrates also escapes a predefined dual interpretation of the colonizer and the colonized. She narrates with multiple registers collectivities involved in difficult dialogues, suspended in different temporalities, ethnic histories, languages, and inequalities. There are many illegitimate subjects, such as Asian women and Indian indigenous people, coexisting both with the powerful and the middlemen, in constant tension along the power lines of inequality and exploitations, but never reduced to such simple dualisms. Her texts interpellates the reader through the pleasures of a so carefully constructed complexity that it borders on unintelligibility. Nonetheless, Devi wonderfully connects complex human relations

[9] Gayatri Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 70 (hereafter cited as DD).

[10] Mahasweta Devi, "Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha", in *Imaginary Maps: Three Stories*, trans. and introduced by Gayatri Spivak (London: Routledge, 1995).

with nature and her love for it. She introduces a non-human, pre-textual element, which blurs any clear boundaries between myth and realism, poetics and politics.

Imaginary maps: "other" spaces to write memory

Devi's *Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay and Pirtha*, is a complex story centered around an encounter between a journalist and a pterodactyl. A leftist reporter, Puran (urban, Indian, educated man in his midlife crisis) arrives in the tribal land during a drought, which intensified the atmosphere of death, apparently related to the appearance of a dark shadow flying over the tribals' land. The entire tribal area, named Pirtha, has been affected by famine, and its untouchable local tribe appears to have embraced a collective death wish. The night in which Puran arrives, the rains start. During the following night, the animal finds the foreigner, perhaps seeking his protection and help. He is therefore considered blessed by the locals and chosen by Bikhia, a boy who became silent since he saw the pterodactyl, to help him take care of the creature. There is a silent agreement between Bikhia and the journalist, and the latter increasingly feels he can not betray their secret and complicity. Despite his efforts and the guidance of the savvy young tribal man, the animal dies. Its death appears to have no explicable reason for the journalist, which ultimately decides not to report such an unbelievable encounter. The animal is part of a tribal death wish, which he fulfils, becoming a messenger of their ancestors, providing an explanation for their misery. But Puran realizes that none of his knowledge is useful in that context, since his role as a 'blessed one' did not allow him to save the creature as he wished. "How gray, what amazing eyes. It wants to say something, to give some news. ... No points of communication. Nothing can be said or written".[11]

As a witness Puran does not understand and cannot make sense of what happened. As the main political subject, he does not have any correct answer when the tribals' answer is inscribed in a myth, something belonging to a different temporality. All maps appear inadequate for the tribals' land and for the figures towards which the

[11] Ibid., 158.

story moves: "No books – Homo sapiens, homo mapiens?– fear to know life by entering life. It is much safer to know life by reading books, reading theory".[12]

> Then what is to be done by Puran, no books have been written about this. If written by a third person, Puran would have perspective on the whole thing (sic).
> There is no one to write. [13]

Confronted with an empirical impossibility, the journalist is the figure of the modern man, caught in the ethical dilemmas of the necessity to "put Pirtha on the map", that is, draw attention to poverty and injustice, and, at the same time, understanding that the means of communication he uses can bring further destruction. "Where is the time? ... He cannot stay here, anywhere anymore, everything has been invaded and devastated by the present".[14]

With this awareness, Puran is increasingly torn, uncomfortable, incapable of transforming his experience into anything narratable. His lifetime crisis deepens now that he is confronted with the issue of writing for the subaltern. He is aware of his complicity with epistemic violence, even as he seeks to denounce social injustice. As he gets closer and closer to the boy and to the prehistoric creature, he loses his already cynical view of development, until he is finally confronted with the agony of the pterodactyl, which is also the agony of all the starving tribal people.

The pterodactyl's death is not teleological. It does not resolve or move the story forward; rather, it points to a complex passage from politics to mythopoesis. The pterodactyl is a shadow, and certainly a pre-human *unheimlich*, which, with his mute eyes, communicates and makes possible an unspoken dialogue at the limits of different political collective subjects, languages, places and times. Facts and words are unclear and suspended, shifting into an agonizing pre-colonial past. Such temporality takes the story neither to eternity

[12] Ibid., 160.
[13] Ibid., 159.
[14] Ibid., 161.

nor to extinction, but through a persistent, agonizing and archaic element.[15] In one instance, during the animal's burial, Bikhia, the young tribal, takes Puran to a cave, a dark, unmapped part of the jungle, which only the tribal people know and can decode. After re-emerging from the cave Puran and Bikhia become distant. Bikhia's silence points to a different, mysterious communication (as is the case between him and the pterodactyl) preceding and exceeding writing and western temporality.

> Puran realized that the crisis of the menaced existence of the tribals, the extinction of their ethnic being, pushed and pushed them toward the dark. Looking at Bikhia's hair … he understood that they were defeated as they were searching in this world for a reason for the ruthless unconcern of the government and administration. It was then that the shadow of the bird with its wings came back as at once myth and analysis…. Now something has happened that is their very own, a thing beyond the reach of the understanding and grasp and invasion and plunder of the outsider.[16]

Bikhia, the tribal boy, knows that the pterodactyl is the soul of their ancestor, who came back to tell them not to leave their land, therefore, they would rather die there. His reading allows the exploited tribals to renew their hope, while the journalist's role of witness is finished. Torn by the tension of telling the story or not, at the end of many discussions with the other local allies in the Civil Service, Puran writes a report, followed by some notes to his friend Harisharan, reported in the last paragraph of the novel. The journalist must ultimately go back to an explanation, needed by the local groups in order to get relief funds. He is accompanied by an aid worker who insists on taking pictures of starving families, in order to increase the chances of receiving international aid. Puran faces many problems in deciding how he is going to write a report on the tribal area and request governmental support or funding, in order to develop the area, to create water canals and improve food supply.

Death and mourning are at the center of the story. These tragedies are

[15] Ibid., 205.
[16] Ibid., 193.

punctuated by the fact that the living symbol of the tribals is slowly killed by modernity and development. The very fact that tribal territories are 'on the map' sanctions their death. Without political power or resources, the much hoped for 'media attention' is not necessarily a relief. The story starts and ends with dry dialogues among the political and governmental groups, in which even those sympathetic to the tribal people are extremely cynical. The civil service member states: "The tribal populations want recognition of their violated identities, their stolen dignity. My power is limited. I can fight mightily with various government departments and bring them a little rice, medicines, powdered milk".[17]

Devi's stories are full of observations on the absurdity of relief policies and their inefficiency. In this novel, her awareness is expressed through the tones permeating the Civil Service reports, the technical language of geographical guides, all interrupted abruptly with words of despair uttered by the natives. In a specific instance, the only tribal informant, Shankar, asks Puran, in their first encounter:

> I don't know where we became guilty. Why did the foreigners come? We were kings. We became subject. We were subjects, we became slaves. They named us as bond slaves … in many tongues. Our land vanished like dust before the storm ... we climb hills and build homes, the roads come chasing us. In pain we are stone, mute. .... Now no one can save us. We are unclean, in mourning, … but I say to you with great humility, you can't do anything for us. We became unclean as soon as you entered our lives.[18]

Many other dialogues shift among different languages and registers, ranging from the social worker's lingo, to old colonial terms indicating the lord or powerful masters (*Sarkar, Sarpanch, Babu, Maharaj*), or, the basic terms indicating food and local crops, foreign to the urban journalist coming from another part of India – much more so to the western reader (*dhal, kodo, Khajra* tubers). Devi does not explain why she chooses to keep some words in the tribals' language, in Hindu or, elsewhere, to add some colonial and contemporary English (such as

[17] Ibid., 146.
[18] Ibid., 120.

soft-drink, everybody's nature cure, agro-training). Each dialogue maintains a certain opacity, always becoming a failed mediation among different times, people and languages.[19]

The journalist, standing for the metropolitan subject the Western reader most likely identifies with, suddenly becomes aware of the existence of a pre-human other (the pterodactyl). The encounter opens up a passageway through different worlds. The story softens the border dividing myths and materiality, thus blending different temporalities, death and mourning, rain and drought, relief and starvation. This movement allows for a space where respect for the non/pre modern subject is possible, a space created by displacing the reader and leaving some hope in the ruins of global postcolonial incommunicability. Through this approach, Devi places on the reader the weight of tribal peoples' historical and linguistic sedimentations, as an ethical responsibility to bear. The power of a pre-modern subject encountering the postmodern is expressed in poetic terms, as silence and waiting, a strategy of displacement of any easy 'metropolitanism'. Before leaving Pirtha, in a conclusive imagined dialogue, Puran addresses the Civil Service worker, on their ethical and communicative failures:

> We have lost somewhere, to Bikhia's people. There was a message in the pterodactyl, and whether it was a fact or not, we missed it. We suffered a great loss, yet we couldn't know it. The pterodactyl was a myth and message from the start. … We built no communication point to establish contact with the tribals. For a few thousand years we haven't loved them, respected them. Where is the time now, at the last gasp of the century? Parallel ways, their world and our world are different. ... Our responsibility was to protect them. That's what their eyes spoke.... Only love, tremendous, excruciating explosive love can still dedicate us to this work … otherwise this aggressive civilization will have to pay a terrible price, destroying itself in the name of progress, each time, as we are destroying the primordial forest, water, living beings, the human. [20]

[19] Glissant's articulation of the right to opacity was developed against essentialism, as a political and poetical strategy based on the recognition of a political right of the other, on his/her freedom not to be defined. "Glissant moved towards an imagined space beyond the old retrograde forms of nationalism". Peter Hitchcock, *Imaginary States: Studies in Cultural Transnationalism*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 58.
[20] Ibid., 196.

A complex and layered text such as Devi's *Pterodactyl* is clearly a poetically powerful critique of any rational politics or ideology which locates the other on a map or in an archive, framing him/her in the past. No historical transition appears neatly defined, in its beginning or end. Gayatri Spivak's afterword to *Pterodactyl* translate the politics expressed by Devi in the current global context.

> The pterodactyl is not only the ungraspable other but also the ghost of ancestors that haunts our present and our future. I have no doubts that we must learn through the slow, attentive, ethical singularity that deserves the name of love, to supplement the necessary collective efforts to change the law, modes of production. .... Indeed, such a supplementation must become the relationship between the silent gift of the subaltern and the thunderous imperative of the Enlightment to use reason... One filling the other's gap.[21]

In *Death of a Discipline,* Spivak is similarly concerned with the reorganization of the archive of literature and its epistemic violence, which endangers the future of indigenous and marginal languages. With such urgency in mind, Spivak also declares her political project: "working for those at the margin, being able to deconstruct those collective identities based on class or ethnicity, to produce textured collectivities (weaved in by literature)".[22] She does so by announcing a death, an interruption which opens a space, to imagine an unpredictable, global collectivity.[23]

[21] Spivak's afterword to Mahasweta Devi, "Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha", in *Imaginary Maps*, 201.

[22] Spivak, DD, 46.

[23] She cites Woolf's call to "work even in poverty and obscurity" to make Shakespeare sister's ghost appear, a ghost made of feminine narrations. Ibid., 35-42.

In this section in which Spivak addresses the political collectivity of women, she points to the imperialist origin of Virginia Woolf's partial economic independence (self-supporting by the grace of imperialism). A subtle political remark of great impact, especially in contemporary neocolonial transnational feminism, achieved through Spivak's close reading of *A Room of One's Own*.

Politics and aesthetics in global disciplinary spaces

The future of postcolonial literatures, and the related issues of freedom and disloyalty to any canon, are given a complex interpretation by Gayatri Spivak. She strongly positions herself in the debate on the future of literary studies, provocatively declaring Comparative Literature dead. The Bengali critic uses the powerful device of an obituary for Comparative Literature in order to open a new critical space. The empty space left in the archive, allows the emergence of new collective subjects, and much needed interdisciplinarity.[24]

Death also opens a new space for the critic, an opportunity to rearrange the archive's fields of knowledge, in this case literature, according to the current temporal shift of globalization. Spivak provocatively positions her politics in relation to her discipline and institutional affiliation (English and Comparative Literature, at the prestigious Columbia University in New York). In her view, shaped by specifically North American debates concerning Comparative Literature and Postcolonial Studies, future critics should "interrupt the ghost dance by careful scholarship".[25] She offers close readings of texts by Conrad, Coetzee, Woolf, Condé, Salih and Devi, dedicating a shelf in the archive of literature to formerly marginalized subjects and stories. Her comments on such writings oscillate, moving across scales and between literary and political planes, with her well-known sensibility for the text. Dispersing such exercises throughout the book, she proposes a provincializing of the literary critic's discipline and method, in sharp opposition with the Eurocentric generalizations of world literature. The very idea of world literature as an encyclopaedia is refused.[26] So is the cosmopolitanism of "being at home in the world", which dwells in the idea of the global as a new site of power. Her rhetoric is informed by a strategic pessimism, deeply immersed in contemporary politics, yet sufficiently removed

[24] Spivak, DD, 16.

[25] Ibid., 53.

[26] For an accurate discussion of world literature's current debates, see Franco Moretti "Conjectures on World Literature", *New Left Review* 1 (February 2000), 54-68.

from it to allow for a utopian opening, questioning the complex role of literary criticism and its cultural production in the period of globalization. The ongoing political shifts may reshape disciplines, and destroy some archives, she argues. Therefore, she considers it useful to outline a prescriptive disciplinary politics, with a project and its related planning strategies. Judith Butler summarized Spivak's project in its political and literary dimensions, in her praise on the back cover of *Death of a Discipline*.

> Spivak deftly opposes the 'migrant intellectual' approach to the study of alterity. In its place, she insists upon a practice of cultural translation that resists the appropriation by dominant power and engages in the specificity of writing within subaltern sites in the idiomatic and vexed relation to the effacements of cultural erasure and cultural appropriation. She asks those who dwell within the dominant episteme to imagine how we are imagined by those for whom literacy remains the primary demand. And she maps a new way of reading not only the future of literary studies but its past as well.

The issues of writing within subaltern sites and appropriation or resistance to dominant power in cultural translations are certainly characteristics of a postcolonial approach. In this sense, she points to the ways in which postcolonial writers and languages have been appropriated. In fact, in her killing rhetoric she criticizes Postcolonial Studies as a spreading canon, which tends to be reduced to "very much India plus the Sartrian Fanon".[27] The hearth of her argument, however is her critique of interdisciplinary cosmopolitism, often identified with Cultural Studies, necessarily subject to appropriation because incapable of valuing the literary and linguistic specificity of the other. Ultimately, Cultural Studies is criticized by Spivak for its "indifferentiation, metropolitan nationalism", and for being "monolingual, presentist, narcissistic, not practiced enough in close reading even to understand that the mother tongue is actively divided".[28]

In contrast, Spivak considers the translator's role to be of utmost

[27] Spivak, DD, 36.
[28] Spivak, DD, 20.

strategic importance in giving depth to "the historical sedimentation of people and languages".[29] The hegemony of global English, which she cites in close connection with Cultural Studies, erases the possibility of understanding differentiation within a mother tongue (i.e. the fictional unity of India or Africa). What concerns Spivak politically is how new lines of power create more or less permeable borders and spaces for translation. She points to the differential between the cosmopolitan other, the migrant intellectual, who can easily cross borders, and those from peripheral countries increasingly policed, subaltern and distanced from global culture.

> The complicity of the local power lines with forces of global capital ... is a secret to the benevolent study of other cultures in the North. Here, a strong complicity between the bourgeois of the Third World and migrant intellectuals in the First cannot be ignored..... This is also the traffic line in Cultural Studies.[30]

Spivak is concerned that complicity and appropriation are deadly mechanisms excluding the subaltern and those who are neither cosmopolitan nor bourgeois.[31] However, in her dialogue with Postcolonial or Cultural Studies, she does not articulate how the two fields have allowed an important crossing of disciplinary borders, a crucial issue in the deadly institutional logic that separates literature into different archives. Postcolonial and Cultural Studies always

[29] Ibid., 18.
[30] Spivak, "Translator's note", in Devi, *Imaginary Maps*, 130.
[31] Others have been uneasy with the role interdisciplinary fields have played in a transnational emerging logic. As regards Gender Studies, Ella Shohat asks: "Given that there is no single feminism, how do we orchestrate these conflictual perspectives in order to rearticulate the feminist terrains of struggle foregrounding the densely woven web of relationality?... When feminism is invoked in academic institutions outside of Western spaces, it is often subjected to an (inter)disciplinary order that anxiously and politely sends it 'back' to the kingdom of area studies. There, the experts of the day, it is assumed, will tell us about the plight of women; each outlandish geographical zone will be matched with an abused bodily part. A doubly exclusionary logic (that which applies to women and to their geography) will quickly allot a discursive space for women as well as for gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender people from diverse regions of the world. Even within multicultural feminist and queer cartographies of knowledge, the diverse regions are often presumed in isolation from the 'center' and from each other." Ella Shohat, "Area Studies, Gender Studies, and the Cartographies of Knowledge", *Social Text* 20 (October 2002), 67-68.

relied on interdisciplinarity and challenged the closed archive. Iain Chambers reminds us clearly of the limited uses of Cultural Studies,

> Cultural Studies is not simply a radical additive to be stirred into the different mixes of historiography, sociology, film studies or literary criticism. It is suspended between these realms. It shadows them, questioning the nature and pertinence of their languages... existing ... as a wound in the body of knowledge, exposed to the infections of the world.[32]

One can argue that in some contexts, Postcolonial Literatures or Cultural Studies may have become a defined field, actively policing its borders. Yet, the fundamental assumptions and practices of such fields do not facilitate the construction of permanent archives and disciplinary walls. Perhaps this is the reason why established social sciences still fear Ethnic and Cultural Studies. In their clean, organized archives, dissecting the body (of knowledge) is safe, while leaving it exposed to the world is not. After having addressed Postcolonial and Cultural Studies as already appropriated cultural spaces, Spivak engages a dialogue with heavy, neatly archived disciplines, such as the social sciences, asking: "How can I, as a reader of literature, supplement the social sciences?"[33]

One wonders what Spivak means by social sciences. What kinds of continuities does she see between the vaguely addressed social sciences and the violently dissected Comparative Literature?

The answer lies in what the social sciences call methodology. Her project presents similar methods to traditional Area Studies: a close reading of texts in their original language, profound knowledge of non-Western cultures, specific and local knowledges which require "intimate engagement". If this methodology seems compatible, it is certainly not easy to detach it from the ideology of Western science, especially after decades of debates shaped by the postmodern critique of science. The complex processes that allow knowledge 'from-below' are certainly not only a question of method, especially since

[32] Iain Chambers, *Migrancy Culture and Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994), 123.
[33] Spivak, DD, 60.

deconstruction played a decisive role in the social sciences' contemporary crisis. Spivak seems to escape a crucial node: how the endorsement of a discipline, regardless of its radical history, gives to any defined 'field' a specialized expertise onto which its heavy authority is built. The horizon of encounter Spivak hopes for, between the social sciences and Comparative Literature, does not intersect the trajectory of the critical debates in the social sciences. Spivak is aware of the history of Area Studies.[34] Yet she feels comfortable imagining the role of a renewed Comparative Literature, as "supplementing the apparitions of Cultural Studies and Ethnic Studies as well as the arrogance of Area Studies where it retains the imprints of Cold War (sic)".[35]

Planetarity and the future anterior

Spivak, ventriloquizing Devi, addresses the responsibility of writing and reading. Literary Studies should politically value the otherness of languages in a democratic project 'from-below'.[36] Much like Devi,

[34] Ibid., 70. Quite differently, Edward Said held an extremely critical opinion of Area Studies and its experts: "The Committee of Concerned Asia Scholars (who are primarily American) led a revolution during the 1960s in the ranks of East Asia specialists; the African Studies specialists were similarly challenged by revisionists; so too were other Third World area specialists.... The U.S. academy had taken over the Orientalist mantle from the Europeans after World War II and the 'area specialist' lays claims to regional expertise, which is put at the service of government or business or both." Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 298.

[35] Even if the various post 9-11 ideological attacks on academia could not be predicted by Spivak, she does clarify in the first chapter of *Death of a Discipline*, "Crossing Borders", how Area Studies changed negatively. In general, her discussion reflects a notable political shift, not uncommon in American contemporary debates. Perhaps Spivak's proposal is partly responding to a war logic, and applying one of its dogmas: 'know your enemy'. In my reading, her work falls in the recurring cultural response to the 9-11 traumas, a call to realism. The war and its short-term logic adopted by the government reverberates among intellectuals in a call for 'more concreteness'. Such strategy presents an increasingly visible limit: a shift towards political realism erases any other poetic realms, leaving to 'theorists' the only choice to conflate their political responsibility with a realist poetics. Perhaps the incessant threats of a global war have constrained American theories and disciplines to loose some of their complexity.

[36] Ibid., 87.

she does not renounce mapping injustice, nor denouncing "responsibly the cruel ratios" of famines, debts and wars. In her closing remarks to *Imaginary Maps*, she cannot but ask another post-Marxist question: "How to raise hope without false promises?"[37]

Spivak refuses the global as a new disciplinary field, which she sees as thick with false promises. She proposes to find figurations to be dis/figured, which are not immediately ideologically comprehensible. Spivak prefers naming planetarity, a new ontological planetary reality. Planetarity, as the uncertain reconfiguration of place, is a concept in clear response to the contemporary paradigm of globalization, which she uses to shift the attention on language and its limits. Words such as globalization are inadequate to convey the presence of bodies and the un-imaginable materiality of the earth. In a sense, something remains opaque, indescribable, even when the planet makes us historical and social collectivities. Theorizing planetarity allows her to recognize a *futuranteriority*, an impossibility to translate the global into a clearly defined political project (such as the socialist revolution). Discussing planetarity implies longing for justice from a utopian space, while recognizing its impossibility. Such planetarity speaks with a collective poetic/political voice, also found in Devi's writings. On this topic, *Death of a discipline* offers a concluding, philosophical question, which is worth engaging on a different ground than that of disciplinary archives and borders: "Who slips in the human's place in humanism (sic) of the end of the day?"[38]

In this becoming collectivity, imagined at the end of the day, one can see many shadows moving; the female and the non-human-other are already moving in the dark, already using a queer, opaque language. For now, there may be a trace in the pterodactyl found in Devi's novel, and in other figurations emerging in female narrations, which draw a hopeful space of knowledge, on the border of maps, in written, spoken or sung forms. In this sense, Spivak imagines a new political and poetical space, where women's writings retrace memories and colonial traumas. In so doing, the critic creates a distance from any disciplinary

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid., 237. The question could be interestingly developed in terms of the blurring boundaries between the human and the post-human.

cage, sterilized house, or deadly archive. The writer simply refuses the unity of an authentic mother tongue.

Conclusion (the unarchivable residue)

Once the literary archive is open to be rearranged, a certain otherness can enter, and in so doing, some other texts, forms of writing and disciplinary criteria become useless. In this sense, the literary archive has already been crossed by forms of writings which challenge its exclusionary logic. Perhaps one example could be that of feminine narrations, which never considered language as a unified code for an authentic subject. Such an awareness, rooted in their being at the margin, is particularly useful in the contemporary global context, in which disciplinary boundaries are redesigned, and when languages are crossed by new differences. Ultimately, Spivak's and other postcolonial critics' reflections are located at the end of a Western temporality (and its project of a world literature). Spivak wishes to assassinate some forms of institutionalization of minorities studies, in order to escape politically dead strategies. Nonetheless, Spivak's argument fits in a post-Marxist tradition of political intellectual work, which crosses many interdisciplinary approaches, especially Postcolonial and Cultural Studies. Spivak also refuses most existing hybridizations, deemed too superficial, as if she lacked confidence in the capability of language to resist being mapped.

The face of the aging white man, the Western man, is not the only image emerging from the Borgesian labyrinth of the Literary Archive, other figures appear from the dark margins. Ultimately, Spivak's and Devi's works prepare the ground for an encounter with such figures, dwelling in English Literature as an archive in ruins, aware of its unhealed wounds, gaps and fractures.

Angelo Ferrillo

'*Con*-signing' the Past: South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The history of the archive, on the one hand
a history of conservation, is, on
the other hand, a history of loss.
(J. Paul Voss, Marta L. Werner)

...the archive is itself an aspiration
rather than a recollection.
(Arjun Appadurai)

The archive has always been a pledge,
and like every pledge, a token of the future.
(Jacques Derrida)

A 'double poetics'

The archive has gained increasing attention in the last few decades not only on the part of those interested in the study of history but more in general on that of scholars conducting research on memory and identity.

The construction of the archive is a compelling process which seems destined to remain indeterminate, ambiguous, never wholly decodable. If one reflects on the institution of an archive, one cannot avoid to consider a series of oppositions – visibility/concealment, order/disorder, outside/inside, memory/forgetting – as the archive is situated at the intersection of these binary oppositions. Archives

always imply choice: the selection of what must and must not be kept, what is worth remembering and what needs to be dismissed and will eventually fall into oblivion.

In his essay on the history and politics of archiving David Greetham has pointed out that every archive is invested with, but simultaneously suffers from, the "poetics of exclusion" comprising, in fact, the principles of inclusion and exclusion which ground its creation. Through his historicist analysis of the structural protocols and principles of archival canons, Greetham not only builds a counter-archive made of exclusions but he also gives evidence that every archive includes "cultural scraps, garbage leftovers, selections, bits of memory".[1]

These heaps of archival exclusions challenge one's sense of comprehension, one's need to plot and organize reality perfectly but also prove that the remains or discards are as necessary to an archive as the objects, the artefacts or the documents collected and preserved in it. Greetham maintains the intrinsic value of the excluded: the inevitable indeterminacy of the archive, which also concerns its poetics/politics, always undermines the relationship between the included and the excluded.

> The poetics of exclusion works, like the mind of God, in mysterious ways, ways in which it is impossible to establish either permanent principles of exclusion or methods of ensuring that what we deem to be excluded will remain so. Yes, the overt cultural acts of exclusion... may seem to contribute to the formulation of such a poetics, except for the irony that the more overt (and the more successful) the cultural exclusion the more the prurient and intrinsic value of the excluded may become.[2]

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault also discussed the significance of the archive in relation to its poetics, though from a different point of view. The archive is not "the sum of all the texts

[1] David Greetham, "The Cultural Poetics of Archival Exclusion", *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 32.1 (Spring 1999), 16.

[2] Ibid., 19.

that a culture has kept upon its person as documents attesting to its own past", it is instead "the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events" or rather "*the general system of the formation and transformation of statements*".[3] Foucault, then, conceives the archive as a functional concept stressing its ideality and complete virtuality. What is most interesting, however, is his implication that the description and the analysis of the archive seem possible only if one recognizes that there is always something which falls outside the archive, or beyond it, and which assures its very existence.

> The description of the archive deploys its possibilities (and the mastery of its possibilities) on the basis of the very discourses that have just ceased to be ours; its threshold of existence is established by the discontinuity that separates us from what we can no longer say, and from that which falls outside our discursive practice; it begins with the outside of our own language; its locus is the gap between our discursive practice.[4]

If the archive for Foucault is the "law of what can be said",[5] then its institution and description are feasible only by acknowledging that something has been left behind however it is defined: the unsayable, the un-archivable, the inter-dicted. Thus the archive's economy also includes its un-ecqnomy, its interiority relies on its exteriority, the inclusion and exclusion principles depend on one another.

The issue of inclusion/exclusion grounding the creation and institutionalization of the archive is crucial to any analysis of the production of history, whether individual or collective, and of the production, spread and circulation of knowledge. Archives are not conceived to be provisional. Every archive is always bound to the hope or desire for permanence, always tied to the persistence of what has been stored in it, of what it has retained. The documents, traces or products of

[3] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. Rupert Swyer (New York: Pantheon, 1982), 128-130; italics in the text.

[4] Ibid., 130-31.

[5] Ibid., 129.

History, of the histories housed in the archive become charged with meaning, part of a body of shared knowledge snatched from the past and consigned to future readings and interpretations. On the other hand, what has not been included in the archive, what falls outside of it, is considered unimportant or irrelevant and is inevitably destined to be forgotten.

As holders of shared knowledge the contents of an archive are believed to be neutral, therefore representing and/or reproducing a stable, uncontested truth. Yet, the traces and testimonies of the past are rather palimpsests, the result of contestations, translations and negotiations, the ultimate outputs of constant erasures and overwritings, the outcome of (his)stories which have been lived, written, read, interpreted, erased, re-written, re-read, re-interpreted.

Official archives, then, must not, cannot tell a single story; their claim to an essential truth is the measure of the self-imposed boundary, of the unattainable yet irreducible negotiation between different and contrasting histories. For this reason, while it exhibits the truth the archive also sheds light on half-truths and lies; while it celebrates History it displays other histories and when it makes voices resonate, it shows it is also haunted by silences or screams of pain.

The birth of an archive is a story of violence because each archive is the result of relationships marked by conflicts in which the glory of some aspects of the past is set against the humiliation of others, the celebration of one part is opposed to the execration of another. For these reasons the *corpus*/body of an archive shows flags raised with pride next to white flags waved out of desperation, it tells about the victor and the vanquished, the perpetrator and the victim: the celebrations and the wounds, whether symbolic or not, inflicted by history. The choice of what to include and exclude is owed to the archivists who, like the *archons* of ancient Greece, Derrida explains, not only ensure the security of the documents deposited in the archive but have also been granted the hermeneutic right to interpret them.[6]

[6] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, trans. Eirc Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 2 (hereafter cited as *AF*). According to Derrida, the archive functions both as a nomological entity due to its physical presence and as a topological entity due to its constitutive contents. To these two principles a third has to be added, what Derrida defines as the archive's ontological principle because the *arkhé*, from which the word archive derives, is not only a place of commandment but also one of commencement. The concept of the archive, therefore, is based on a triadic principle which puts together its inalienable elements: domicile, law and origin. The locus of the topo-nomological definitions, the *archeîon*, is both the place and the document of law, an edifice from which power and authority are exercised because the *archons*, those who are in command, can interpret the documents stored in the archive.

The question of interpretation is what makes the word archive uncertain. Nothing, according to Derrida, is "more troubled and troubling";[7] nothing is more uncannily disturbing. The constitution and interpretation of every archive are histories of compromises, complicities and plots, of interdictions and 'thou shalt nots', of both semi-private and semi-public connections. They always conceal the complexity of translation as each archive is "at once offered and unavailable for translation", it is simultaneously "open to and shielded from technical iteration and reproduction".[8]

The archontic principles of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The Derridean notion of the archon is a useful tool for thinking about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the committee established in 1995 by the South African parliament to investigate apartheid crimes, evaluate the request for and facilitate the granting of amnesty advanced by persons guilty of gross human right violations and promote the process of reconciliation in a society deeply wounded and torn apart by the conflicts of the recent South African past.[9]

[7] Ibid., 90.

[8] Ibid.

[9] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (hereafter TRC, Truth Commission or simply Commission) was set up by the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act (1995) to construct as complete a picture as possible of the deeply traumatized and divided past of the apartheid era in the period from 1960 to 1994. The act also established three committees within the TRC: the Committee on Human Rights Violations (HRVC) whose aim was to gather information from victims of past abuses after declaring each deponent a victim; the Committee on Amnesty (AC) which had to consider amnesty applications on the basis of some preconditions (the crime had to have been committed

Like a superior magistrate in ancient Greece, the Truth Commission has set itself up as the guardian and interpreter of the archive since the beginning. Its members – human rights activists, lawyers, theologians, historians, social workers and psychologists – have become the guardians of the archive not so much because they have safeguarded what was being stored, but mainly because they have ensured the collection, institutionalization and preservation of evidence from the past.[10] The members and components of the Commission have also claimed their 'publicly recognized authority' and the power to interpret the archive as the most privileged representatives of the new nation.

The Commission has allowed the past to speak, asking people to recall the errors of apartheid at the TRC's public and event hearings in order to unearth and face them. Yet, through its gathering of the traces and documents of the past, the Truth Commission has imposed an authoritative and unquestionable version of history which has become an absolute rather than a possible history.

The process of archiving evidence, of assembling information to create an archive is associated, as Derrida argues, with the function of

following a political objective, the person asking for amnesty had to provide a full disclosure of the act for which amnesty was requested); the Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee (R&RC) whose task was to make recommendations to the President regarding how to restore the human and civil dignity of the victims. The Commission also provided for an Investigative Unit which could carry out investigations by seizing any evidence or elements relevant to the investigation and subpoena and question people who appeared before the TRC. Between April 1996 and December 1997 some 22,000 statements from victims were collected,– 4,000 victims testified, 2,000 at public hearings –and more than 7,000 amnesty statements. The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act also provided for the compilation of a report, the Commission's *Final Report*, which was delivered to President Nelson Mandela on 29th October 1998.

[10] The Final Report lists the original seventeen members of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission whose names were published in the Government Gazette (N° 16885) on 15th December. They were Archbishop Desmond Tutu (Chairperson), Dr Alex Boraine (Vice-Chairperson), Ms Mary Burton, Adv Chris de Jager, the Revd Bongani Finca, Ms Sisi Khampepe, Mr Richard Lyster, Mr Wynand Malan, the Revd Dr Khoza Mgojo, Ms Hlengiwe Mkhize, Mr Dumisa Ntsebeza, Dr Wendy Orr, Adv Denzil Potgieter, Dr Mapule F Ramashala, Dr Fazel Randera, Ms Yasmin Sooka and Ms Glenda Wildschut. See *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report* (London: Macmillan, 1999), vol. I, 60 (hereafter cited as *TRC Report*).

unification, identification and classification defined as "the power of *consignation*".

> By consignation, we do not only mean, in the ordinary sense of the word, the act of assigning residence or of entrusting so as to put into reserve (to consign, to deposit), in a place and on a substrate, but here the act of *con*signing through *gathering together signs*.... Consignation aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration.... The archontic principle of the archive is also a principle of consignation, that is, of gathering together. [11]

Driven by the desire to 'shut the book on the country's past', to close the horrendous chapter in the apartheid story of the nation's past, the TRC, through the public hearings and the event hearings, *con*-signs to the 'rainbow nation' its archive while articulating an ideal configuration which can correct imbalances, resume crashed relations and promote reconciliation.[12] Yet, this gathering soon reveals the TRC's limits, its archontic power repressing the multiplicity of histories on the assumption that "truth has always been there, that it had simply been hidden from the public gaze".[13] For this reason the truth exhibited by the TRC is presented as the one and only truth, because the past in which the nation needs to recognize itself, recall and work through is unique.[14] While the archive cannot and should

[11] Derrida, *AF*, 3; italics in the text.

[12] The expression 'rainbow nation' symbolises the 'new' South Africa in the post-apartheid era. It was used for the first time by the Chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who also spoke of the 'rainbow people of god' presumably calling to mind the Old Testament story of the Deluge where the rainbow stands for God's promise not to judge and punish humankind any longer for the errors committed. Tutu probably used this phrase as it is also imbued with the symbolism of South African indigenous cultures in which the rainbow generally signifies hope and the assurance of a bright future. The image of the rainbow, however, has more obvious political derivations as the rainbow's colours symbolise the diversity of South Africa's multicultural, multiethnic and multiracial society. The 'rainbow nation' metaphor both informs and reinforces the vision of nation building.

[13] *TRC Report*, vol. I, 12.

[14] The TRC recognized the complexity of the concept of truth since the beginning. The

not accommodate a complete picture of the past, its consignation foreshadows an illusion of totality, because what the archive houses is what is necessary to know, at least what really counts for the future. This illusion of wholeness, this all-embracing structure, however, bears evidence of the inevitable gaps present both in the Mandate of the Commission and in its activities and proceedings.

On a national scale, the Mandate of the TRC restricts its analysis to a specific period from the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre to a few days after the first democratic elections in April 1994. The need to investigate the gross violations of human rights, moreover, limits the Commission's survey only to particular forms of sufferings. The TRC, in fact, does not investigate abuses and violations that occurred before 1960; it does not deal thoroughly with the economic policy of exploitation, with the discriminatory provisions related to education and other public services, with the forced removals of peoples from their lands that were part of the apartheid system. Although the deliberation on "defining gross human rights violations" insists that "the underlying objective of the legislators was to make it possible for the Commission to recognize and acknowledge as many people as possible as victims of the past political conflicts", this claim to inclusivity is evaded. The TRC does not discuss or confront the psychological effects and suffering caused by detention without trial when not accompanied by acts of torture, poisoning or death of the detainees, nor does it include other important categories in its hearings such as pass law prisoners and farm prisoners.[15]

Similarly, the Commission does not consider relevant international

Final Report, in fact, distinguishes between four different notions of truth: factual or forensic truth, personal or narrative truth, social or 'dialogue' truth and healing and restorative truth. Despite acknowledging the subjective, interactive and reparative dimensions of truth, however, the TRC accorded great prominence and privilege to factual or forensic truth. At any rate, the whole set of different truths foreshadow the TRC's wider project: the making of shared collective memory, the making of History and the making of the new nation.

[15] *TRC Report*, vol. I, 70-71. Pass laws involved racial monitoring of the black population and racial targeting of suspected political opponents. In 1960 these laws were also extended to women so each 'native' adult in South Africa was required to have a passbook. Failure by a black person to produce a pass or to conform to the administrative restrictions on his/her day-to-day movements resulted in arrest. Thus pass laws soon

aspects which contributed to the establishment and consolidation of the apartheid regime. The *TRC Report* acknowledges that apartheid has to be analysed and evaluated within two major international political contexts: the anti-colonial resistance movement in Africa, in particular in neighbouring territories, and the cold-war context which caused an increasing form of anti-Communism, especially after the 1948 election victory of the National Party. Despite these admissions, however, the Report does not mention the impact that post-colonial, post-1975 wars in Mozambique, and especially Angola, had on the South African conflict, considering that many South Africans were directly involved as combatants. The Commission, furthermore, does not examine the interconnection between apartheid and the second pole involved in the Cold War, the imperialist bloc, which surely influenced the post-1945 world system, both politically and militarily, as much as, but probably more than, the ghost of Communism.

This prohibited admittance, these national and international blind spots which accompany the consignation of the archive strengthen the need to examine what falls outside of it because it is this exteriority, as Derrida asserts, which ensures the possibility of memorization, repetition and reproduction: *"there is no archive without a place of consignation, without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority. No archive without outside*".[16] The archive which stores its traces is thus the same as that which aims to remove some of them; the principle of preservation grounding every archive seems to work on the basis of the acknowledgement of the destruction-drive which aims to efface the traces the archive holds. The outside of the archive is what ensures and guarantees memorization and repetition. Yet according to Freud, repetition, also intended as the compulsion to repeat, remains inseparably linked to the death drive and to destruction. As a consequence, for Derrida, what "permits and

became the primary instrument to arrest and charge political opponents. As the number of arrests increasingly grew with too heavy a financial burden for the State, the Department of Native Affairs decided that pass law offenders should not be taken to court but to labour bureaus where they would be forced to volunteer. This resulted in the establishment of a farm prison system.

[16] Derrida, *AF*, 11; italics in the text.

conditions archivization" is what "exposes to destruction, and in truth menaces with destruction", thus concluding that "the archive always works, and *a priori*, against itself."[17]

The archive Derrida speaks of, however, is not only a locus of consignation from which command is exercised; it is also the place in which memory is deposited. The archive, nevertheless, is not the guardian of spontaneous memory, as *mnémè*, nor of the memory intended as the outcome of the act of re-memoration, as *anamnésis*. The archive stores memory in the form of documents, as *hypomnéma*.[18] This is the reason why the Truth Commission produced two official archives: the first made out of proofs, documents and testimonies of the past, the second represented by its archived version of the past in the form of the *Final Report*.

The collection and reporting of individual histories of abuses constitute the way in which the Commission facilitates the comprehension of the traumatic past and reconstructs the victims' dignity, providing them with a 'safe' space, Derrida's substrate, within which they can tell their version of the past, restore their memories and foster a new humanity. The hearings are "the beginning of giving the voiceless a chance to speak, giving the excluded a chance to be centered and giving the powerless an opportunity to empower themselves". Yet, the testimonies are selected so that they can be representative of the national-building project and promote the reconciliation process. The choice of the memoirs meets the need for an ideal configuration: the making of a collective memory, a national narrative in which all South Africans can recognize themselves.[19]

However, since memory is by its very nature deeply unstable and revisionist, especially personal memory, the TRC strives to overcome this instability by deploying two devices: the textualization of the stories in written form and their inter-textualization, the latter allowing each single testimony to be inscribed within a public,

[17] Ibid., 12; Derrida's italics.

[18] Ibid., 11.

[19] *TRC Report*, vol. I, 110.

authoritative, master narrative of the South African past composed of a constellation of stories which mutually legitimate one another.[20]

The public space offered by the Truth Commission, then, is a patriarchic space setting its standards and laying down its laws which treat the several versions of the truth with partiality and does not guarantee equality of treatment to victims and perpetrators. The archontic violence of the Commission empathically accepts the victims' stories as samples of 'essential truth'. On the other hand, the testimonies of the perpetrators are subject to cross-examination as they follow an inquisitorial model which forces them to full disclosure of their stories of abuses before the injured party. As Susan V. Gallangher has explained the confessional discourse of the victims and the perpetrator is different. Whereas the victims' confessions are mainly performative as they are asked to convey information but also granted the right to enact their pain, the perpetrators' confessions are clearly constative as they have to provide the Commission with detailed information of their abuses and how they were committed in support of a political end.[21] In both cases the TRC's proceedings affect the public hearings' testimonies and the statement-taking methodology. By asking specific, fixed questions and refraining from asking others the members of the Commission silence some aspects of the testimonies, limiting public memory and official history. At any rate there is no possibility of contesting the TRC's methods or procedures. Both the victims and the perpetrators must position themselves in the prefixed patterns established by the TRC whose data of the past are not so much 'given' to as 'taken' from the past. Similarly the people who attend the hearings are mere spectators who cannot influence the making of the nation because they cannot convey or shape any meaning or interpretation. As Brent Harris has confirmed: "no subject positions were created for voicing opposition or alternatives to the state's nation building project".[22]

[20] See James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (London: Blackwell, 1992), 9-10 and Brent Harris, *The Past, the TRC and the Archive as Depository of Memory*, www.oslo2000.uio.no/program/ papers/m3c-harris.pdf, 87-8.

[21] Susan V. Gallangher, *Truth and Reconciliation: The Confessional Mode in South African Literature* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002), 125-28.

[22] Harris, *The Past, the TRC, the Archive*, 51.

Unearthing personal histories: Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*

The need to comprehend the multiplicity of truths, to allow the victims to tell their stories outside the archiviolitic principles of the TRC, to explore the relationship between collective memory, socially and politically oriented, and personal memory which resists assimilation is the core of Antije Krog's semi-fictionalized report *Country of my Skull*. The fragmentary, composite, mosaic-like structure of the book, which puts together transcripts from the TRC hearings, interviews, theoretical debates, newspaper reports, letters, poems, fables and allegories, dialogue, and several textual quotations from politicians and writers, is the first and probably the best answer of the writer to the all-including, but also all excluding, 'grand narrative' of the Truth Commission.

While awaiting and yearning for the promised unity, fragmentary writing suspends it and asks the reader to shun any conclusion. Krog's narrative technique best exemplifies and articulates the difficult relationship between personal memory, which demands to be represented without any interdiction, and collective memory which complies with the principles of representativeness, singularity, credibility and unequivocal interpretation.

In chapter 3 of *Country of My Skull* the fragments of the testimonies are presented without any reference to the context in which they were uttered, without any indication of the victims/witnesses who gave them; moreover they are neither commented on nor enclosed in an encompassing narrative. Each fragment stands out alone against the official history set up by the TRC, complete/incomplete in and of itself. The first of these fragments, the first of all the fragments in the book, is distinguished from the others by the absence of quotation marks.

> Beloved, do not die. Do not dare die! I, the survivor, I wrap you in words so that the future inherits you. I snatch you from the death of forgetfulness. I tell your story, complete your ending – you who once whispered beside me in the dark.[23]

This fragment, which does not give voice to a witness, but probably

[23] Krog, *CS*, 38.

to the writer herself, represents the most comprehensive explanation of the reason which has induced Krog to tell/collect her book, her archive.[24] The initial injunction – 'do not die' – reinforced by the verb 'dare' and by the exclamation mark, is, primarily, a command not to forget, to keep the victims' memory alive. The preservation of these memories is ensured by language enfolding the victims ('I wrap you in words'), allowing the writer to relate their stories ('I tell your story') and complete them ('complete your ending').

By inserting the victims' voices in her book, Krog allows them to locate themselves within the collective memory, though outside its rules of formation, and to convey their feelings. The writer strives to unbind the victims from the chains of the past, from those (white)'mind-forged-manacles' that had silenced them, depriving their language of the ability to signify and, above all, to publicly communicate their pain. Some fragments later, one of the unnamed victim speaks.

> The sun was bright… but it went dark when I saw him lying there. It's an everlasting pain. It will stop never in my heart. It always comes back. It eats me apart. Sonnyboy, rest well, my child. I've translated you from the dead.[25]

As a survivor, the writer, like the witness of the fragment, feels committed – but at the same time is eager – to accomplish her duties towards the past: resuscitate the dead, bring them back to the present to give some meaning to their stories, translate them into a language striving to represent the unrepresentable. This obligation towards the victims, however, raises a tricky question which forces Krog to doubt her proper right to write. After the first extenuating day of the collection of testimonies, she records:

[24] There is no clear evidence that this fragment is by Krog herself, as it is set apart from the main body of the text like the other ones from the victims' testimonies. However, the absence of quotation marks and dots supports this idea. Similarly, the fragment is unlikely to be Krog's appropriation of a victim's testimony as this would clash with her literary aesthetics.

[25] Ibid., 40.

> No poetry should come forth from this. May my hand fall off if I write this. So I sit around. Naturally and unnaturally without words. Stunned by the knowledge of the price people have paid for their words. If I write this, I exploit and betray. If I don't I die.[26]

The writer's dilemma confronts the need to relate the stories of the victims including their blind spots, their inexplicable and uncommunicable aspects, without imposing her ordering, archontic authority, typical of every writer, which would articulate into an ideal configuration what demands instead to remain disarticulated.

Krog responds to this dilemma, as Saul Tobias has argued, by renouncing her authorship, when necessary, thus identifying herself with the victims or by speaking not merely for her own benefit but also for the sake of another.[27] Through these narrative devices she manages not to betray herself but simultaneously to make the victims claim their right to speak for themselves in the deepest, most intimate and direct way.

Yet, even when this aim seems to have been achieved, something is irremediably lost, is consigned to inexorable forgetting. Language is inadequate to convey both the victims's stories and Krog's writing, unsuited to tell the untellable. As one of the unnamed victims says: "This inside me... fights my tongue. It is... unshareable. It destroys... words".[28] Krog insists on the failure of language to represent, to name the atrocities of the past, to report them. "My experience tells me that there is no way you can begin to imagine the language, the rhythm, the imagery of the original stories".[29] Despite relying on the ability of language to remain – "the language...it stays"[30] –, this language which signifies the horrors of apartheid remains partly unspoken, as incomplete as the victims' fragments.

Ultimately, the way victims/witnesses abruptly speak for

[26] Ibid., 66.

[27] Saul Tobias, "History, Memory and the Ethics of Writing: Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*", international conference *TRC: Commissioning the Past* (Johannesburg: 7-9 June, 1999), 11. Available at www.trcresearch/ papers.org.za.htlm.

[28] Krog, *CS*, 39. Dots in the text.

[29] Ibid., 312.

[30] Ibid., 51.

themselves without any introduction or context, the inconsistent use of quotation marks or the use of fragments of transcripts from TRC witnesses' speech to substitute authorial explanations, seem, in Méira Cook's words, to be "part of a larger project: to foreground the inherent difficulties of address in relating these testimonies, and to convincingly demonstrate that 'truth', and, by implication, narrative, is always already contingent, subjective, and improvisatory".[31]

The victims' direct or indirect report of their truths revolves around the performativity of the body which changes into a theatre of memory and violence. Making the body visible before the Commission, always within sight, is essential for the testimony itself as it is an archive which preserves its own traces, in the form of the physical wounds inflicted by history. The dragged, beaten, bloodstained, maimed, split up, massacred or humiliated body becomes the test-bed to corroborate the authenticity of the testimonies and even when this referent of dreadful memory is absent, the survivors claim it ("I want his hands back"[32]), demand that the bodies of their loved ones be recovered, identified, buried again or ask that the body's outrage be staged.

The story of captain Jeffrey Benzien and his victim Tony Yengeny is almost a parable through which it is possible to understand how violence turns into spectacle. The representation, before the TRC and under the watchful eye of the media, of the instrument of torture used by the frightful perpetrator towards his victims engenders a narrative in which the body, as Bester has highlighted, becomes a performative site of violence.

> The body, altered by violence, re-enacts other altered bodies dispersed in time and space; it also re-enacts political discourse and even the movement of history itself. But the physically marked body becomes not only a site but also a sight of the discursive re-enactement of violence...[33]

[31] Méira Cook, "Metaphors for Suffering: Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*", *Mosaic*, 34.3 (September 2001), 81.

[32] Krog, *CS*, 39.

[33] Bester Rosy, "At the Edges of Apartheid Memory", international conference *TRC: Commissioning the Past* (Johannesburg: 7-9 June, 1999), 4. Available from www.trcresearch/ papers.org.za.htlm.

The visualised story of the 'wet bag method' is the double spectacle of violence and its re-enactment which allows victims to reacquire control over their bodies just at the moment of their highest exposure. This spectacle, as Krog shows, is disturbing but cannot be missed.

> At Yengeni's insistence, Benzien demonstrated the wet bag method.... The judges... jump up so as not to miss the spectacle. Photographers come running, not believing their luck. And the sight of this bluntly built white man squatting on the back of a black victim, who lies face down on the floor, and pulling a blue bag over his head will remain one of the most loaded and disturbing images in the life of the Truth Commission.[34]

Benzien's performance as perpetrator, Bester continues, is "a narrative of inversion"[35] in which his body, the body of the torturer, is turned into the body of the tortured as it is both visually 'marked' by television cameras and photographic images and by the victim's strong language of accusation. At the moment of his material complicity, Benzien becomes the victim of its violence. Thus, its (re)incrimination, de-contextualized in itself, is decriminalized while the victim is somehow criminalized. This narrative of inversion, then, foreshadows the dangers of the we-were-all-victims rhetoric which parallels the other rhetoric which also informed the TRC, the need to recognise that there is a 'little perpetrator' in everyone.[36]

Captain Benzien's testimony is also significant as it allows Krog to explore the issue of memory loss. While the victims show their urge, as unrestrainable as it is painful, to bear witness to their stories – "We tell stories not to die of life" [37] –, to permit the memory which defends them, to get over the trauma of the past which offends them, the perpetrators do not remember, maintaining that some events did

[34] Krog, *CS*, 93.

[35] Bester, "At the Edges of Apartheid Memory", 8.

[36] See Jeremy Cronin, "A Luta Dis-Continua? The TRC Final Report and the Nation Building Project", international conference *TRC: Commissioning the Past* (Johannesburg: 7-9 June, 1999), 9-10. Available from www.trcresearch/ papers.org.za.htlm.

[37] Krog, *CS*, 64.

not happen at all. The victims' narrative impulse, their memory bulimia, sets itself against the perpetrators' resistance, their refusal to bear the burden of their abuses, their memory anorexia.

> There are probably three kinds of memory loss. The first is voluntary – you change your memory because you are under threat, because you cannot bear to live with the reality. The second kind is involuntary – something is so traumatic that it rips a hole in your memory... But there is also a third kind of memory loss that occurs when you testify in public. Kotze [a psychologist] says Benzien's stress levels were so compounded by having to testify and his anxiety about how this might affect the last bits of life he has with his wife and children...[38]

Whether voluntary, involuntary or the result of a rise in stress levels caused by public confession, the perpetrators' amnesia is one of the most unresolved and thorny issues related to apartheid memory. After all, as Krog observes: "How to distinguish between lies and memory loss?"[39]

Yet it is in the overcoming of this anorexia that the promise for a real reconciliation lies. Krog's report struggles from the first to the last page against the deep sense of guilt each South African feels for the horrors of the past of which s/he was the agent or conscious but inept witness; against all those subtle or silent forms of forgetfulness implicated in the creation of a national archive.[40]

[38] Ibid., 99.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Jacqueline Rose has examined the question of accountability in relation to lack of necessary action starting from a request for amnesty advanced by an Indian woman for her 'apathy'. Although the Commissioners recognized that 'apathy' was, in fact, an act of omission, the request was not accepted as omission did not fall under the rubric of offence or delict. See: "Apathy and Accountability: South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission", *Raritan* 21.4 (Spring 2002). Krog also refers to four different categories of guilt. Following the formulations made by German theologians after the Second World War, she distinguishes between criminal, political, moral and metaphysical guilt. While the first two concern people who directly or indirectly committed murders, the last two include people who did not do enough and were passive or those who outlived the victims. She observes, quoting Karl Jaspers: "We survivors did not seek [death]. We did not go into the

Yet forgetting, as Nietzsche wonderfully explained, is as necessary as remembering because it is in between the two that the essence of truly living occurs. This boundary point at which the past must be partly forgotten opens the possibility to relate to history critically. For Nietzsche critical history overcomes both the limit of monumental history with its emphasis only on great moments of the past, linked to each other through and endless chain of events, and that of antiquarian history which reveres any element of the past as worthy for it is too preservationist. Critical history is what manages to keep the difficult balance of living 'unhistorically' and yet with memory.

> Here it becomes clear how necessary it is to mankind to have, beside the monumental and antiquarian modes of regarding the past, a third mode, the critical… If he is to live, man must possess and from time to time employ the strength to break up and dissolve a part of the past: he does this by bringing it before the tribunal, scrupulously examining it and finally condemning it… It is not justice which here sits in judgement; it is even less mercy which pronounces the verdict: it is life alone, that dark, driving power that insatiably thirsts for itself. Its sentence is always unmerciful, always unjust, because it has never proceeded out of pure well of knowledge; but in most cases the sentence would be the same even if it were pronounced by justice itself.… It requires a great deal of strength to be able to live and to forget…[41]

By sweeping away a part of the past the victims and the perpetrators can rid themselves of the burden of history, get through the short circuits within the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, caused by searching the truth at all costs, by the endeavour to find unity where there is discontinuity, to create a monumental history where there have been many contrasting histories and by the idea that forgiving equals forgetting.

streets when our Jewish friends were led away; we did not scream until we too were destroyed. We preferred to stay alive, on the feeble, if logical ground, that our death could not have helped anyone. We are guilty of being alive." Krog, *CS*, 123.

[41] Friedrich Nietzsche (1874), "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life", *Untimely Meditation*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 75-6.

For all South Africans suspended between the total refusal of the past and the acknowledgment of their participation in the events that shaped it, there opens the difficult and dangerous opportunity to live Nietzche's *Unhistorisch*, a way to recover from the scars of the violent conflicts of the past. To this extent the words uttered by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the Truth Commission's President, assume a new meaning and give voice to a real promise, to South Africa's pledge to the future.

> We should all be deeply humbled by what we've heard, but we've got to finish quickly and really turn our backs on this awful past and say: Life is for living.[42]

[42] Cited in Krog, *CS*, 42.

Fiorenzo Iuliano

Tacit Cruelties: archive of the body and violence of pleasures

Your spring & your day are wasted in play,
And your winter and night in disguise.
(William Blake, *Nurse's Song*)

Body and archive

In his text *Archive Fever*, Jacques Derrida emphasizes the layered structure of the archive, whose complexity lies in the composite articulation and juxtaposition of different signs, involved in a mechanism of mutual reference and deferral never to be subsumed in a conclusive and comprehensive synthesis, despite the overhanging menace of a superimposed system of global signification provided by historiography. Derrida interrogates the genesis of the archive, the multiple and sometimes contrasting meanings ascribed to it, and the ways in which, as an epistemic tool, it opens up new directions for investigating the field and the limits of historiography. The archive is a normative notion, a hermeneutical instrument, a topological scheme; it assembles signs and provides them with a regulatory and, to some extent, teleological value. The collection of signs, the 'con-signing', is a normative as well as an hermeneutical act – the archive is a 'topo-nomologic' construct, a means through which the signs are collected and at the same time deciphered, and whose authority and sovereignty is guaranteed by the powerful forces embodied by the archons, the only authorities entitled to exert their power upon it.[1]

[1] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 3.

Derrida discusses and interrogates the archive along the silent track of the 'Freudian impression'. His thought proceeds, as usual, through metonymical suggestions, progressive and juxtaposed hints for speculation that create a constellation of thoughts and ideas, rather than an organic dissertation.

My aim in this essay is to follow or to parallel a metonymical route similar to Derrida's, trying to make a connection between the terms I want to address, not in order to construct a final and comprehensive thesis, but merely to show affinities, similarities, subtle evocations and sometimes strange equivalences. I wish to speak of the archive of the body and of the body of the archive; and I wish to speak of the power of violence in the constitution of both the body and the archive, where by violence I mean a regulatory instance capable of imposing a meaning to the objects it threatens. I will examine some texts that question the role of violence and representation, and the interaction between these two notions: what violence comes to stand for, once it is represented, and what it comes to stand for once it is avoided, repressed, and substituted by representation.

To this purpose, Jean Luc Nancy, Judith Butler and U.S. writer Stephen Greco will be interpellated. Nancy, in his *Corpus*, deals with the notions of body and corporality and their role in the contemporary political and epistemic scenery; in "Phantasmatic Identification and the Assumption of Sex", Judith Butler examines the constitution of the (hetero)sexed self as an act of violence; while in the short-short story "Good with Words" by the American writer Stephen Greco violence is theatrically reshaped in the forms and the gestures of sadomasochistic gay sex, and is, at the same time, rhetorically erased and deactualized.[2]

Jean Luc Nancy traces a suggestive parallel that connects the body and the archive: the body, 'corpus' in Latin, also stands for collection of norms and laws.

[2] Jean Luc Nancy, *Corpus* (Paris: Éditions A. M. Métailié, 1992); Judith Butler, "Phantasmatic Identification and the Assumption of Sex", in *Bodies That Matter. On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993); Stephen Greco, "Good with Words", in *The Sperm Engine* (San Francisco: Green Candy Press, [1987] 2002), now in David Leavitt and Mark Mitchell, eds., *The New Penguin Book of Gay Short Stories* (London: Penguin, 2003).

> ...a catalogue instead of a logos, the enumeration of an empirical logos, without transcendental reason, a gleaned list, aleatoric in its order and in its completeness, a consecutive, laboured recitation of parts and pieces. ... The model of the corpus is the Corpus Juris, the collection or compilation of the Institutions, the Digests, and the other Codes of all the articles of the Roman law. It is not a chaos, nor an organism: the corpus stands, not exactly between the two, but rather elsewhere.[3]

The notion of corpus is seen by Nancy as disrupting the organic coherence of the archive: the body is, like a 'corpus', a collection of data, of signs, perhaps of suggestions, which, however, never amount to a regulatory scheme, a conclusive and comprehensive system capable of summing up all the instances at stake. The body is read (or perceived) as a 'corpus' and not as an 'organon'; it is a collection of signs moving on a metaphoric surface, which collide and blur into each other miming the coherence they lack. The 'organon', on the contrary, stands for a coherent 'summa' of consequential and interdependent norms, arranged in a vertical sequence, where each item depends on the one that precedes it and creates the nomological bases for the following one.

The 'organon', a well established notion in the Aristotelian philosophical tradition, is a collection of texts dealing with logical and scientific methods, ranging from the analysis of ontological categories of the existent to the exposition of the principle of syllogistic logic. On the other hand, modern thought has its own 'organon' in Francis Bacon's work, his 1620 *Novum Organum*, characterized by a pragmatic and at the same time strictly rational stance, which, drawing on Aristotle, established the deductive and scientific rules according to which human knowledge had to proceed in order to arrive at truth.

The 'corpus' cannot body forth the 'organon' – this can be inferred from Nancy's words – and it is not so much meant to embody any coherence as to replicate it, and to literally give body to an imagined coherence depriving it therefore of any meaning and showing in exemplary fashion the lack of ground from which logos draws its strength. The body finds its natural, but

[3] Nancy, *Corpus*, 47-48; my translation. I wish to thank my friend Gianna Fusco who helped me translate the quotations from *Corpus* into English.

at the same time controversial, form, in the act of writing: the *corpus juris* is a written text that instances the force of the law, opposing the metaphysical and transcendent value of the *corpus Christi* from which Nancy's speculation starts – the body whose immateriality comes to be the most craved object in Western culture, devoured, incorporated, digested in order to achieve an immaterial, disembodied, exclusively spiritual salvation located in the farthest and most unreachable elsewhere. The 'corpus juris' is the secular, down-to-earth, reassuring transcription of this unreachable body, its immanent descent among men and its translation in terms that are not superimposed, but commonly shared and consensually accepted.

The secular and rational reshaping of this body of salvation comes to be a collection of norms, that is, an act of writing; paradoxically enough, the body of salvation can circulate and make sense among people only as writing, and only once translated into a 'corpus', a collection of sentences – an archive – which from its very start stands for something else, replicating and replacing the metaphysical unattainability of the body of salvation. The corpus is not the actual body, Nancy seems to suggest; it is entangled in the same net of mutual referentiality and symbolic dependence, but the body as flesh or as performance – or illness, counter-sexuality, erotic and imaginative power that disrupts the certainties of the *corpus juris* – is posterior, marginal, derived from a process of exclusion and abjection.

The body as archive can emerge as a provocative and performative response to the force of the law and to its regulatory strength, preserving on itself the traces of different and disseminated processes of repression, abjection and refusal. It is a body that retains in its structure the signs of a past superficiality by now completely incorporated, as Freud underlines in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

> Indeed embryology, in its capacity as a recapitulation of developmental history, actually shows us that the central nervous system originates from the ectoderm; the grey matter of the cortex remains a derivative of the primitive superficial layer of the organism and may have inherited some of its essential properties.[4]

[4] Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Siegmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton & Company, 1990), 29.

As a collection of traces, the body is the body of writing, or, as Jean Luc Nancy writes, "restless discourse, casual syntax, declination of occurrences. *Clinamen*: a prose inclined toward the accident, fragile, fractal … Corpus: a writing that travels and sees, one after the other, all the lands of the body".[5]

Corpus instead of organum, clinamen instead of logos: there seems to emerge a perception of the body and corporality which, bypassing Aristotle and Bacon, draws on Epicurus (or Lucretius) and maybe Deleuze in the attempt to find more suitable patterns for philosophical speculation, and whose most appropriate structure is displayed on the surface and in spatiality – meant as a mechanism to distance, create spaces, gaps and voids, similar to writing and to the material disposition and arrangement of signs on a sheet of paper or in electronic synapses. The body is archive insofar as it parallels the process of writing, which is first of all an act of touching and distancing, a performative and never ending 'fort/da'. "Writing is not signifying. But it must be said that this – reaching the body, touching the body, *touching*, at last – is what constantly happens in writing".[6]

The body as archive is also the body of repression. In Freudian terms, repression is crucial to understand how impulses and drives, thoughts and gestures, undergo the process of archiving. For his part, Derrida insists on the importance of repression in structuring the archive, maintaining that his 'mal d'archive' has been conceived as a 'Freudian impression', and retracing the articulated semantic and etymological spectrum of the words impression-repression. As he has argued, the English word 'impression', and its association with the psychoanalytic word, 'repression', refers among other things to a typographical jargon:

> The first impression is scriptural or typographic: that of an inscription … which leaves a mark at the surface or in the thickness of a substrate. … Can one imagine an archive without foundation, without substrate, without substance, without subjectile?[7]

[5] Nancy, *Corpus*, 49-50.
[6] Ibid., 12-13.
[7] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 26-27.

At the same time, 'impression' can also be understood as a suggestion, an indefinite idea not clearly shaped, an embryonic form of thought, whose extreme vagueness is fundamental and constitutive of its inner essence, a notion that cannot be completely read as transparent. The 'mal d'archive', or the 'Freudian impression', emerges out of a mixture of these meanings, and of their (more or less) legitimate, not to say spurious, affinity with the Freudian 'repression'.

I will try to proceed along the same metonymical routes traced by Derrida in approaching the archive as a moveable chain of signifiers, hinged on the dyad 'impression-repression'. The English word 'repression' does not account for all the nuances at play in the German words that express the same meaning. Derrida hints at this metonymical dynamic, by pointing to the shifting signifiers which convey, in French, English and German, the meaning of 'repression': 'Verdrängung', repression, 'refoulement'.[8] A profound affinity connects the notions of 'repression' and 'representation'. The word used by Freud is 'Verdrängung', but a similar association is contained in legal German, where the word 'Vertretung' means 'representation, substitution, remotion'. Thus the Freudian repression comes to be a substitution but also a representation or rather, a substitution achieved through a representation – the superimposition of a cathected, empowered figure designed to act (or to speak) in one's stead.

Violence and memory

Derrida maps the rich and articulated semantic spectrum that constellates the word 'impression', but his words seem to miss one implication, which binds up the archive with violence. Impression is a wide-ranging term, as he has pointed out, conveying an array of nuances that either blur or annihilate each other. Impression – as pressure, forcing – is also an act of violence; if it is one of the bases of the archive, it follows that memory is caught in a complex dynamics of forces and drives clashing against one another. Freud, too, commonly refers to pushes, breakings, forced drawings and so

[8] Ibid., 28.

forth to address the mechanisms of repression and memory, using a lexicon connotated violently. Strangely enough, Derrida does not refer to a crucial text in which memory and impression are entwined in a mutually inclusive-exclusive play. Friedrich Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality*, written in 1887:

> ... it is by no means merely a passive inability to be rid of an impression once it has made its impact, nor is it just indigestion caused by giving your word on some occasion and finding you cannot cope, instead it is an active desire not to let go, a desire to keep on desiring what has been, on some occasion, desired, really it is really the will's memory. [9]

Memory itself is produced through violence, as Nietzsche forcefully asserts,

> When man decided he had to make a memory for himself, it never happened without blood, torments and sacrifices ... all this has its origin in that particular instinct which discovered that pain was the most powerful aid to mnemonics .[10]

The body can be resignified as a locus apt to incorporate and reconfigure the archive only if it is a violated body, a body on which violence is forcefully impressed.[11] Again, the impression: a forced,

[9] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1887] 1994), 39.

[10] Ibid., 41. Deleuze and Guattari, too, define *On the Genealogy of Morality* as the "great book of modern ethnology". They maintain that the body in pain, marked by the 'sign', is the first step toward the complete organization of the fluxes – which constitute the primitive 'territorial machine' – into the compartmentalized dynamics of the 'socius': "All the stupidity and arbitrariness of the laws, all the pain of the initiations, the whole perverse apparatus of repression and education, the red-hot irons, and the atrocious procedures have only this meaning: to breed man, to mark him in his flesh, to render him capable of alliance, to form him within the debtor-creditor relation, which on both sides turns out to be a matter of memory – a memory straining toward the future." Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: The Athlone Press, [1972] 1984), 190.

[11] Sigmund Freud, on the other hand, suggested a relationship between sadism and the

more intense, somehow hurting gesture, which leaves its marks and survives its actuality.

The impression serves memory, but at the same time it marks the body. It is intimately connected to flesh and blood, to the inscriptions on the body, and to the practices of reconfiguring bodies through a more or less violent transformation, be it produced by surgery, drugs, cyber-technologies, or simply by piercings and tattoos.

If the body as a whole bears on itself the traces of a violent impression, the sexed body, or rather, the 'hetero-sexed' body, is the site in which the fluctuation of violent drives and archiving needs finds a concretion, the symbolical locus that enacts the production of a sanitized memory. This memory must be preserved and exhibited as exemplary, inasmuch as it is the result of a complex process of exclusion that finally culminates in the paradigm of the legitimate heterosexual body. Judith Butler acutely explores the evolution of this process, arguing that the production of heteronormative bodies and sexuality implies the double move of incorporation and repudiation of phantasmatic abject identities. Butler's text is also marked by continuous references to the force of violence: she speaks of "the trembling body" produced by the law, the "cruel strategies of erasure", the "abjected spectres that *threaten* those very subject-positions", and then states, "the question here concerns the tacit cruelties that sustain coherent identity, cruelties that include self-cruelty as well, the abasement through which coherence is fictively produced and sustained".[12]

The close link existing between words and their illocutory power, on the one hand, and bodies and their materiality, on the other, is stressed by Butler, who points to the dynamics that produce heterosexual normativity and install it as the natural paradigm from which the so-called anomalies break away.[13] Bodies "come to

history of civilization; in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* he wrote: "The history of human civilization shows beyond any doubt that there is an intimate connection between cruelty and the sexual instinct; but nothing has been done towards explaining the connection, apart from laying emphasis on the aggressive factor in the libido." *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, [1905] 2000), 25.

[12] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 101, 112, 113 (my italics), and 115.

[13] This theme has been taken up and extensively analyzed by Butler in her following

matter", Butler affirms, both in that they come to materiality, acquiring a legitimate and sanitized material shape, and in that they enter the discursive and normative field consistent with the codes of heterosexual normativity;[14] otherwise, they are condemned to inhabiting the phantasmatic (and psychotic) realm of abjection, and stand for the unmentionable and immaterial locus of perverse desire – which can never be (symbolically) rescued from its role as a threatening and cautionary instance. As she argues, "the limits of constructivism are exposed at those boundaries of bodily life where abject or delegitimated bodies fail to count as 'bodies'".[15]

Butler maintains that the assumption of sex, far from being a natural act, is the result of a set of strategies of exclusion, which produce the abject figures of the "feminized fag and the phallicized dyke", as haunting and threatening sites of abjection.[16] The heterosexual and heteronormative identity is produced through the identification with and the subsequent rejection of these symbolical sites; this fluctuating dynamic never achieves its final goal and perpetually constitutes menacing identifications that need to be overcome in order to gain a steady, permanent and reassuring position of legitimate identity. However, the process of exclusion is not a definitive one, as Butler observes: "it is not … that a subject disavows its identifications, but, rather, that certain exclusions and foreclosures institute the subject and persist as the permanent or constitutive spectre of its own destabilization".[17]

Identity, like memory, is produced and enforced through violence; the body as a 'corpus', by now readable in its materiality and threatening actuality, is born of violence, and must preserve and exhibit the traces of the impression in order to achieve a permanent identitarian status. Identity itself, and heterosexual identity in

texts, especially *Excitable Speech*, but also *The Psychic Life of Power*, both published in 1997.

[14] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xii.

[15] Ibid., 15. A similar thesis is exposed by Butler in her recent *Precarious Life. The Power of Mourning and Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 2004).

[16] Butler, *Bodies that Matter,* 96.

[17] Ibid., 116.

particular, must get through the violence of the abject identification in order to stabilize its own normative character. To Butler's reflection, identification-through-abjection occurs (or may occur) as the result of specific historical circumstances – once more, ontogenesis replicates phylogenesis, and a significant correspondence between a psychoanalytical and a socio-historical process takes place. This does not simply mean that circumstances generate such striking coincidence between otherwise different and independent processes, but that the same mechanisms of dynamic identification and repudiation that map the emergence of a viable and legitimate identity inform the constitution of social agencies as well.

The erotic and cathected site of abjection is represented not simply by gay sex or gay subjectivity, but, as Stephen Greco's "Good with Words" illustrates, by the 'stigma' produced by the Aids spread, at once incorporated and refused through the mechanisms of representation.

Sex and simulation

Memory, violence, body, simulation. Simulation itself as violence, or perhaps simulated violence as a rhetorical inscription on the body, capable of rendering the body the apt site to enact the mechanisms through which the violence of history is displayed. "Good with Words" first appeared in the gay magazine *Advocate Men* in 1987, when the debate about Aids and safe sex, especially gay safe sex, was reaching its momentum in the United States.[18] It is a short-short story with almost no plot, which describes a scene of sadomasochistic sex among three men. Under the menace of Aids, safe sex was considered the only possible way to escape the risks of contagion; thus, sexual (sadomasochistic) intercourse among the three central characters (the narrator Stephen, his friend Paul, and another man) is turned into mere representation or, to some extent, into a rehearsal. In this tale, a central role is played by words and verbal violence, which must replace the typical gestures and behaviours of sadomasochism, evoking and imitating them. The

[18] Further reflections on the theme of safe gay sex and Aids can be found in Simon Watney, *Policing Desire. Pornography, Aids and the Media* (New York: Methuen, 1987).

sadomasochistic bodies mime the experience of pain to which they are subtracted, and which is achieved through simulation, through a theatrical gesture that renders the bodies themselves blank sites to be mapped by the actual forces operating in the historical dynamics.

The attainment of pleasure is earned through a baroque mechanism of representation, and through the verbal play in which the three characters seem to be completely absorbed. Towards the end, the narrator comments:

> I couldn't help thinking how dismal a conclusion a stranger would have drawn simply by reading a transcript of our encounter. And even if he'd been there himself, would a Times reporter or health department official have understood how loving it all was?[19]

This tale shifts the attention to the connection existing between violence and simulation, and upon the immediacy and immediate consequentiality of the shift from violence to simulation, or violence as simulation. Violence cannot be identified with simulation, even in the case of literary texts where violence is narrated as its actuality exerts its force even when it is merely described. But at stake, now, is the menace of illness, perceived as a sort of intrusion, a 'foreign' element, which compels Greco to write of sex and violence as and through an act of cautious simulation, in his remembering, or maybe regretting, a lost 'golden age' of gay liberation and free sexuality, in an era marked by the threat of Aids and of its biopolitical consequences. He writes: "... I found a scene ... that would have seemed innocuous enough four or five years ago, but now, in the era of Aids, took on a faintly unsettling quality".[20]

History makes its abrupt irruption into the somehow enchanted realm of gay sex and the American urban gay community in the 1980's: the spread of Aids and its stigma, violently attached to gay people, represented the abrupt interdiction for gay men to enjoy rights of full and legitimized citizenship. Gay sex, once conceived as challenging the rules of straight sexuality, is now forcibly turned to instancing a mortal practice.

[19] Greco, "Good with Words", 337.
[20] Ibid., 334-35.

In contrast to the supposed mono-directional trajectory of "normal" sex, which finds an obvious conclusion in the orgasmic discharge, sadomasochistic sex enacts violence as an alternative and deviating form of sexual pleasure.[21] Sadomasochism finds in the enactment of violence, and in violence as an enactment, its most intimate form of pleasure with no consequential and 'teleological' ending, but based on a complex liturgy of forms and practices, involving a particular attire, specific tools, a more or less steady separation of roles and, what is fundamental to the tale by Greco, a proper use of words.[22] A friend of the protagonist, Albert, ends the tale with a significant assertion: "Stephen, if you can't tell the difference between talking about something and the thing itself, then you belong in a cave, drawing bisons on the wall".[23] Words are among the necessary tools employed in sadomasochistic pleasure, once this form of pleasure is forbidden under the menace of Aids. If sadomasochism is a deliberate enactment of simulated violence – perhaps of the same violence actually perpetrated on the 'abnormal' bodies of queer people – the sex scenes described by Greco comes to be the simulation of a simulation, the complete erasure of pleasure as immediate and orgasmic *jouissance* and its deferral to the realm of words, of performance, and representation.[24]

[21] See the essay by Brady Thomas Heiner "The Passions of Michel Foucault", *d i f f e r e n c e s: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 14.1 (2003), which emphasizes the role ascribed by Foucault to the potentiality of gay sex to constitute itself as 'counter-sexual' ("the limit experience"). Foucault stresses, among other things, the potentiality of gay sex for remapping and redrawing the boundaries of subjectivity once the primacy of heteronormative sex, and its strong influence on the constitution of gay identity as a "normalized" and "sanitized" one, had been completely dismissed.

[22] See the brief essay by Mark Graham, "Sexual Things", *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies,* 10.2 (2004), in which Graham discusses the rhetorical and, to some extent, ideological role played by objects in sexual intercourse: "Things link the sexualities of the assemblages in which they figure to processes that are supportive but also sometimes subversive of hierarchies of sex, sexuality, gendered meanings, class, "race," ethnicity, global capitalism, nationalism, and so forth. … The things involved in sexuality and gendering, I want to suggest, exceed their performative context as a matter of routine rather than as an isolated exception" (302).

[23] Greco, "Good with Words", 337.

[24] In the essay "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification", in *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), Judith Butler argues that the drag performance shows the 'imitative' character of gender: "Thus, drag imitates the imitative structure of gender, revealing gender itself to be an imitation" (145). Drag is, thus, 'imitation of imitation', a notion that seems to me not so far from the idea of safe and (or maybe as) sadomasochistic sex conveyed by Greco's tale as 'simulation of a simulation'.

In the tale by Stephen Greco political subjects, once marked by the stigma of abjection, must die in order to recover an otherwise forbidden access to pleasure, and the death of these actual subjects (whose political identity, in this case, is given by their homosexual behaviour) amounts to their inscription in the simulated order of sadomasochistic sex. As Judith Butler points in a note to "Phantasmatic Identification",

> … it is this already circulating trope of homosexuality as a kind of social and psychic death that is exploited and strengthened in homophobic discourses which understand Aids to be the result of homosexuality (rendered as definitionally unsafe, as danger itself) rather than the result of the exchange of fluids. … The decentered or vanquished subject initiates the possibility of a heightened eroticism and an affirmation of life beyond the hermetic and closed circuit of the subjects.[25]

It is exactly that 'stigma', made more and more significant by the theatrical resort to 'simulated sex', that is capable of giving way to a new legitimating and inclusive process – in other words, to compartmentalize homosexuality (thanks to its previous representation and repudiation), and finally archive it in an acknowledged and sanctioned status of legitimate citizenship. Pleasure is experienced as violence also because a compulsory act of erasure of the subject must be faced in order to gain access to a preserved, but otherwise foreclosed, realm of pleasure.

The abject body must be transcended and negated in order to restore a lost sexual legitimacy. The constitution of a legitimate subject is a complex process, as Judith Butler argues in *Bodies That Matter*, which implies subtle mechanisms of identification with certain symbolical instances and repudiation of others, rated as abject.

[25] Butler, *Bodies That Matter,* 266.

The body itself is a symbolical locus, through which processes of identification or repudiation can be performed, and the materiality of the body proves to be the crucial site where the process of legitimate identification can take place. The suppression of the body and corporeal life is discussed by Judith Butler as a strategy delineated by Hegel in order to define a subject as organically structured; this mechanism of suppression empowers the very object it obliterates. As Butler points out,

> The impulse or bodily experience which would be negated, to return to Hegel, is inadvertently *preserved* by the very activity of negation. We can see in both Hegel and Freud a certain reliance on a dialectical reversal by which a bodily experience, broadly constructed, comes under the censor of the law only to reemerge as the sustaining effect of the law. The Freudian notion of *sublimation* suggests that denial or displacement of pleasure and desire can become formative of culture.[26]

Sublimation is the first step towards complete subjectivation; if one connects sublimation to the exemplary condemnation cast upon gay sexuality as a consequence of Aids, it comes to be the first requirement for restoring gay sex and gay behaviour to a previously experienced legitimacy, recognizing its status of legitimate citizenship.

Let me go back to Freud and his essay about repression. He characterizes 'repression' as a form of archiving, a move that suspends the immediacy of an impulse, consigning it to the unconscious: "... the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance".[27] Repression is archiving, a process through which something is taken away from the place where it previously belonged and consigned to another symbolic site, be it the unconscious or, as in Greco's tale, the rhetorical and, to some extent, ideological, mechanism of representation. But repression is also a

[26] Butler, "Stubborn Attachment, Bodily Subjection. Rereading Hegel on the Unhappy Consciousness", in *The Psychic Life of Power*, 58.

[27] Sigmund Freud, "Repression" (1915), in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: Norton and Company, 1989), 569.

process of suspension, (temporary) negation, dislocation, a characteristic gesture through which the actual weight of reality, its concretion, its annoying burden, is literally 'suspended', temporarily annihilated, removed from contingency. This gesture, this cautious and momentary respite, is the first step toward archiving history and consigning it to the realm of representation. The bodies in Greco's tale are called to embody the repression of historicity; they mime an already and elsewhere mimed violence. One of the rhetorical strategies of sadomasochism, the enactment of a fictive violence to point to and simultaneously exorcize actual violence, is now fragmented in an array of layered paradigms, where each act of miming refers to a parallel and identical act perpetrated elsewhere.

This leads to the other, more complex, question regarding the bodies involved in this mechanism of perpetual deferral of pleasure, and of its relegation into the phantasmatic field of words properly used, and what they can incorporate, represent, or stand for. If the whole mechanism of sex is a representational one, the role that can be played by bodies by now deprived of their actual sexual connotation is dubious. Nancy has suggested that the body itself could be an archive, and display in itself the archival inscription of its own story and of its sense of belonging, or not-belonging. In Greco's story the sex scene is emblematic, because the body and corporeality seem to have been completely banned, and substituted by a complex apparatus of roles and words; words are invoked as the aptest substitute for sex, as the title "Good with Words" seems to suggest: in the era of Aids, 'words' are all that remains to be good with.[28]

Greco's queer bodies stand to incorporate symbolically, and perhaps to archive, the implosion of the codes of heteronormative sexuality and behaviour and, at the same time, to bear upon themselves the traces of the lives lost to Aids and commonly

[28] The importance given to words is all the more significant if related to the context in which the tale is set: "silence=death" was one of the most common slogans of the gay movement in the 1980's. The 'politics of words' hinted at by Greco in his tale can be also read as a paradoxical and ironical reference to this strategy; cf. the note on pages xxvi-xxvii in *The New Penguin Book of Gay Short Stories* for a brief overview of the relationship between literature, gay activism and Aids.

considered 'ungrievable'. The violence of the archive amounts, in the Aids era, to the violent storing of desires, pleasures, intercourses, imposed by the emergence of Aids and by the overt condemnation Aids was for gay men during the 1980s.

> Some lives are grievable, and others are not; the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human: what counts as a livable life and a grievable death?[29]

We must ask what status should be ascribed to the 'words' Stephen Greco refers to in his tale, since the narrative can be read as an attempt to 'word' bodies and pleasures, translating the threat of Aids and the spectrality of violence into the more reassuring realm of a sexual performance, filtered through and preserved by words. The three characters keep playing standard(ized) roles; the tale opens with a long oneiric scene that somehow sheds an oblique and dreary light upon the whole narration. The men repeat stereotypical and almost ritualistic expressions – words already heard, belonging to the crude and anonymous jargon of pornography, which properly fit the theatrical setting into which they have turned sadomasochistic sex.

> The scene heated up rapidly.
> 'I live for that dick', said Paul, the gaze fixed on it.
> 'Then, tell me about it, man. Let me hear it.'
> Paul's drone became more animated.
> 'Please, let me have your dick. Slip it into my head .'
> Then he looked up at the guy's face.
> 'I'll take your load, okay? Let me suck it out of you. I don't care if I get sick.'
> I guess that was what they both wanted to hear. [30]

[29] Butler, *Precarious Life*, xiv-v.
[30] Greco, "Good with Words", 336; my italics.

Words, in this short and dismal story, are just formulas; they do not embody the authoritative and nomological power of 'logos', the word that forces things into meanings, paralysing both terms in a rigid mechanism of reference. Formulas are invoked to undermine the archive, contaminate its structural and epistemic purity, and resort to the power of parody and performance, of liturgy, even of sortilege – words capable of escaping the domain of logos and its illocutory force. "And words are only words, even if they do bring the big, bad world into the bedroom, where we can *play* at controlling it".[31]

The bodies depicted by Greco are literally ex-posed, exhibited, deprived of any foundational ground that could inscribe them in an organic mechanism of mutual interaction; they operate as performative machines, complex engines violently inserted in the dynamics of a representative strategy. Such bodies are, in Deleuzian sense, 'machinic', crossed by both incessant and turbulent fluxes of desires and contrasting processes of censorship and sublimation. This clash finally results in the fictive and theatrical forcing of roles and expressions showed in the tale; the bodies cannot be figured as 'wholes', because they lack both an inner organic structure and a teleological (or soteriological) nature. The process of embodiment, a mechanism through which history literally descends among the bodies and makes sense once it is incorporated in their interactive play, must stop and surrender, because of the sovereign death instinct that the (homo)sexualized stigma of Aids seems to have cast upon them. This echoes Jean Luc Nancy's reflection on the possibility of the body to be 'grasped'.

> Since a body cannot be grasped in its entirety, as love and pain show, since bodies cannot be totalised, nor founded, there cannot be an experience of the body, just as there is not an experience of freedom. But freedom itself is the experience, and the body itself is the experience: the display, the taking place.[32]

[31] Ibid., 337 (my italics).
[32] Nancy, *Corpus*, 89.

Paola Sallei

Unpacking the Library of Modernity

En Afrique, quand un veillard meurt, c'est une bibliothèque qui brûle.
Amadou Hampaté Bâ, Speech at UNESCO (Paris 1962)

Re-thinking the library

Writers, and intellectuals in general, are supposed to feel at home when using a library, but, as soon as one looks at the matter from a postcolonial perspective, the library becomes an uncanny place, a common place that is no longer familiar.[1]

In *The Idea of Africa* (1994) V.Y. Mudimbe confronts us with the interrelationship between modernity, colonialism and the library when he observes that the legitimation of both the modern order of knowledge and the modern order of the world goes back to the second half of the fifteenth century, when the first Renaissance Pope, Nicholas V (1447-1455), founded the Vatican library and issued the very first encyclical which encouraged European colonial domination over the rest of the world.[2] On one side, his encyclical *Romanus Pontifex* (1454) began a sequence of papal bulls that sanctioned the rights, privileges and obligations of the European powers to occupy,

[1] The reading of the library as an un-homely place is based on Sigmund Freud's essay "The Uncanny" (1919), in James Strachey, ed., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XVIII (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 217-256.

[2] V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press / London: James Currey, 1994), 30-37.

christianise and practise slavery in the recently discovered lands. On the other, Nicholas V is commonly considered the first humanist pope by whom the Vatican library received its humanistic imprint consisting in the development of sections devoted to humanistic disciplines, beyond its archival and religious function. At the very beginnning of modernity, this imprint enhanced the bond between the idea of the library as a repository of universal knowledge and imperialism as an ideology of universal power – an imprint the Western library has kept through the centuries, supporting imperialism all along its subsequent stages of discovery, occupation, slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism.

This constitutive bond is evident at the basis of another important institution founded during the evolution of the modern period: the British Museum (1753) and its annexed library (1854). The very idea of a library nestled inside a museum, together with the panoptic architectonic design shaping its Reading Room, clearly connotes the library as the child of the Enlightenment. It was regarded from the start as the national library, but, given the interrelation between the centre and the periphery of the British Empire, it was also an imperial library which gathered large collections of books and 'libraries' related to the histories and cultures of all the countries and territories belonging to the empire.

The word 'library' refers both to the material structure devised to hold and preserve books, and to an organised collection of books accessible for consultation. The figurative meaning of the word 'library' refers to a corpus of studies and knowledge about a specific subject matter and to the related web of explicit and implicit inter-textual links existing among them. In the West, this double-edged notion of library has a strong cultural tradition and a long history. Its function and metaphorical meaning overlap with those of other institutions like the museum and the archive. Because of their double function of legitimising and de-legitimising historical records and traces from the past, these three institutions have offered themselves as models to illustrate the psychological mechanisms of memory keeping and forgetting. They are often referred to in order to make sense of amnesia, remotion and repression and to draw maps of the unconscious.[3]

[3] See Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (NY: W. W. Norton, 1961), and in particular "The Psychical Mechanism of Forgetfulness" (1898), in *The Standard Edition*, vol. VII, 289-294.

The Freudian idea of the library poised between order and chaos and perceived as an element of civilisation that preserves and spreads cultural memory while repressing the *id* and the *libido* was addressed and de-constructed by Jacques Derrida in his 1995 essay on the notion of archive as a metaphor for the constitution of mental and cultural processes.[4] His inquiry into the archive starts from a "Freudian impression", as he himself declares in his subtitle. It concerns the aporia between the work of memory as a process of preservation aiming at archival fixity and that of repression as a drive to destroy archival recordings.

The notion of 'archive' in Derrida does not possess a univocal and always-already given meaning established by tradition, but it is determined by what it has performed in the past and by what it promises to perform in the future in terms of the (im)possible enlargement of understanding and knowledge.

> The strange result of this performative repetition ... is that the interpretation of the archive... can only illuminate, read, interpret, establish its object, namely a given inheritance, by inscribing itself into it, that is to say by opening it and by enriching it enough to have a rightful place in it. There is no meta-archive ... By incorporating the knowledge deployed in reference to it, the archive augments itself, engrosses itself, it gains in auctoritas. But in the same stroke it loses the absolute and meta-textual authority it might claim to have. One will never be able to objectivize it with no remainder. The archivist produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future. [5]

Although Derrida explicitly refers to the archive, his study is also useful to understand the function of the library: both institutions share the condition of being authoritative places whose assignment is the production and distribution of authoritative knowledge. Moreover the library, like the archive, not only produces itself while constituting

[4] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998).

[5] Ibid., 67.

itself and determining the structure of its own contents, but it contains the principle of its own destruction. This de-construction of the library as a repository of fixed signs entails the awareness that the sign is nothing but a trace.

The authority accorded to the library had been investigated by Michel Foucault in his interpretation of knowledge as a discursive practice produced through the mediation of institutions like the archive. In his opinion knowledge is constructed according to a discursive field which creates a representation of the object of knowledge, delineating its constitution and its limits. Every writer must conform to this in order to communicate, to be understood, and to be accredited and accepted.[6]

As regards the library in the strict sense of the word, Foucault takes up the idea – expressed by Borges in *La biblioteca de Babel* (1941) – that the library is a place where everything that can be said has already been said. For Foucault the visual order of the books on the shelves represents the cosmic order: the catalogue is a secondary instrument and is regulated according to an analogical rather than semantic criterion since it is not intended as a guide to the perusal of the volumes but rather as a means to memorise their topographical display on the shelves.[7] The library and the librarian become metaphors of power and knowledge and it becomes possible to detect the "discourse of fear" which shapes the library itself. If it is ideally conceived as an institution not to be violated, then the reader feels humiliated inside it, because he/she finds himself/herself in the position of a trespasser who disturbs its inherent order and capacity of control.[8] The sense of control and completeness related to the Western library allows a discourse of fear to penetrate the library.

[6] Michel Foucault, *The Order Of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (N.Y.: Vintage, 1994).

[7] See Michel Foucault, "Language to Infinity" and "Fantasia of the library", in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977), and the well-known example of a 'certain Chinese encyclopedia' based on Borges, and used to start his own inquiry into the relationship between nature and history in *The Order Of Things*. Ibid., xv.

[8] The "discourse of fear" is discussed by Gary Radford and Marie Radford in "Power, Knowledge, and Fear: Feminism, Foucault, and the Stereotype of the Female Librarian", *Library Quarterly* 67.3 (1997), 250-266, and in "Libraries, Librarians, and the Discourse of Fear", *Library Quarterly* 71.3 (2001), 229-329. Roger Chartier underlines the sense of frustration rising from the tension between the ambition to exhaustivity and the reality of incompleteness of the nineteenth-century library on one side and, on the other side, the anxiety produced by the uncontrollable multiplication of books connected with the marketing and trade of literature faced with the desire to set up limits to a universe of texts through epistemological, institutional and cultural structures, *The Order of Books* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 88.

Foucault symbolically identifies the space of modernity with the library. In a lecture given in 1967 he defined the space where we live as a net, an interconnected and heterogeneous set of relations that delineate sites which are neither irreducible to nor superimposable to one another. Discarding the possibility of utopias he focuses on "heterotopias" – real places that function as counter-sites in a given culture, and where all the other real sites can be illusionary represented, but also contested and inverted. These other spaces are also spaces of the Other. It is not surprising that he identifies the museum, the archive and the library as the heteropias proper to the nineteenth-century Western culture. In addition to these, he mentions colonies as perfect Other places, and the ship as the heterotopia *par excellence* – because, since the sixteenth century, it has connected these colonies with one another and with the metropolis to support its development. [9] The reference to the ship as Other space can also be found in J. M. W. Turner's painting *The Slave Ship, Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming on* (1840), which is a document/monument in the Foucaultian sense, connecting spaces and histories in the European archive of western civilisation.[10]

[9] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", *Diacritics* 16.1 (1986), 22-27, 24, and 27.

[10] Although the dying slaves are so prominent in the title, they are almost invisible in the painting, as their presence is only marginally suggested by a detail showing the manacled leg of a black person already engulfed by the waves, and is removed in the comments of its contemporaries. This work of art is a monument but also a historical document which records the practice of slavery and the impossibility to repress its memory. It allows and negates, at the same time, the possibility that Other histories, silently embedded in the English colonialist cultural archive emerge and speak for themselves, and therefore it frames and reconfigures the hegemony of Western representation. A critique of the British iconographic representation of Western hegemony and especially of the presence/absence of black people in the works of the English painter William Hogarth is offered by David Dabydeen's *Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in*

The position of Foucault on the archive was reconsidered from a postcolonial perspective by Edward Said who showed in *Orientalism* (1978) how Europe constructed a universal and self-referential knowledge of other cultures in order to exercise imperial power by means of cultural structures such as schools and archives. He formulated the concept of "Orientalism" in terms of the library and of the "internally structured archive", by emphasising how the European archive constructed a discourse about the Orient as a place for the collection of studies and fantasies on the part of the West.[11] With the same intellectual position, Said pointed out the necessity of operating within the institutions in order to be able to question them, but he also pointed out the necessity of looking at them from the outside in order to be able to subvert them.

Derrida's and Said's contrapuntal readings of Freud's and Foucault's interventions make the *topos* of the library lose its ideal aura of eternity, completion and self-referentiality. The library tends to be identified more and more with an institution historically generated and permeated by the cultural reality of a given society. This makes it not only a place where books are kept, but also a place full of anxiety and conflicts of class, sex and race – increasingly so since the beginning of the twentieth century. Libraries were planned, set up and maintained everywhere in the British colonies, and the fact they were run in such a way as to enforce cultural colonialism was part of a larger project. It was indeed a historical, social and cultural phenomenon to be found all over the world. It may be useful, therefore, to re-think the position in which both readers and authors find themselves in relation to this kind of library.

Eighteenth Century English Art (Mundelstrup: Dangaroo Press, 1985). Dabydeen's analysis aims at rescuing the negated history of the Blacks who remained invisible to the eyes of contemporary white art lovers even when they were represented in works of art. The same intent of recovery and redemption of the negated memory of the Blacks prompts Dabydeen's poem dedicated to the slave thrown overboard in a famous painting by Turner (*Turner*, Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2002). See also Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), and Iain Chambers, *Culture after Humanism: History, Culture, Subjectivity* (London: Routledge, 2001), 29-30.

[11] Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, [1978] 1994), 41, 58.

This change of perspective is what may be referred to as postcolonial. As Stuart Hall emphasises, with postcolonialism the analysis of the language of the colonial encounter passed from the recognition of the proliferation of differences arising from the colonised-coloniser duality to a revision in de-constructive terms of writing as *différance*, as movement and the production of difference.[12] By conventionally making the beginning of History coincide with the appearance of the written document, and consequently with the moment of origin of the library, the Western scientific tradition intended to lay the basis upon which to found a unity of experience defined through the dimensions of time and space.[13] The contribution of Derrida disrupts this formulation, by dematerialising the concept of origin. The notion of *différance* makes the theoretical weakness hunting the dream of originality at the heart of the History of the West explicit together with the awareness that writing is a supplement to the origin and that it is writing itself that determines history.[14]

Re-collecting the library

A fundamental theoretical contribution that sheds a disturbing light on the concept of the library comes from V. Y. Mudimbe, an academic and writer from what was once the Belgian Congo, who lives and works in the United States. After Edward Said's theory of orientalism, Mudimbe articulates a view of the library as a space which sustains the textual undertaking of colonialism by harbouring collections of studies and fantasies elaborated by the West on Oriental subjects. Mudimbe defines the *colonial library* as an intellectual space where it is possible to recognize the discursive practices deposited in the texts of academics

[12] Stuart Hall, "When was 'the Postcolonial'? Thinking at the Limit", in Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti, eds., *The Postcolonial Question. Common Skies, Divided Horizons* (London: Routledge, 1996), 247.

[13] See for instance Elmer D. Johnson, *History of Libraries in the Western World* (N.Y.: Scarecrow, [1965] 1970).

[14] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, [1967] 1997), 107, 161.

and writers from classical Greece through modern and contemporary Europe.

This mass of Western texts has constructed a regime of truth which has defined Africa as 'other' by repeating a discriminatory stereotype suitable to support the exercise of power on the part of the European coloniser, as Homi Bhabha explains in "The Other Question".[15] This stereotype – directly derived from the institution of academic disciplines defined as scientific – was a powerful instrument through which the West has perpetrated its epistemological violence upon Africa. The observation that even the most Afrocentric descriptions of the concept of Africa and of African culture make recourse to categories and conceptual systems that derive from a Western epistemological order does not, however, exclude the fact that the narrative character of the disciplines involved can be disputed.

> Exploiting travellers' and explorers' writings, at the end of the nineteenth century a "colonial library" begins to take shape. It represents a body of knowledge constructed with the explicit purpose of faithfully translating and deciphering the African object. Indeed it fulfilled a political project in which, supposedly, the object unveils its being, its secrets, and its potential to a master who could, finally, domesticate it. Certainly, the depth as well as the ambition of the colonial library disseminates the concept of deviation as the best symbol of the idea of Africa. I do refer to this colonial library, which beyond its adjustments and arrangements offers traces or reflections of a longer tradition. In fact, I have tried to circumvent its epistemological violence by including its nightmares as well as the fragile presuppositions of its ponderous knowledge.[16]

From a single and accumulative system of knowledge and an instrument of oppression the library may become a postcolonial space of encounter, open to interrelation and revision, and capable of

[15] Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question", in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

[16] Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa*, xii.

overturning perspectives. In order to show the inadequacy of the categories and assumptions of Western knowledge, Mudimbe declares and discusses his own formation which was much influenced by Marxism and by the thought of Foucault and Sartre, and more specifically by their reception in Africa. He considers his own books, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge* (1988), and *The Idea of Africa* (1994) as an archaeology of the construction of the right to invent Africa that the West has claimed for itself for centuries. As he says, the project of *The Invention of Africa* comes from a reaction to "what it means to read oneself as a margin in narratives conceived and written by those who have discursive power".[17] In his book, Mudimbe specifies the marginal – but not passive – position from which he takes his cue and from which he intends to participate in the postcolonial debate.

At the end of his work, presented as written 'stories' to be left as an inheritance for his descendants – whom he calls affectionately "my 'Americanised' children born in Africa" – Mudimbe places himself and his field of study within the idea of Africa offered by the social sciences today. He finds himself put to the test in the role of editor of an encyclopaedia of African religions and philosophy at a time when he dedicates his studies to the production of an up-to-date knowledge of Africa based on a re-evaluation of the library. His intervention in the social sciences must inevitably start from his own position as an African philosopher. From his point of view both the archaeology of the idea of Africa and his project of an encyclopaedia deal with a disruptive and disputable discursive tradition which is totally contained in the Western library. As he remarks,

> Since I began my work on the encyclopaedia project I felt the certainty of being "colonised" by three main types of ancient knowledges. The first is a knowledge (savoirs and connaissances) depending on a political power ... this is the Word of God to His Prophet [Jesus or Mohammed]. The second type is a genealogical one: why do I have to go back to Plato or St. Augustine in order to face the intellectual history of African cultures? This leads me to the

[17] Ibid., xvii.

> last type of knowledge that confronts me: it is, methodologically, secular, and by definition usable because of its efficiency and the moralities of its effects on my mind. This would be, for example, the knowledge of disciplines such as anthropology and history.
> All these knowledges seem to function like fictions for me. Are they real? .... Yet, I cannot conceive the encyclopaedia I am directing without them.... I have tried to show, in this book, that the epistemological and intellectual disorder represented by my reading is indeed, also a political issue. The knowledge articulated in the encyclopaedia to come will witness to a will to truth and, thus, can already be questioned.[18]

Postcolonial literature often attempts to resist the colonialist perspective by opposing in its subject matter and in its forms the discourses that have sustained colonisation in what appears to be a struggle between representations. This metaphorical and material struggle finds a battlefield in the library, but it does not share the terms used for the battle between ancient and modern books Jonathan Swift imagined at the end of the seventeenth century. It resists the temptation of finding a solution in the animist hypothesis of books and the following production of a cathartic rite - a solution which would allow the shifting of blame from those who write the volumes or who select them for reading, to the volumes themselves.

The postcolonial revisions of the idea of library proposed here tend to claim autonomous authority for the postcolonial writers hosted in the postcolonial library. In so doing they want to reverse a narrative which has been so far a prerogative of the West. They tend to authorise the expression of a subversive critical discourse on the Western epistemology by availing themselves of its interstices. According to Homi Bhabha, the discourse from the margins has the capacity to bring into relief the discontinuity of a dominant discourse which is therefore neither monolithic nor universal. In this situation, cultural difference constitutes a form of intervention. Through writing, this difference is articulated in a movement of meaning which produces a multiplicity of spaces of signification.

[18] Ibid., 207-208.

> It [cultural difference] changes the position of enunciation and the relation of address within it; not only what is said but where it is said; not simply the logic of articulation but the topos of enunciation. The aim of cultural difference is to re-articulate the sum of knowledge from the perspective of a signifying singularity of the "other" that resists totalisation – the repetition that will not return to the same, the minus-in origin that results in political and discursive strategies where adding-to does not add-up but serves to disturb the calculation of power and knowledge, producing other spaces of subaltern signification.[19]

The proliferation of spaces of signification that are articulated through writing, as suggested by Bhabha, finds an excellent place of enunciation in the library. The very existence of authors like Derrida, Said, Mudimbe and Bhabha, and the presence of their works in the library, shows intrinsically what is hidden behind the apparent self-referentiality expressed by Western rhetoric – which therefore gives way – and the contrast that comes from positions that the West itself has unintentionally contributed to creating.

Re-placing the library

The problematic nature of the library may be further considered by referring to two remarkable episodes which are explicitly connected with one another. They are concerned with two intellectuals' autobiographical experiences on the occasion of un-packing their own libraries, with the consequent necessity of readjusting – physically and mentally – the apparently fixed and stable structure of the libraries themselves. Both discuss their ways of inhabiting the library and concentrate on the change of attitude imposed upon the owner by the physical shift of the library and the movement taking place among the books, and especially by the shift from order to disorder and viceversa involved in the same action of un-packing a library. The

[19] Homi Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation", in *Nation and Narration* (London and N.Y.: Routledge, 1990), 312.

first library belongs to Walter Benjamin, a German Jewish intellectual in Nazi Europe, and the other to Homi Bhabha, a leading Indian postcolonial intellectual.

In his essay "Unpacking My Library. A Talk about Book Collecting" (1931), dedicated to an account of his relationship with his library as an academic and, especially, as a book collector, Benjamin shows that the cultural practices connected with the library are neither casual nor innocent, but rather inter-twined with the contingent historical and social reality.[20] As James Clifford emphasises with regard to the appropriation of the exotic object by the West in the twentieth century, there are implicit political, taxonomic and subjective processes in the cultural practices of collecting depending on the acceptability of such object in museums, on the market, in the archives and in the discursive traditions.[21] Walter Benjamin is part of this phenomenon when he brings the experience of his library to bear on the manifestation of his own individuality and to the construction of his own identity by basing it on the material possession of books. In fact, this cultural practice has put him in touch with others and has allowed him to know places and practices that reinforce his command of the world around him. His books are charged with memories. Therefore, as a collector who rearranges his books, he does not limit himself to taking possession of the past and transforming it into memories, but he also dismembers the present with his *re-collecting* – collecting and remembering at the same time – which makes visible and important what has been forgotten.[22]

In his essay Benjamin deals with collecting, knowing that he is speaking about himself, and concretely describes the pleasure he

[20] Walter Benjamin, "Unpacking My Library. A Talk about Book Collecting", in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. and introd. Hannah Arendt (N.Y.: Schocken, 1969), 59-67.

[21] "Some sort of 'gathering' around the self and the group – the assemblage of a material 'world', the marking-off of a subjective domain that is not 'other' – is probably universal. All such collections embody hierarchies of value, exclusions, rule-governed territories of the self. But the notion that this gathering involves the accumulation of possessions, the idea that identity is a kind of wealth (of objects, knowledge, memories, experience), is not surely universal. ... In the West, however, collecting has long been a strategy for the deployment of a collecting self, culture, and authenticity." James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, Massachussets: Harvard University Press, 1988), 218.

[22] Joseph D. Lewandowski, "Unpacking: Walter Benjamin and His Library", *Libraries and Culture: A Journal of Library History* 34.2 (1999), 155.

finds in preparing to arrange his books which have remained packed up in crates for two years:

> I am unpacking my library. Yes, I am. The books are not yet in the shelves, not yet touched by the mild boredom of order. I cannot march up and down their ranks to pass them in review before a friendly audience .... Instead, I must ask you to join me in the disorder of crates ... [23]

Being a "genuine collector", he perceives the magic of such a temporary state of disorder before the books are placed in the boring bourgeois rational order of the shelves, while he dwells in front of his thousands books, reflecting on the various practices he followed in order to acquire them and the memories they awake. He is so fascinated by this self-referential operation that he cannot stop.

The ultimate way of acquiring a library – the most solid according to Benjamin – is by inheritance. The position of inheritor is also the best position for being a preserver or a destroyer of the memory kept therein. It is the possibility of transferring a collection which safeguards its significance because the sense of the collection resides in its owner. On the other hand, he concludes that, by setting up his library, he has built a refuge for himself: "Not that they come alive in him [the collector]; it is he who lives in them. So I have erected one of his dwellings, with books as the building stones, before you, and now he is going to disappear inside, as is only fitting". (67)

The passion for book collecting, like that for quotations, leads us back in Benjamin's case to an ambiguous attitude towards the past, precariously poised between preservation and destruction. Baudrillard grants the collector the possibility of operating, through possession, in an abstract dominion that allows him to place himself outside reality as an autonomous totality.[24] The collector therefore has the possibility to free himself from the authority of tradition which orders the past

[23] Benjamin, "Unpacking My Library", 59. Subsequent references follow quotations in parentheses.

[24] Jean Baudrillard, "The System of Collecting", in John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, *The Cultures of Collecting* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), 8.

according to its own criteria. Thus he can establish a non-systematic relationship with the chosen object, giving it new life. In Benjamin's words, "to a true collector, the acquisition of an old book is its rebirth .... To renew the old world, that is the collector's deepest desire when he is driven to acquire new things" (61). Like a child, the collector has the power to give life to objects which he rescues from a destiny of oblivion in order to give them another chance, to set them free. As he says, "To a book collector, you see, the true freedom of all books is somewhere on his shelves" (64). Benjamin underlines this thought by making an analogy between his action and that of the prince who bought a beautiful slave-girl in *The Thousand and One Nights*. Reading Benjamin's appropriation of this exotic imaginary tale, not only does one find a component of magic in his idea of library, but also a sexist and orientalist slant in his theory of collecting.[25]

On the other hand Homi Bhabha, in "Signs Taken for Wonders" (1985), deals with the institution of the library in the colonial context.[26] The presence of the English book in the colonies, its repetition in a space separate from its origin, has the effect of establishing its own authority. Bhabha, however, re-reads and re-writes the material in the European archive to find inside it, and in its interstices, the incongruities which destabilise the whole Western discourse founded on writing. His argument starts from the *topos* of wonder that accompanies the discovery of the English book in the context of the empire and from which the English book acquires its own definition by difference, as a direct result of its dislocation:

> Written as they are in the name of the father and the author, these texts of the civilising mission immediately suggest the triumph of the colonialist moment in early English Evangelism and modern English literature. The discovery of the book installs the sign of appropriate representation: the word of God, truth, art creates the conditions for a beginning, a practice of history and narrative. But the institution of the Word in the wilds is also an Entstellung, a process of

[25] Naomi Schor, "Collecting Paris", in John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, eds. *The Cultures of Collecting*, 254.

[26] Homi Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders", in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 102-122.

> displacement, distortion, dislocation, repetition – the dazzling light of literature shed only areas of darkness. Still the idea of the English book is presented as universally adequate ...[27]

Bhabha infers the inadequacy of the Western presence and of its ways and means in the colonies from the same sources present in the European archive, and sees signs of resistance on the part of the natives in the face of the authority of the English book, and of the institutionalisation of imperial power. On this occasion Bhabha goes beyond the concept of the ambivalence of the colonial discourse to arrive at the formulation of the discursive conditions of colonialism in terms of hybridity, not only in order to overturn and undermine colonial authority in all its forms, but also to constitute a possible form of resistance on the part of the native. Bhabha's argument that the dislocation in the colonies of the first English book contributed to producing colonial hybridity, thus helping to disrupt the authority of the dominant discourse rather than establishing it, can be used for the whole library of Western texts which were progressively brought there.

The library of this intellectual of Indian origin emerges from his essay "Unpacking My Library ... Again" (1995).[28] Starting from the title this essay directly recalls Benjamin's. It defines his own library and that of his predecessor in a retrospective way, suggesting an opening up to the future in the Derridian sense. Having been in Chicago for a few months, and having to unpack the crates containing his books, Bhabha is ready to accept Benjamin's invitation, which he quotes expressly, even borrowing his words to start his essay. This invitation is above all to speak about himself, like Benjamin, and reflect on the dialectical tension between the order and disorder arising from the temporary confusion consequent to the dislocation of one's own library, recognising at the same time that this dialectic has involved his life and his work. Bhabha therefore accepts Benjamin's invitation, but also that of Foucault, asking himself and his reader the

[27] Ibid., 105.

[28] Homi Bhabha, "Unpacking My Library ... Again", in Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti, eds., *The Postcolonial Question. Common Skies, Divided Horizons* (London: Routledge, 1996) 199-211.

question: "Does the order of books determine the order of things? What kind of history of oneself and one's times is coded in the collecting of books?"[29] The answer lies among the images of cosmopolitan disorder that emerge from the different roamings of Benjamin and Bhabha around the world and from the different discoveries and rebirths these roamings gave to the books in their possession.

The route described by Benjamin in his search of material for his collection moves along a curved line that covers Continental Europe from south to east and links the cities of Riga, Naples, Munich, Danzig, Moscow, Florence, Basle, Paris and Berlin, and continues with the memory of the rooms that contained his library in Switzerland, in a journey back through the places of his training as a student and of his childhood. Bhabha remembers books bought in "Bombay, Oxford, London, Hyderabad, Champaign-Urbana, Jyavaskala", from India to the centre of the former empire and beyond. These routes draw two movements around the world, different in extension and direction, which characterise the two men well. In taking his books out of their crates while keeping in mind his illustrious predecessor, Bhabha becomes aware of a destiny that binds him to Benjamin.

> ... it is the 'disorder' of our books that makes us unredeemable 'vernacular' cosmopolitans committed to what Walter Benjamin describes as 'the renewal of existence'. In subtle ways that disorder challenges the shelved order of the study, and displaces the Dewey decimal that persuades us that our cosmopolitanism is of a more 'universal', academic cast (199).

The situation of bewilderment offers the Indian intellectual the opportunity to reflect on the "contingent dis-ordered historical 'dwelling' bestowed upon us by many of the most interesting books that we collect today" (199). The anecdotal occasion of the unpacking of his library offers him not only the opportunity to experience a different way of inhabiting the library, but also to reflect on such habitation thanks to the casual and improbable combination of books, brought about by a moment of revelatory disorder.

[29] Ibid., 199. Subsequent references follow quotations in parentheses.

A similar biographical occurrence illuminates the different personalities and intentions of the two intellectuals. Unlike Benjamin, Bhabha passes his books in review with the reader, and does not dwell on the methods of acquisition or the material quality of the texts. The postcolonial intellectual is not interested in the discourse of collecting that constituted a significant and distinctive characteristic of the European thinker. Bhabha offers to his reader's attention a library of contemporary books and extracts. He does not deal with old and precious volumes to be given new life and from which ready-to-use quotations can be drawn. He deals with texts that have been read and pondered upon, which are to be seen in relation to each other and whose content is to be discussed: the ethical and aesthetic imperative to renew the life of the book which inspired Benjamin becomes for Bhabha the pedagogical imperative of dislocating, translating and re-placing the text, in an effort to vernacularize the *great tradition* and strengthen the *petit récit* in his role of teacher in the multicultural academy.

In his essay Bhabha discusses the link between two texts which happen to be unexpecteldy juxtaposed: both regard cosmopolitanism in the contemporary sense, start with the disruption of a pedantic order, refer to two lists of books presented as fit to make sense of Late Modernity and try to seize the world through books. On the one hand Martha Nussbaum's essay "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism" is evaluated as being too tied to a centralised and abstract view of cosmopolitanism which still leaves refugees and emigrants out of the discussion. On the other hand, Adrienne Rich's poem "Eastern War-time" from *An Atlas of the Difficult World*, suggests a "mode of address [which] attempts to open up an intervening space, a space of translation-as-transformation particularly opposite to the difficult, *transnational* world" (203), a transnational world that also expresses destruction and trauma: historical memory is not therefore an abstract idea but a material means that must be continuously "'restored and framed', cut and edited" (203).[30]

[30] Martha Nussbaum, "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism", *Boston Review* 19.5 (October-November 1994); Adrienne Rich, "Eastern War-time", in *An Atlas of the Difficult World. Poems 1988-1991* (N.Y. and London: Norton Company, 1991), 35-44.

In the course of his reflection Bhabha abandons the discussion of the framework and system of the library, while continuing to compare two opposite perspectives on the world. He points out the risk of accepting the concepts of Western social and political thought as if they were universal. They prove instead their fallacy whenever they pretend to provide global explanations since their intention has always been to create distinctions in the colonial and the postcolonial tradition alike.

The two examples of literary criticism offered by Benjamin and Bhabha clarify each other. They both suggest that "being in the world is like inhabiting a library", but not because books contain all the experience of the world or because the system of meanings that is familiar to us reaches us through books. In the words of Gianni Vattimo, "the relationship of familiarity with books is, rather, the model and the emblem of our relationship of familiarity with the world". In the modern way of inhabiting the world, places – anything but abstract – have multiplied their relationships:

> Inhabiting a place, and not simply finding oneself in a space, can always only be done by acknowledging a belonging, which is memory, temporal distension of existence, *habitus* as habit, familiarity, shared historicity … our places have multiplied their relationships; our library has become the library of Babel, where the multiplicity of languages seems to be transformed into a senseless hubbub, but which is actually, anyway, a game of sensible discourses which can no longer - if they ever could - be formulated in an isolated way. [31]

This relationship of familiarity with the discourses of the library handed down to us through authors like Derrida, Said, Bhabha and Mudimbe, reveals the ingenuousness that envelops the rhetoric of modernity. In this article we have seen them unpacking the library of modernity through their physical and intellectual presence and their agency. Their interventions reformulate the Western relationship of familiarity with the library. By re-discussing its presumed origins

[31] Gianni Vattimo, "Abitare la biblioteca", *Aut-Aut* 267-268 (1995) 88, 92; my translation.

with all its intellectual, historical and social implications, they offer us an idea of the colonial and postcolonial library which is caught in the complex inter-relationship between physical locations and the enunciation of modernity, and which continues to interrogate and challenge the colonial experience.

Laura Sarnelli

"Undoing the Colonial Archive" Isaac Julien's *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin White Mask*

The film *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin White Mask* by Isaac Julien offers itself for the exploration of some deeply interrelated issues, such as the 'construction' of the historical archive from a 'non dominant' location/position, the perspective of a different interpretation of historical documents, and the possibility to deconstruct the Derridean "arcontic domiciliation", its monolithic authority, in order to open up a new "house" where a different historical archive could be re-written and re-created.[1] According to Derrida, the meaning of archive refers back to a place, the house of the holders of the power and authority to interpret official documents, "there" where the law originates.[2] The

[1] In *Archive Fever* Jacques Derrida proposes a theorisation of the concept of the archive by foregrounding, from the very beginning, the etymological derivation of the word: "The meaning of 'archive', its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the supreme magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded". It is in this "domiciliation" that official documents are set and picked out as archives only by virtue of this "privileged topology". Derrida comes to a topo-nomological definition of the archive – the place and the law – foregrounding this "archontic dimension of domiciliation, with this archic, in truth patriarchic, function, without which no archive would ever come into play or appear as such". Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression", *Diacritics* 25.2 (1995), 9-10.

[2] In this respect, it is worth noting that while Derrida highlights the space dimension of the archive (*there*, *the home of archonts*), Foucault stresses the temporal one, since, in his view, an archive is a system of discursivity that governs the formation of statements of knowledge, and the pattern of enunciative possibilities and impossibilities. In other words, an archive governs what can and cannot be said. To this extent an archive is a public form – the discursive institution – of memory. Michel Foucault's view in *The Archaeology of*

drama-documentary film *Frantz Fanon* produced in 1996 by Isaac Julien and Mark Nash disturbs this domiciliation insofar as it reveals a visual critique 'with a difference'; it enacts a different aesthetics of representation, sets up the archiving of a different history. As Julien and Nash argue, the film lays its own foundation on the project of 'undoing the colonial archive', and performs this deconstruction through the representation of a fragmentary aesthetics of memory which aims at re-archiving and re-creating the past.[3]

> To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognise it 'the way it really was.' It means to seize hold on a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes.[4]

The work of Isaac Julien fits in the context of black independent cinema in Britain characterised by a mode of production and representation which has the critical function of providing a 'counter-discourse' to those versions of reality produced by dominant voices and discourses in British film.[5] Julien eludes the temporal and space boundaries of official history to recover and, above all, rearticulate an-other past, an-other history, an-other archive. This is achieved through a new cinematic language which breaks with the traditional practices of representation. The cinema of Isaac Julien, therefore, leads a struggle on two fronts at once: the political, through the

Knowledge that archives are based on mnemonic realiability (since they are the textual systematization of their own enunciability) contrasts rather sharply with Derrida, according to whom archives occur at the moment when there is a structural breakdown in memory. Derrida's archive, indeed, is mnemonically unreliable insofar as it is somewhat 'feverish,' 'hallucinatory,' 'fragmentary,' 'traumatic.' This distinction is useful here to foreground that the film testifies to both the fragmentary and the (counter)discursive nature of the archive. See Herman Rapaport, "Archive Trauma", *Diacritics* 28.4 (1998), 68-81.

[3] Isaac Julien and Mark Nash, "Fanon as Film", in Amada Cruz, ed., *The Film Art of Isaac Julien* (New York: Bard College, Centre for Curatorial Studies, 2001), 106.

[4] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schoken Books, 1969), 255.

[5] See Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1994).

theorisation of a new politics of archiving, and the aesthetic, through formal innovation.

An archive of images, sounds, voices

Julien's film is a visually striking introduction to the life and thought of the Martinican thinker and activist Frantz Fanon, weaving together documentary archival and historical footage, readings from Fanon's work, dramatizations of critical junctures in his life, scholars' and critics' analyses of his work, recollections offered by relatives and friends, photographs, and visual poetry. Julien and Nash define the kind of film-making practice inherent in the Fanon piece as *doing theory on film*: "[T]he act of visualization can be seen as a form of theoretical production which makes the body, in particular, a privileged site of imagistic power and mediation".[6] Julien's work produces a theory through the visual against colonial knowledge production, which was based on regimes of visibility and discursivity – what Homi Bhabha calls the regime of the scopic drive.[7]

> I had to meet the white man's eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me … I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects … I took myself far off from my presence … What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a haemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood?[8]

Colonial discourse produced a deeply stereotyped and fetishistic representation of otherness, a form of "racialised knowledge of the other" deeply implicated in the operations of power constituting the core of imperialistic politics.[9] It laid its foundations, as Homi Bhabha

[6] Julien and Nash, "Fanon as Film", 106.

[7] See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 66-84.

[8] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 110-112.

[9] Said's discussion of Orientalism, on the wake of Foucault's theorisation of power/knowledge, brilliantly exemplifies this point. As Robert Young has pointed out, Said's Foucaultian analysis has been challenged by Bhabha's psychoanalytic approach which highlights the distinction between a "manifest" Orientalism – the conscious and scientific knowledge about the Orient – and a "latent" Orientalism – "an unconscious

has indicated, on the concept of fixity. By denying 'the play of difference', stereotyping, as fetishisation and objectivisation of the subject, blocks the signifier 'race' in an overwhelming fixity.[10] It is precisely this kind of dominant representation as a form of knowledge deeply involved in the colonial discourse of power that Julien tries to subvert, contesting it from within, through alternative strategies which focus on the body and the visual.

He enacts what Stuart Hall advocates, namely, a re-reading of Fanon through the practices of 'trans-coding' and 're-signing' through which a reconfiguration of the representational politics of alterity is allowed.

> The principal counter-strategy here has been to bring to the surface – into representation – that which has sustained the regimes of representation unacknowledged: to subvert the structures of 'othering' in language and representation, image, sound and discourse, and thus to turn the mechanisms of fixed racial signification against themselves, in order to begin to constitute new subjectivities, new positions of enunciation and identification.[11]

It is from this perspective that the quotation from *Black Skin, White Masks* by Fanon at the beginning of the film is to be unravelled: "I cannot go into a film without seeing myself. I wait for me. In the interval, just before the film starts, I wait for me … A Negro groom is going to appear. My heart makes my head swim".[12] Through his innovative approach Isaac Julien stages a representation of otherness exempt from the reifying and objectifying gaze, a representation of a black identity with which to identify.

positivity of fantasmatic desire." According to Young, Bhabha "has shown how colonial discourse of whatever kind operates not only as an instrumental construction of knowledge but also according to the ambivalent protocols of fantasy and desire." Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), 161.

[10] See Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 66; Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: SAGE Publications, 1997), 260.

[11] Stuart Hall, "The After-life of Frantz Fanon: Why Fanon? Why Now? Why *Black Skin, White Masks*?", in Alan Read, ed., *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation* (London: Institute for Contemporary Arts, 1996), 19.

[12] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 140.

Through a non-linear, heterogeneous, and fragmentary narrative, Julien re-appropriates the documentary form – a visual technique affecting an objective point of view as well as a realistic representation – subverting, however, its perspective: the treasured documentary values of authenticity and immediacy, typically invoked to lay claim to an authoritative place of knowledge and enunciation, are questioned. *Frantz Fanon* represents, instead, a palimpsestic aesthetics by deploying an "audio-visual-texual dance of positionalities" where both image and sound are continually haunted by other texts.[13] A form of multi-voiced, polyphonic and discontinuous narrative shows a series of visual contrasts between true images and false images, between historical images and dramatised sequences, between poetic voice-overs and actual comments by academics. Music in this context represents a real 'sound image' which has a decisive role in complementing the action. Moreover, by employing the stylistic element of the *tableau vivant* extensively, the film brings to life an archive of words and images, lives and voices, memories and impulses.[14] This fragmentary collage of archive material, visual reconstruction and evocative music suspends the transparency necessary to an objective account, offering, on the contrary, a critical interpretation of Fanon by continually questioning his ideas, criticising his blind spots. As Julien and Nash argue: "It is not a question of simply finding a way to represent Fanon in film, but to use film to engage with Fanon's ideas and perhaps in some way transform them".[15] Following Trinh T. Minh-ha's assertion, "Documentary is/not a name",[16] this model of the documentary foregrounds its constitutive aporia: the representation of a historical subject of enunciation who might occupy shifting epistemological positions, a voice that speaks from a provisional knowledge position.[17]

[13] Robert Stam, "Fanon, Algeria, and the Cinema: The Politics of Identification", in Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, eds., *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality, and Transnational Media* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 36.

[14] "Literally the painting comes alive", in Julien and Nash, "Fanon as Film", 107.

[15] Ibid., 106.

[16] Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Documentary Is/Not a Name", *October* 52 (Spring 1990), 76-98.

[17] See Bharskar Sarkar, "Tangled Legacies: The *autos* of biography", *Rethinking History* 7.2 (2003), 215-234.

Turning back the gaze

> I want you to feel, as I, the sensation of being seen. For the white man has enjoyed for three thousand years the privilege of seeing without being seen … Today, these black men have fixed their gaze upon us and our gaze is thrown back into our eyes … by this steady and corrosive gaze, we are picked to the bone.[18]

Frantz Fanon lies claim to the creation of a cinematic space where fact and fiction, history and memory, fear and desire are blurred, in order to enable a reconsideration of the legacy of the Western gaze and the exploration of new forms of representing the past.[19]

The innovative feature of this filmic text precisely lies in offering an aesthetics which not only aims at representing Fanon's life and after-life, but also makes the audience part of its rewriting. Overcoming the traditional 'observing subject/observed object' relation, Julien focuses his attention on the body in his attempt to change and renew the act of looking. The body becomes an open signifier, free from identity impositions from the outside that fix and freeze it. The body at once questions itself and is questioned by an observer/spectator who dialogues with it through a negotiation of gazes, points of views, positions, different and changing perspectives. As Julien asserts: "It is the look – the act of looking – that we want to challenge, to renew in terms of position: we need a third way of looking at the black body and how it is inscribed in these visual practices".[20] The film displays the centrality of the look, the act of looking from the place of the other which fosters a transformative gaze, a gaze that is returned by the other.

The focus on the look in the film reflects the importance and significance its thematisation has in Fanon's texts themselves. Both

[18] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Black Orpheus*, trad. S. W. Allen (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1976), 32.

[19] See Ragnarr Farr, ed., *Mirage: Enigmas of Race, Difference and Desire* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts in Association with the Institute of International Visual Arts, 1995), 98-108.

[20] M. Nash, I. Julien, M. Attille, R. Peck, H. K. Bhabha, "Film-makers'dialogue", in Read, ed., *The Fact of Blackness*, 169.

Black Skin, White Masks and *The Wretched of the Earth* cast colonialism and racism as a clash of gazes. As Fanon has described it, white people have exercised their power through the gaze to such an extent as to 'fix' black people outside their own world and to make them experience an identity that could not be other than that of the other. The black subject's existence deeply affected by the white self can feel black only in relation to the white; paradoxically, he lives his own difference in its negative sense as obvious and natural.

Stuart Hall points out that at the heart of Fanon's text there is the recognition that "an account of racism which has no purchase on the inner landscape and the unconscious mechanisms of its effects, is, at best, only half the story".[21] The other half resides in what has not been said, has not been made visible, in what is only imagined and projected into unconscious scenes of desire. Racism, as Hall argues, works through the construction of symbolic boundaries between racially constituted categories, and its binary system of representation firmly tries to fix and neutralise the difference between otherness and identity. Fanon constantly reminds us that this "epistemic violence is both inside and outside, and operates through a process of splitting that affects both sides of the division"; that is why the question is not "black skin/white skin", but rather, "black skin/white mask".[22] In other words, "the internalisation of the self-as-other", the pathological embodiment of the white other as ideal self is the process of what Fanon calls "epidermalization", the inscription of race on the skin: "the 'look' from the place of the 'other'".[23] This 'being seen' triggers a total depersonalisation of the black subject who, in an effort to compensate for his alleged inferiority, dons a white mask.

This process is made visible and best conveyed in the film sequence which shows Fanon facing metropolitan racism in France. In the revelatory moment of the encounter with the other, the cry "Mama, look, the Negro! I'm frightened!" epitomises the whole discourse of colonial representation where the other, through a

[21] Hall, "The After-life of Frantz Fanon", 17.

[22] Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities", *Anglistica* 1.1-2 (1997), 19.

[23] Hall, "The After-life of Frantz Fanon", 16.

process of identification and disavowal, becomes an object of fear and desire, phobia and fetishism. Isaac Julien forces the title of his film on Fanon by omitting the plural "masks"; this choice is significant insofar as it highlights how incisive white power was in constructing a mask, and only one, on black skins – the white version of black identity.

As has been pointed out, "the colonialist's greatest crime was to make the colonized look at themselves through colonizing eyes", since the very act of self-regard is mediated by "superimposed alien looks and discourses".[24] The film displays a sequence where the cultural critic Françoise Vergès comments upon Fanon's reworking of the Lacanian mirror stage and elucidates the white subject's hallucination when it looks at itself in the mirror and finds the other, different from itself. The visual representation of this concept shows the image of Isaac Julien in a metaphorical interplay of mirror reflections and disturbed specularity. In this place it is Isaac Julien who feels 'colonised' and strives to get rid of the white look. This sequence reflects Bhabha's psychoanalytic insights on the concept of ambivalence informing the regime of visibility deployed in colonial discourse.

> In the objectification of the scopic drive there is always the threatened return of the look; in the identification of the Imaginary relation there is always the alienating other (or mirror) which crucially returns its image to the subject ... the recognition and disavowal of 'difference' is always disturbed by the question of its re-presentation or construction.[25]

In his attempt to archive a different his-story 'from the place of the other', Julien enacts throughout his film a different and alternative politics of representation and re-signification of the black body. "This practice has taken the form of working *on the black body itself* driving the suppressed violence of racism so deep into itself that it reveals the transgressive lineage of the suppressed desire on which it

[24] Stam, "Fanon, Algeria, and the Cinema," 39.
[25] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 81.

feeds".[26] It is a visual practice that takes shape in the revision of the body as well as in the creation of new "bodily schemas," of what Fanon defines "a slow composition of my *self* as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world".[27] Throughout the film the black body becomes the privileged site of representational counter-strategies which aim at reversing stereotypes against themselves. The body is observed, listened to, desired, questioned, and reworked in the act of challenging race, gender, and sexual boundaries.

Isaac Julien's re-reading of Fanon through post-modern lenses leads him to interpret the revolutionary theorist against the grain. This is best conveyed in the representation of homoerotic and interracial desire where sexual politics take centre stage and the complexity of race, gender and sexual relations in the colonial context emerge. As Stuart Hall points out, the loss of social power by black people in the context of slave societies led to an unconscious disavowal of homosexuality, since it was considered a threat to the assertion of a black male identity. Hall discusses Fanon's troubling passage on homosexuality in terms of tropes replacement: according to Hall, Fanon draws attention to the unstable construction of masculinity which shows a rereading of the master/slave relationship in Oedipal terms. Homosexuality, according to Fanon, was a 'white man's disease' projected onto the white other since it was unacceptable to the black self.

Indeed, this attitude towards homosexuality can be considered "a symptom of homophobic fixation and disavowal in the political economy of masculinity in black liberationist discourse".[28] *Frantz Fanon* is critical of its protagonist's attitude towards homosexuals through the use of clashing images. In contraposition to Fanon's troubling dismissal of the possibility of homoerotic desire in the Antilles, the actor Colin Simon as Fanon declares to the camera, 'I had no opportunity to establish the overt presence of homosexuality in Martinique', as two black men kiss passionately in the background.

[26] Hall, "The After-life of Frantz Fanon", 20.
[27] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 111.
[28] Kobena Mercer, "Decolonisation and Disappointment: Reading Fanon's Sexual Politics", in Read, ed., *The Fact of Blackness*, 125.

When the two men stop kissing, they look at Simon-as-Fanon, who looks back at them. The film stages an orchestration of gazes and glances that highlights the overt sexualised nature of the racialised look, boldly bringing out the play of desire – avowed or denied – in the field of vision. Re-collecting an archive of images and ideas, pointing to its silences and contradictions, Julien produces a history of black gay desire and identity.

> Colonial fantasy attempts to 'fix' the position of the black subject into a space that mirrors the object of white desires; but black readers may appropriate pleasures by reading against the grain, overturning signs of 'Otherness' into signifiers of identity. In seeing images of other black gay men there is an affirmation of our sexual identity.[29]

Fanon's view of interracial desire is also contested through the voice, this time, of the Guadeloupean writer Maryse Condé who criticises the deeply sexist and misogynist implications of Fanon's theories. In the filmic reproduction, interracial desire is represented free from colonial and racist prejudices. Maryse Condé condemns Fanon's consideration of the "coloured woman" in his analysis of Mayotte Capecia's novel *Je suis martiniquaise*. The black woman's desire for the white man does not necessarily subtend to the racist desire of "de-blackening" the race neither does the black man's desire to possess the white woman reveal, in any absolute sense, the unconscious desire to "marry white culture" in a metaphorical act of colonisation.[30]

The visual technique used to represent Fanon's theories in contraposition to the biographical Fanon emerging from the interviews is adopted as well in those filmic sequences that display Fanon's arrival at the psychiatric hospital of Blida Jonville. The dramatization restores the destructive effects of colonial violence by showing Algerian patients in chains. As Julien points out, "certainly patients were still in chains in psychiatric hospitals earlier in the

[29] Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien, "True Confessions", in Cruz, ed., *The Film Art of Isaac Julien*, 59.

[30] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 63.

century, but [this] historical evidence is inconclusive".[31] This image, however, is immediately contradicted by the interview with psychoanalyst Alice Cherki who denies what is being represented. Beyond the reinscription of a myth – that of Pinel liberating his patients from their chains at the time of the French revolution – Julien is representing the idea of the Algerians' liberation from the shackles of alienation set up by the ethnocentric gaze.[32] In the film, Fanon is shown removing the chains from his Algerian patients, a symbolic representation of an act of decolonisation, emancipation and freedom from the chains of colonialism, thus placing Fanon's contribution to colonial psychiatry in the wider frame of a political project aimed at deconstructing the sociocentric and ethnocentric view of Western discourses.

The use of Gillo Pontecorvo's film *Battle of Algiers* (1966) within Julien's film is another means to deconstruct the colonial archive. *Battle of Algiers* subverts Eurocentric and orientalist focalisation typical of western and imperial adventure films by giving agency back to the Algerians and by assuring them linguistic and cultural dignity.[33] The principal innovation of the film lies in the fact that it

[31] Julien and Nash, "Fanon as Film", 107.

[32] As Françoise Vergès states: "The narrative of Fanon unchaining the patients evokes the gesture of Philippe Pinel, the French doctor and founder of modern psychiatry, who liberated the insane of the hospital of Bicêtre from their chains during the French Revolution...Pinel broke with the classical notion of madness, transforming the mad into the sick; Fanon broke with the colonial-racial notion of madness". Colonial psychiatry relied on deeply essentialist and racist conceptions that considered the colonised populations' madness and mental inferiority as congenital and innate. Fanon disproves this theory by arguing that it is the colonial context that determines the pathological nature of the natives. See Françoise Vergès, "Chains of Madness, Chains of Colonialism: Fanon and Freedom", in Read, ed., *The Fact of Blackness*, 49.

[33] This colonialist vision according to which "the settler makes history", is perfectly expounded by Fanon, while "over against him torbid creatures wasted by fevers, obsessed by ancestral customs, form an almost inorganic background for the innovative dynamism of colonial mercantilism". Colonial space, as it was imagined in the imperial vision, emerged as a symbol of conquest, an empty space to be seized, an ideal attracting a systematic exploitation of a land where the colonized was deemed to be completely absent, or considered, as Said suggests, "the fixed status of an object frozen once and for all in time by the gaze of Western percipients". Relegated to the margins of history, culture, and civilisation, the colonised subject existed only as an added 'object' in the colonial space, it

subverts the traditional identificatory mechanisms by making the spectators assume the colonised point of view and by presenting the Algerian struggle as an exemplum, so that terrorist actions against colonial power are depicted as justified. It illustrates the much contested Fanonian idea of anti-colonial violence as a response, a "counter-violence" to colonialist terror. Indeed, Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, written in 1961, represents a key intertext for *The Battle of Algiers*, while the latter, as Julien himself points out, "could be said to represent Fanon film itself e*n abîme*".[34]

Among the several fragments of Pontecorvo's film used in *Frantz Fanon*, the sequences depicting women engaged in the Algerian struggle assume particular importance. Women's active involvement in the anti-colonial struggle is remembered through the representation of symbolic images in which the photograph of the face of a woman is projected on to the veil of another woman. These haunting shots, repeated several times throughout the film, depicting veiled and unveiled women, have the function, on one hand, to recall the significance and the historical dynamism of the veil in the context of the Algerian society during anti-colonial resistance, and on the other, to recover the legacy of that past, the pain of violence written on the body.

The historical dynamism of the veil, a cultural signifier that assumes different meanings in the context of the Algerian war of independence, is analysed by Fanon in *A Dying Colonialism*.[35] Veiling as an act of camouflage for carrying grenades, manifestos, revolvers and mines, but also unveiling to masquerade as Europeans in order to pass French checkpoints, were strategies Algerian women used to mislead colonial authority. From a sign of gender difference which relegated women to the private and domestic confines of home, the veil becomes increasingly charged with political meaning by representing a public symbol of resistance against French domination, and therefore, a

was not considered as an active "interlocutor", but rather, a "silent Other". Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin Books, 1967), 39-40; Edward Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered", in Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and other Essays* (New York: Harvard University Press, 2002), 198-215, 202.

[34] Julien and Nash, "Fanon as Film", 106.

[35] Frantz Fanon, "Algeria Unveiled", in Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (London: Grove Press, 1965), 35-68.

symbol of colonial frustration that leads to the desire to unveil women who escaped surveillance of the colonial gaze. The history of Algerian colonisation gives rise to a highly sexualised discourse where violence crystallizes on the body of the veiled woman. Her unveiling hid the unconscious desire of the French colonizers to break down the wall of resistance of Algerian society, a society that kept denying them any access through the cult of the veil. The veil, therefore, becomes a revolutionary tool to subvert colonialism.[36] Julien's film shows with great incisiveness the fluidity and dynamism of the meaning of the veil, highlighting, indeed, the politicisation of women's role in the context of the independence war. By using some of the footage from *Battle of Algiers*, he underscores, once again, the centrality of the gaze. The sequence from the film depicting three Algerian women masquerading before a mirror, and their passing a French checkpost reveals how the colonial gaze, predicated on the equation of the veil with tradition and passivity, is turned around by women in the service of the revolution.[37]

By weaving readings of excerpts from Fanon's essay 'Algeria unveiled', and comments by cultural theorists Stuart Hall and Françoise Vergès, the film takes on Fanon's decidedly male conception of the liberation struggle, challenges the marginalization of women that marks his thought, and implicates his legacy in the continuation – perhaps intensification – of oppressive hetero-patriarchal norms and structures in postcolonial Algeria.

The closing image of Julien's film, depicting the projection of a veiled woman onto the back of another woman, could epitomize the meaning of the project of "undoing the colonial archive". The veil reproduces the structure of the Panopticon by allowing to see without being seen. For Foucault, such asymmetry of seeing-without-being-seen is the very essence of power since ultimately the power to dominate rests on the differential possession of knowledge.[38] From this perspective, the veil, insofar as it enables women to see without

[36] See Maria Boariu, "The Veil as Metaphor of French Colonised Algeria", *JSRI* 3 (Winter 2002), 173-188.

[37] See Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994), 248-255.

[38] See Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980).

being seen, becomes a metaphorical barrier to the power/visual control of the Western gaze, by proposing a different "I/eye" – a new subject and a new gaze – which re-writes colonial history.

The ethical turn

> A specter is haunting our postcolonial world, the specter of Frantz Fanon.[39]

Frantz Fanon deploys overlapping discontinuous temporal stages aiming at re-inscribing and re-creating fragments of the past that keep on haunting and questioning the present. The film is "archeological in orientation", insofar as it explores "what has been hidden from history in order to dig up resources for imagining the present differently".[40] The past, therefore, is not conceived as an absence, a permanent loss, as that which "once was but is no longer",[41] but rather, it is considered in Heideggerian terms as an "having-been", as that which refers back to the futureness of being: "In the mode of forgottenness, having-been primarly 'discloses' the horizon in which *Da-sein*, lost in the superficiality of what is taken care of, can remember".[42] "The pastness of the past", as Paul Ricoeur reminds us, refers back to a past that keeps on inhabiting and haunting the present. The spectre of colonial history is the history of oppression and victimisation; violence during the Algerian war is nothing but the spectre of the oppressed/repressed haunting and threatening oppressors, for whom history turns to be a nightmare.

In Julien's film, the psychiatric hospital is the place where colonization meets decolonisation. What is worth noting is that the dramatization restores the destructive and devastating effects of the

[39] Françoise Vergès, "Creole skin, black mask: Fanon and disavowal", *Critical Inquiry* 23. 3 (Spring 1997), 578.

[40] Mercer, "Decoloniastion and Disappointment: Reading Fanon's Sexual Politics", 118.

[41] Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. K. Blamey and D. Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 352.

[42] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, quoted in Ricoeur, 312.

colonial violence not only for the colonised but also for the coloniser. One of the most troubling and disturbing sequences in the film displays the delirium of concomitant and alternating images of Fanon treating both the victims of torture and the French soldiers suffering the traumatic effects of having tortured Algerians. Successively, the camera focuses on a suggestive combinatory looks between Fanon and the French soldier: the latter looks at Fanon while Fanon looks elsewhere, Fanon looks at the soldier while the soldier looks away. The white man, looked at by the black man is unable to sustain his disturbing gaze. This shot shows, once again, the centrality of the look – the act of looking from the place of the other which fosters a transformative gaze, a gaze that is returned by the other. As the sequence suggests, Julien's film goes beyond Fanon by precisely exemplifying not only the reification of the colonised, but, above all, the 'depersonalisation' and dehumanisation of the coloniser as well, caught in a nightmarish spiral of violence from which there is no way out other than by taking responsibility for the oppressed.

To live with Fanon's spectre is to live with the memories, heritage, and genealogies of the history of decolonisation.

> Remembering Fanon is a process of intense discovery and disorientation. Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present.[43]

It is forgetting, indeed, that makes memory possible, enabling, thereby, the possibility to interpret the past otherwise, toward the future.[44] It leads to the 'promise of the future', which Derrida discusses.

> To think of memory or to think of anamnesis, here, is to think things as paradoxical as the memory of a past that has not been present, the memory of future – the movement of memory as tied to the future and

[43] Homi K. Bhabha, "Foreward: Remembering Fanon", in Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, xxiii.

[44] See Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 69-80.

not only to the past, memory turned toward the promise, toward what is coming.[45]

From this perspective, the relation between the remembering of a traumatic past, of what Paul Ricoeur defines 'wounded memory', and the trauma of the present Bhabha refers to, must be thought through.

In the film it is the figure of Homi Bhabha which accomplishes the task of re-inscribing and interpreting Fanon's thinking in the postcolonial context; in this respect, the visual contraposition between the image of Bhabha walking like a Benjamin *flaneur* in the contemporary metropolis and the symbolic image of Fanon represented in the desert is extremely powerful. Through the figure of Bhabha, Fanon's very words seem to resound with extreme topicality and relevance when he asserts, "But the war goes on, and we will have to bind up for years to come the many, sometimes ineffaceable, wounds that the colonialist onslaught has inflicted on our people".[46] Indeed, the recurrence of the "ruthless logic of colonial capitalism" in the era of globalisation, or the reconfiguration of a new Manichean division of the postcolonial space after September eleven separating 'the world of order' from 'the world of disorder', or even the new wars of resistance against American military rule representing the contemporary form of imperialist power, bear witness to the resonance and repercussions of the colonial past in the present.[47] Beyond historical parallelisms, Bhabha invites us to reflect upon the 'everyday emergency' of contemporary times the re-reading of Fanon and the colonial past leads to.

> My interest lies in the transient intersection where the claims to national culture within the ontopological tradition (the presentness of the past and the stability of cultural or ethnic ontology), are touched –

[45] Jacques Derrida, "Passage – From Traumatism to Promise", in E. Weber, ed., *Points...Interviews, 1974-1994*, trans. P. Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press: 1995), 383.

[46] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 200.

[47] Julien and Nash, "Fanon as Film", 108; Homi K. Bhabha, "Statement for the Critical Inquiry Board Statement", *Critical Inquiry* 30. 2 (2003-2004).

> and are translated by – the interruptive and interrogative memory of the displaced or displaceable populations that inhabit the national imaginary – be they migrants, minorities, refugees or the colonised.[48]

He draws attention to the moment when the stability of cultural identity – "the national ontopology" – is questioned by the memory of its dislocation. Through the historical metaphors of violence and proximity, both psychic and topological, between 'the Negro' and 'the white man', 'the native' and 'the settler', Fanon "faces a deeper truth about the arrangements of our times, our nations, our cities, our people".[49]

By proposing the concept of a trans-national humanism, and drawing on Lévinas' ethics, Bhabha proposes a humanism of alterity based on a dialogical relationship among bodies. Dialogue is to be meant as exposure to the 'otherness of the other' by taking responsibility for the other.

> In the impossibility of evading the neighbour's call, in the impossibility of distancing ourselves ... we are not free to distance ourselves from him ... this condition, or non-condition, of the hostage will therefore be nothing less than the primary and essential modality of freedom.[50]

From this perspective, Julien's Fanon, too, proposes a new ethical relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. At the end of the film Fanon is quoted, revised 'in Lévinasian terms.'

> From the moment that you and your like are liquidated like so many dogs you have to retain your importance...You must therefore weigh as heavily as you can upon the body of your torturer in order that his soul, lost in some byway, may find itself once more...And then there

[48] Bhabha, "Day by Day...With Frantz Fanon", in Read, *The Fact of Blackness*, 188, 191.

[49] Bhabha, quoted in Isaac Julien, dir., *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin White Mask*, 1996.

[50] Emmanuel Lévinas, "Substitution", in A. T. Peperzak, S. Critchley, and R. Bernasconi, eds., *Emmanuel Lévinas: Basic Philosophical Writings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 95.

> is that overwhelming silence – but of course the body cries out – that silence that overwhelms the torturer.[51]

Sacrificing their own body, the victims of torture and resistance denounce the limits of that very power which has subjugated them, showing, therefore, the possibility of overcoming it and the proximity of historical freedom.

The ethico-political dimension of the film is further foregrounded by bringing to the fore the centrality of listening. The filmic audio-visual practice as a whole and, particularly, some of the most disturbing sequences displayed in the film are suggestive in this respect. The sequence depicting an Arab mental patient who recites a call for freedom in his own language, as well as the one showing Fanon as a psychoanalyst listening both to the tortured and to the torturer stand for a past that, in the guise of 'the face of the other', speaks to the *I*. It embodies, in Lévinas' words, "an immemorial past, signified without ever having been present, signified on the basis of responsibility 'for the other,' in which obedience is the mode proper for listening to the commandment".[52] The centrality of listening to traumatic memory is well described by the Freudian scholar Kathy Caruth who figures the traumatic moment as a moment of listening – listening to a voice, the voice of the other, speaking from a wound.[53] *Frantz Fanon* can be read, in this respect, as a metaphorical act of ethical listening insofar as it portrays a past surviving and addressing itself to a belated self 'who was never there' as a relayed, wounded, fractured sound, as a moment of traumatic listening. That past which asks, in the guise of Fanon's body:

> Oh my body, make of me always a man who questions![54]

[51] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, quoted in Bhabha, "Day by Day with Frantz Fanon", 203.

[52] Emmanuel Lévinas, *On Thinking-of-the-Other: Entre Nous*, trad. Michael B. Smith and B. Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 172.

[53] See Kathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

[54] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 232.

Marina Vitale

Palimpsests of History and Memory

> I transcribed the scroll, I wrote it out
> and then I wrote it over, a palimpsest of course,
>
> but it came clear, at last, I had the answer
> or the seven answers to the seven riddles…
> (H.D., *Vale Ave*)

Palimpsests of historical memory

I am borrowing the first word of my title from the literary vocabulary of Hilda Doolittle, the American writer best known as H.D.[1] The term aptly describes her distinctive style, shaped by an aesthetics that is both spontaneous and coherent with her meditated theory of personal and historical consciousness. As she herself specified on the title-page of one of her early collections of short novels, entitled *Palimpsest*, a παλίμψηστοσ is "a parchment from which one writing has been erased to make room for another".[2] But however accurate and deep the erasure, there will always be an angle from which the old inscription is visible; some trace or ghost of the previous writing or writings will always remain to haunt the new text, making it resonate

[1] H.D. moved to Europe in 1911 and lived between London and Switzerland until her death in 1961. For a discussion of the nomadic identity of a rather consistent cosmopolitan community of expatriates in the early decades of the twentieth century, see my " 'Separated from the separated': il nomadismo identitario di H.D. e delle altre", in Lidia Curti et al. eds., *La nuova Shahrazad. Donne e Multiculturalismo* (Napoli: Liguori, 2004), 123-144.

[2] H.D., *Palimpsest* (Paris: Contact Éditions, [1923] 1926), title-page.

with double or multiple echoes and hybridising the new words with uncanny meanings.

Before looking at some of H.D.'s palimpsestic work, I want to discuss the appropriateness of the term for describing other forms of writing, namely historical writing, and indeed the very process of making sense of personal and historical experience. Above all I want to connect the notion of the palimpsest to the theme of 'Politics of Archiving and the Aesthetics of Memory', to which this issue is dedicated.

The comparability of literary and historiographical textuality has become natural enough in the last decades since the theoretical debate waged in the fields of Cultural and Historical Studies has demonstrated that the writing of History amounts to a large degree to *making* histories, and that the methodology of the historian is in many ways akin to that of the storyteller. One visual illustration of this resemblance is offered by the cover design of the paperback edition of *Making Histories*, a momentous collective volume published in 1982 by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies.[3] The title puns on Edward P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, a text that constituted — together with Richard Hoggart's and Raymond Williams's seminal work — one of the cornerstones of Cultural Studies as a disciplinary field.[4] The cover of the book presents a sort of visual riddle suggesting the idea that History is constructed by the very act of being written; that any historical 'fact' is constituted by a multilayered stratification of histories; that any 'page' of history is a palimpsest of re-membrances.

The cover page is completely filled up with the reproduction of part of a page of a sociological or historical text typed in small print.

[3] Richard Johnson, Gregor McLennan, Bill Schwartz, and David Sutton, eds., *Making Histories. Studies in History-Writing and Politics* (London: Hutchinson and CCCS, University of Birmingham, 1982).

[4] Edward P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, [1963] 1968), Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957) and Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958) and *The Long Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961) all belong to the same moment of theoretical redefinition.

The different shades of black and grey in which the words are printed conjure up the silhouette of an eighteenth century miner, as if it emerged from an underlying layer of printed text. Both the silhouette and the background are made of words: both are the product of a discursive practice, part and parcel of the same great narration — or *grand récit*, according to a terminology which was to become common a few years later under the influence of Jean François Lyotard and Hayden White.[5] Those familiar with social history texts were immediately reminded of George Walker's print of a miner, which had been used as the cover illustration for the Penguin edition of Thompson's *The Making*.

In his important book, Thompson had outlined the great narration of the emergence of the English working class as a historical subject endowed with a more or less lucid awareness of its own destiny and historical function – of its agency. This great narration amounted to a sort of mythical construction centred on the heroic figure of the 'free born Englishman', a construction heavily sustained by a preconceived idea, a paradigm, a theory.[6] In spite of that, Thompson had waged a stern battle against any theoretical stance in the field of historiography, and maintained that a pragmatist, 'objective', and 'scientific' attitude not only constituted the most specific virtue of the historian, but also the greatest and most valuable peculiarity of the English nation. Theory,

[5] The expression *grand récit*, was coined by Jean François Lyotard, one of the most successful prophets of the "post-modern condition", to describe the rhetorical operations dominating the discourses of both human and natural sciences. The notion of *grand récit* is also perfectly coherent with the conception of "narrativity" recognized by Hayden White as the basic rhetorical mode shaping historiographical discourses. Cf. Jean François Lyotard, *The Post-Modern Condition. A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massoumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1979] 1984) and Hayden White, *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973). Cf. also Marina De Chiara's discussion of the ordering power of historiography in her recent book *Oltre la gabbia. Ordine coloniale e arte di confine* (Roma: Meltemi, 2005), esp. 98-110.

[6] In the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution the Radicals had used the myth of the "free born Englishman" as an inspiring ideological lever to stir up the "People" to demand universal suffrage and political justice as their birthright, qua natural inheritors of the *Magna Charta Libertatum*.

instead, was condemned as non-scientific, un-English, inauthentic, and, in a word, "poor".[7]

In their 1982 book the Birmingham researchers took issue with Thompson's quest for a 'scientific' historiographical practice guaranteed by the empirical evidence of facts. At the same time they paid homage to his effort to open up new paths in the area of historical research; they valued his recognition of obscured and marginalized histories alongside and inside the main current of dominant History; they welcomed his eagerness to listen to the voices of a multitude of subaltern subjects whose stories had never been taken into account by historians. Thompson's work in fact played a decisive role in bringing about a shift from the notion of History to that of histories, helping to accelerate a trend which had started in the thirties with the advent of Social History, and had soon given rise to the various Histories from below and from the margins.[8]

This trend in historical research has endeavoured to provide some answers to questions like those polemically posed in 1935 by Bertold Brecht in his *Questions from A Worker Who Reads*. The author reflected on the enormous human toll paid by numberless social subjects dragged into 'great' historical deeds without being asked, while the names inscribed in the annals of humanity are exclusively those of kings and commanders, because only the 'Great' are acknowledged in the victors' History.[9] More recently established branches of historical studies, such as Subaltern Studies and Post-Colonial Studies, are trying to provide their own answers by

[7] Cf. Edward P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London: Merlin Press, 1978). It contains various essays, among which "The Peculiarities of the English", originally published in 1965.

[8] In Great Britain the process started with A.L. Morton's *A People's History of England* (London: The Left Book Club, 1936), which focussed for the first time on the role of the common people in the development of historical events. Oral History, Women's History and, more recently, Post-colonial Studies were to follow. The influence of the *Annales* School on the renewal of historiographical methods and aims is inestimable.

[9] Brecht's poem opens with the question: "Who built Thebes of the seven gates?/In the books you will find the name of kings./Did the kings haul up the lumps of rock?" and ends with the observation : "So many reports./So many questions." Cfr. Bertolt Brecht, *Poems 1913-1956* (London & N.Y.: Methuen, 1976).

interrogating the silences of History. Their aim is to rescue counter-memories, intercepting the half-strangled voices of the defeated and the subaltern historical subjects, thus allowing half-erased traces of human experience to emerge from the palimpsest of dominant historical interpretations. "Can the Subaltern Speak?": the polemical question looming in the title of an influential article by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak reverberates, with a post-colonial inflection, Brecht's working-class reader's rhetorical questions.[10]

The awareness that history writing amounts to making histories – or narrating stories – has worked as a powerful lever to open up the apparently solid carapace of historical 'Truth'. It has shown that behind the 'objective' façade of historiographical writing there lies a skein of different interpretations or 'definitions' (to borrow from Edward Said's reflections on Samuel P. Huntington's bellicose pamphlet on the clash of civilizations).[11] Said's militant refutation of Huntington's aggressive theory is a good example of a deconstructive practice which starts from a view of historiography as an ideological field structured in struggle, where contrasting interpretations of the 'Real' vie with one another in an effort to define, that is, to create or modify the 'Real' itself. As he reminds us,

> ... the writing of history is the royal road to the definition of a country.... [T]he definition of a society is in large part a function of historical

[10] Cf. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (University of Illinois Press: Urbana, 1988). Spivak's intervention is a highly concerned comment on the work of the Indian Subaltern Studies Group, led by Ranajit Guha whose counter-history project she encourages but also criticizes. In particular she suspects that, for all their efforts to unmask the epistemic violence committed by colonialist historians upon colonial subjects, Post-colonial Studies (and more specifically Subaltern Studies) may reproduce neo-colonial imperatives. The best-known volume of the group is Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, eds., *Selected Subaltern Studies* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[11] Samuel P. Huntington's "The Clash of Civilizations?", originally published in *Foreign Affairs* (summer 1993), was extended into the notorious *The Clash of Civilizations and the Re-making of World Order* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1996).

> interpretation, which is fraught with contested claims and counter-claims.[12]

The traces of 'contested claims and counter-claims' were indeed what Thompson had sought to discern alongside and underneath the overriding interpretations of the causes and social consequences of the Industrial Revolution. In so doing, he had dug out of public and private archives a mass of documents – such as half-literate workers' autobiographical writings and letters, police reports, religious tracts and political pamphlets – hitherto devoid of scientific value and had allowed a strong choir of plebeian voices to be heard: he had attuned his own ear to pitches and tones which had remained inaudible until then. Still, from among the extraordinary rich welter of evidences he had listened to, he had never distinguished any but male timbers. It was only some decades later, under the influence of feminism, that the same or similar documents started to speak with feminine voices as well, revealing the experience of women who had lived, suffered and fought side by side with the (supposedly) free-born Englishmen so dear to Thompson's heart.[13] For all of Thompson's – or any other historian's – aspiration to objectivity, the (material and metaphorical) archives of history and memory will only release partial and culturally determined information. The palimpsest will allow its half-blurred grooves to be perceived, but only from an ex-centric angle.[14]

A sophisticated exercise of the gaze is required to discover the "traces beneath the traces" which strew the landscape of personal and historical memory. As Sigmund Freud discovered, the impression of things past can never be thoroughly erased from memory, although the things themselves can only be brought back to light like

[12] Edward Said, *Reflection on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2000), 579-80.

[13] Barbara Taylor's *Eve and the New Jerusalem. Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Virago, 1983) was among the first works in women's history.

[14] I am using the word "grooves" thinking of Freud's description of the psychological mechanism of partial recovery of repressed memories that he compared to the operation of the so called Mystic Writing Pad. Cf. Sigmund Freud, "A Note upon the "Mystic Writing-Pad" (1925), in James Strachey, ed., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XIX (London: The Hogarth Press, 2001), 225-232 (especially 229).

archaeological finds. In his 1929 essay on *Civilization and Its Discontents*, he compares the process of remembering to the imaginative effort of somebody who watches an urban landscape and sees – syncretistically – the various buildings which have succeeded one another on the same site leaving nothing but a trace behind. He writes:

> ... let us make the fantastic assumption that Rome is not a place where people live, but a psychical entity with a similarly long, rich past, in which nothing that ever took shape has passed away, and in which all previous phases of development exist beside the most recent.... And the observer would need perhaps only to shift his gaze or his position in order to see the one or the other.[15]

Freud's enthusiasm for archaeology is well known as well as his pride in his collection of archaeological little treasures.[16] The discourse of Archaeology taught an important lesson to the science of the unconscious, and its language offered vital metaphors to describe the mechanisms of memory and the work of analysis.[17] Freud and numberless thinkers after him – including the *nouveaux philosophes* and, more recently, many historians – were ready to draw significant inspiration from both its method and its language.

H.D.'s re-visionary memory

"Today we have tunnelled very deep". This is a recurrent remark by which "the Professor" used to seal H.D.'s sessions with him. Even

[15] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. David McLintock, (London: Penguin, [1929] 2002), 8-9.

[16] H.D. was almost overwhelmed by the richness of his collection when she first entered his study in Berggasse 19 in March 1933. "I had not expected to find him surrounded by these treasures, in a museum, a temple", she annotated in the quasi diary she kept during the first weeks of her analysis in Vienna. It is now published with the title "Advent" and constitutes the second part of her fascinating *Tribute to Freud* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, [1956] 1970), 119.

[17] Particularly relevant to the construction of Freud's theory of memory is his 1914 essay on "Remembering, Repeating and Working Through", in *The Standard Edition*, vol. XII, 147-56.

before meeting Freud, however, and starting to explore the depths of her own psyche with his help, she had been deeply influenced by his theories and strongly fascinated by the analogy between the methods of psychoanalysis and those of archaeology.[18] She had already elaborated her notion of the palimpsest as a metaphor for the workings of poetical imagination, as well as a sort of objective correlative for psychic life, under the double influence of Freud's theories and the epochal archaeological discoveries which had brought to light large segments of ancient civilisations buried all around the coasts of the Mediterranean.[19]

She had felt the fascination of the *Greek Anthology*, and especially of its most ancient core, Meleager's *Garland*, belonging to the first cent. B.C., which had gathered some of Sappho's and Anyte's poems, thus preserving them, albeit in a fragmentary form.[20] She was very much alive to the multilayered – multicultural, multilingual, diasporic – identity of Meleager, who had flourished at the crossroad of various races and languages.[21] She had developed an understanding of the complexities of classical cultures with their intricate mixture of

[18] As a borderline subject H.D. lived recurrent periods of mental disorder both in the aftermath of World War I and in her later years. Before going into analysis with Freud in Vienna in 1933, she had had experiences of analysis with Mary Chadwick in London in 1931 and more fleeting experiences with Havelock Ellis towards the end of World War I and later, in Berlin, with Hanns Sachs, who introduced her to Freud. Before starting her analysis with him she read his work extensively, and also Freud read quite a lot of her writings before, during and after his professional work with her. For a thorough study of the relationship between Freud and H.D.'s circle, cf. Susan Stanford Friedman, ed., *Analyzing Freud. Letters of H.D., Bryher, and Their Circle* (New York: New Directions, 2002).

[19] For a very interesting discussion of this aspect cf. Paola Zaccaria, "Beyond One and Two: The Palimpsest as Hieroglyph of Multiplicity and Relation", in Marina Camboni, ed., *H.D.'s Poetry: "the Meaning that Words Hide"* (New York: AMS Press, 2003), 63-88.

[20] In her deeply researched study on *H.D. and Sapphic Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), Diane Collecott mentions Sappho's texts discovered after the 1907 reprint of Wharton's edition of Sappho that H.D. possessed, namely the 'Berlin Parchment' and the Oxyrhincus papyri from which H.D. quotes extensively, making her own translations. It is worth noting that H.D., her husband (Richard Aldington) and Bryher (who would soon become her long-standing lover) were all busy translating Greek classics.

[21] She discusses his complex Jewish, Greek and Syrian cultural and linguistic identity in *Notes on Thought and Vision*, in *Notes on Thought and Vision & The Wise Sappho* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1982), esp. 33.

variegated traditions among which, she found, the Middle-Eastern and north-African elements were by far the most vital and interesting. It is no chance that Miss Fairwood, the protagonist of "Secret Name: Excavator's Egypt" – one of the three stories constituting *Palimpsest* – is a highly researched assistant to a famous Egyptologist. Neither is it a chance that this character reaches the conclusion that the universally acclaimed purity of the ancient Greek civilisation was in fact the happy result of multiple contaminations with adjoining or rivalling cultures; of multiple re-inscriptions on the palimpsest of History.

With her American and English life experience, her ambivalent sexual orientations, her perception of mysterious links between apparently impermeable realities, this young classicist is in many ways a mouthpiece for H.D. And, for all its artistic acerbities, *Palimpsest* (and especially this section) offers some charming features like its uncanny geographies, its exotic flora strangely replicating a familiar elsewhere, its various pasts merging into one another. While visiting the Egyptian archaeological sites, Miss Fairwood expresses her enraptured enthusiasm for their uncanny iteration of familiar shapes:

> "*The Greeks came to Egypt to learn*".... His remark ... seemed the right, the just accompaniment to the swinging of that barge-like, low-set, old-fashioned vehicle, to the swing and soft throb of it and the curious blackness, familiar as along some marshy American sea-river... Somewhere behind them the moon had fallen down perpendicular, slipped off the flat stretch of sand where hillocks marked drift and sand hill, where following sand hill and sand crest and hollow of sand trough, it seemed eventually one must surely reach a sea, the rim of a New Jersey seacoast; where inland cut apart from the inwash of salt tides, with the meagrest space of tangled undergrowth separating it from contamination, from the inwash of sea, were fresh pools, where dragon-flies opened iridescent petal of frail wing, where hovering dragon-fly perched on the ivory, out-rayed petal of New Jersey lotus." [22]

Similarly telling is a young American tourist's rejection of this intercontinental iteration:

[22] *Palimpsest*, 217-18; italics in the text. For the expression "The Greeks came to Egypt to learn", see also passim.

> She couldn't bear it this morning, when I said that the curious crinkled rather pernicious trumpets of the green-white hellebore and the pepper-trees were amazingly Californian. She said, 'don't mention hibiscus to me, hydrangea or hibiscus or pepper-trees or even these hateful poinsettias that are so awfully Californian. The palms even (if you will go on comparing) will eventually put me off Egypt altogether'.[23]

"Past, present, all the commutations of past and present (as light cast through darkened glass) were merged at one within her. The just past, the far past", Miss Fairwood half-meditates in the vaguely stream-of-consciuosness-like diegesis typical of H.D.'s fiction, and of this novel in particular.[24]

In her later works H.D. reached a much more pliable style capable of conjuring her sense of palimpsestic reality without burdening her texts with open references to her theoretical convictions. She plied the threads of her personal and historical mythologies into the rich warp of her stratified narratives, giving poetical life to that process of re-membering as an epiphany of traces beneath traces that had been so authoritatively explained by Freud in his work and that she had learned to practice as one of his analysands.

As she wrote in her *Tribute to Freud*, she had always sensed that "There were things under things, as well as things inside things".[25] But it was during one of her sessions with him that she came to understand the symbolical valence of an episode belonging to her childhood, which she read now as a metaphor of the surfacing of the repressed contents of the unconscious and also of her ambivalence towards such contents. While playing in the garden with her brother, who was two years older than herself, and an older half-brother, they happened to upturn a large log and discovered that underneath the rotten wood there existed a secret world that they contemplated for a few moments with wonder and fright. Then they hurried to put the log back in place very delicately in order to hide, but also to preserve, the secret universe they had come across:

[23] Ibid., 204.
[24] Ibid., 218.
[25] *Tribute*, 21

> We saw what was under the heavy immovable log. There was a variety of entertaining exhibits; small things like ants moved very quickly; they raced frantically around but always returned to the same ridge of damp earth or tiny lump of loam. In neatly sliced runnels, some white, wingless creatures lay curled. The base of the log had been the roof of a series of little pockets or neat open graves, rather like Aztec or Egyptian burial-chambers, but I did not know that. These curled, white slugs were unborn things. They were repulsive enough, like unlaced boils. Or it is possible that they were not essentially repulsive – they might be cocoonless larvae, they might 'hatch' sometime. But I only saw them, I did not know what they were or what they might portend. My brother and I stood spellbound before this disclosure. Eric watched the frantic circling of the ants attentively. Then he set the log back carefully, so as to crush as few of the beasts as possible, so as to restore, if possible, the protective roof over the heads of the white slugs.[26]

The notion of potential 'hatchings' is pervasive in H.D.'s cultural universe. It is quite central to her way of looking at the past. It qualifies her intertextual revisionist practice consisting in re-visiting the male-dominated literary canon in order to re-write it from a feminine point of view and to reinstate women as powerful agents in the literary and mythological archives.[27] It is also at the basis of her faith in the inexhaustible possibility of language to release endless new meanings: "I know," she wrote in *The Walls Do Not Fall*, "I feel/the meaning that words hide;//they are anagrams, cryptograms,/little boxes, conditioned//to hatch butterflies…".[28]

[26] Ibid., 20-21.
[27] Her effort to reinstate women as powerful agents in the literary and mythological archives resulted in a gallery of feminine heroines – Eurydice, Claribel, Mary of Magdala, Penelope, Helen, and many others – freed from their traditional ancillary roles and allowed to act out their half-suffocated potentialities. Among the finest analyses of H.D.'s construction of a feminine Pantheon, see Susan Stanford Friedman, "Creating a Women's Mythology", in Susan Stanford Friedman and Rachel Blau DuPlessis, eds., *Signets. Reading H.D.* (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1990), 373-405. For a seminal definition of the term 're-vision' cf. Adrienne Rich's "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision", in *On Lies, Secrets and Silence* (New York: Norton, 1979), 35.
[28] H.D., *The Walls Do Not Fall*, in *Trilogy* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1973), 53.

One of the fascinations of her autobiographical writings consists in her ability to presentify the past, not so much in the sense that the past is made available as if it were taking place in the present, but rather in the sense that its meaning depends largely on the light later events project upon it. The workings of her revisionary memory are clearly shown in *Tribute to Freud* where the act of re-membering is foreclosed, analysed, discussed and even the reliability of the remembered episodes is questioned and often discarded. Also in other works, as for example in her last novel, *The Gift*, certain occurrences are revisited several times and take up different meanings when looked at on subsequent occasions.

The Gift was published in 1961, the year of her death. But it had been composed during World War II. Most of it was actually written during the London blitz as a sort of self-therapy against terror and despair. She knew that, in extreme situations, shock and fear can scatter and destroy the contents of that "strange *camera obscura*" which constitutes the human mind, as she wrote in the first chapter of the novel, appropriately entitled "Dark Room". But she also knew that "... shock can also, like an earthquake or an avalanche, uncover buried treasure".[29]

She describes the process of retrieving past impressions from one's individual and collective archive as depending on a delicate mechanism which is often self-conscious, although it cannot be put in motion at command. As she says,

> ... it would be possible with time and with the curious chemical constituents of biological or psychic thought-process ... to develop single photographs or to develop long strips of continuous photographs, stored in the dark-room of memory, and again to watch people enter a room, leave a room, to watch, not only those people enter and leave a room, but to watch the child watching them.
> All this is really very simple. The trouble is, the process of this letting loose or letting flow, continuous images like a moving-picture, is a secret one can not, with the best will in the world, impart. Because one does not quite know how it works, when it will work or how long it will continue to work, once it is started. The store of images and pictures is endless and is the common property of the whole race. But one must, of necessity, begin with one's own private inheritance; there, already the measure is *pressed down and shaken together, and running over*.[30]

[29] Ibid.

The mental strategy she developed blended past and present in such a way as to allow her to overcome the agony of being trapped in a London house during the severe air raids the town suffered in 1941. As she noted in one of her diaries,

> ... without the analysis and the illuminating doctrine or philosophy of Sigmund Freud, I would hardly have found the clue or the bridge between the child-life, the memories of the peaceful Bethlehem, and the orgy of destruction, later to be witnessed and lived through in London. That outer threat and constant reminder of death, drove me inward, almost forced me to compensate, by memories of another world, an actual world where there had been security and comfort. But this was no mechanical intellectual trick of mind or memory, the Child actually returns to that world, she lives actually in those reconstructed scenes, or she watches them like a moving-picture.[31]

Her sophisticated narrative method broadly relies on the stream of consciousness technique, that had been elaborated in the previous decades, and that she had learned to master in her early novels. But it also relies on a fine cinematic sensibility, which was one of her gifts and which she had nurtured with her experiments in film production.[32]

[30] H.D., *The Gift*, edited and annotated by Jane Augustine (Gainesville: The University of Florida Press, [1961] 1998), 50-51.The line in italics in the text (Luke 6:38) is one of the frequent references to the New and Old Testament one encounters in H.D.'s work.

[31] *H.D. by Delia Alton* (Unpublished Diary, 1949-51), cit. in Jane Augustine's "Introduction", in Ibid., 5.

[32] She was among the founders of Pool, an experimental film making group which produced *Borderline* (starring Paul Robeson and herself among others) in 1930. She was also one of the founders and editors of *Close up*, the first British cinema review. An anthology was edited by James Donald, Anne Friedberg and Laura Marcus (*Close Up 1927-33. Cinema and Modernism*, London: Cassell, 1998). A more recent anthology was edited in Italy by Paola Zaccaria: *Close Up (1927-1933). Antologia della prima rivista internazionale di cinema* (Torino: Lindau, 2002).

> The dream, the memory, the unexpected related memories must be allowed to sway backward and forward, as if the sheet or screen upon which they are projected, blows and is rippled in the wind or whatever emotion or idea is entering a door, left open. The wind blows through the door, from outside, through long, long corridors of personal memory, of biological and of race-memory. Shut the door and you have a neat flat picture. Leave all the doors open and you are almost out-of-doors, almost within the un-walled province of the fourth-dimensional. This is creation in the truer sense, in the *wind bloweth where it listeth* way, in the way the snow falls, in the way a branch of mock-orange blossom runs askew out of its frame, against a high wooden-fence or along a shed where there are rabbits or hens or a kennel where there was once a dog.[33]

This respect for the free play of associations by which memory works, this effort to salvage vivid details of everyday life from oblivion, however fragmentary and insignificant, makes the reading of her novels, and especially *The Gift*, an intense visionary experience through which the readers are put in the position of participant watchers of scenes of life, which are re-membered, re-lived, and re-experienced. The wind of memory that – as we have just read – blows through the corridors of the psyche shuffles and juxtaposes seemingly meaningless moments of personal stories together with the great and tragic events of History, loading them with mysterious intimations of hope or despair.

The wind of memory and the storm of history

The remembered stories which interweave through *The Gift* do not belong merely to the protagonist's individual life but to a repository of memories which have been passed on from one generation to the other as a 'gift' from one 'gifted' person to another, from an older seer, wise-woman, or dreamer to a younger one.[34] The mnestic

[33] *The Gift* , 84. The reference to John 3:8 is in italics in the text.

[34] "I seemed to have inherited that. I was the inheritor ... I inherited Fanny from Mama, from Mamalie, if you will, but I inherited Fanny. Was I indeed Frances come back? Then I would be Papalie's own child, for Papalie's name was Francis; I would be like Mama; in a sense I would be Mama." *The Gift*, 37.

fragments that emerge like traces in a palimpsest are disparate, but linked together by a thread of analogies and associations. They organize themselves around three moments of 'vision'. The first concerns a religious ceremony, which took place in 1741 to solemnize a pact between a community of Moravian exiles who had recently settled in the New World and a group of native American tribes – a pact that was deemed heretical by both the Moravian orthodoxy and by the power logics of the white American 'frontier'. The second relates to the deciphering – carried out in 1841 by H.D.'s grandmother and by her first husband – of the only extant document that sealed such a pact. The last coincides with the London blitz of 1941.

The 1741-1841-1941 cadence is one of those uncanny coincidences that fascinated H.D., although it is never emphasized in the novel. The key episode towards which all the threads of the complex web of stories constituting the plot converge, takes place in the fifth chapter, entitled "The Secret". Here the child Hilda, who is only ten years old, comes in contact, without fully understanding its meaning, with a secret shared by a long feminine line in her family. It is a summer night full of shooting stars, and her family is sitting in the garden commenting upon the swift appearance of the luminous trails in the sky. The child listens to their soft voices from upstairs where she is chatting with her grandmother, her beloved Mamalie, who mixes up times and generations. Mamalie is now addressing her grand-daughter as if she were either her own daughter or one of her sisters, while re-living old moments of her life as well as reconstructing confidences whispered to her by her elders. The child, bewitched, plays along with her and – by way of mutterings, half sentences, interruptions and detours – Mamalie recalls an old alliance made between her Moravian ancestors and the chiefs of seven native American tribes, including Mohicans and Iroquois. They had written an agreement on a sort of rough parchment in a mosaic of idioms and symbols belonging to the different ethnic groups. But the pact was broken because the specific Moravian group to which Mamalie's and Hilda's ancestors belonged was totally unrepresentative of the larger Moravian community in America and even more so of the official white Americans' aggressive interracial policy. The Moravians who had signed the pact followed a long-standing mystic tradition

denominated the Hidden Church. Their principles were totally at variance with the rapacious and belligerent politics upheld among the white people, who were in favour of fur trading and seizure of the land. On the other hand, also most of the Indian tribes were on the war foot.

The pact had been sealed by the mystical exchange of the names of two women belonging to the two communities. Anna von Pahlen, the most outstanding figure in the Moravian community, had donated her chosen name, Agnes, to the wife of the most powerful among the Indian chiefs, and the latter had reciprocated by donating the white woman her chosen name, Morning Star. But, being both ex-centric, the two negotiating communities could not stop the ensuing massacre. Everything was put on fire, both by the conventionally orthodox Moravians who disavowed the interethnic rite which had just been sealed, and by the other Indian tribes who literally buried the village of the whites under a swarm of incendiary arrows. Everything was destroyed. The only salvaged thing was the parchment (or at least a paper copy of the parchment), which, one century later, in 1841, was found, almost by chance, and deciphered by Mamalie and her husband, thanks to a combination of archaeological and philological know-how and visionary illumination. As the old woman now recalls in her half dream,

> He thought at first it was an old music-scroll, he pulled out. But it was a document written in curious characters, Greek, Hebrew and Indian dialects and writing and marginal notes of music. The paper scroll bore the names of Commerhof, Pyrlaeus and Christian Seidel with (my Christian supposed) the list of medicine-men or priests of the Indian tribes, done in their picture-writing. ... The papers were headed by the motto ... *l'amitié passe même le tombeau.*[35]

Fire and its metamorphoses are a leitmotif in the novel. It causes terror and death, but not all the time. The luminous trails left by the shooting stars are and are not the fire trails of the 1741 Indians' arrows and of the 1941 Nazi bombs, which illuminate the London sky

[35] Ibid., 158-9.

in the last chapter. The shooting stars may or may not become incendiary, and, on the other hand, the bombs and their blazing trails may become shooting stars.

In her 1941 abyss of fear and horror, the only comfort and the only hope the grown-up Hilda may find is the thought that her women ancestors' 'gift' has not exhausted its potentialities, that there may still be the possibility of establishing some pact of fraternity and friendship among peoples at war: a pact of solidarity and identification with the Other.[36] In a London darkened by war-time curfew regulations and shattered by explosions, under the stress of extreme personal danger and the fear of a larger historical disaster in the face of Nazi aggression, her imagination turns back to other moments when history had taken a decisive turn. She evocates them through the medium of the almost mangled exchanges between a young child and her slightly amnesiac grandmother:

> It's not really dark in this room but then I am not afraid of the dark, I am afraid more of a bright light that might be fire or a shooting-star, falling on the house and burning us all up.
> It all started with the shooting-star and my asking questions, but the question that David Zeisberger asked (Mamalie said) *might have changed the course of history*, so it is important, after all, sometimes to ask questions. I think of questions I could ask Eric sometimes or I could ask Mamalie – but there is no use saying, "who is Lucy?" because for the moment, it seems that I am Lucy.[37]

Hilda's evocation of an obscured moment which "might have changed the course of history", but failed to have an impact on the future, calls to mind Walter Benjamin's dictum, in his sixth thesis on the philosophy of history, that

> [t]o articulate the past historically ... means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger .... Only that historian will have

[36] Although it must be said that her interethnic dream doesn't find any specific articulation and remains very vague, as had also happened in *Borderline*, the film she had co-produced with the Pool Group in 1930.

[37] *The Gift*, 173; my italics.

> the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.[38]

In the agonizing instants that might be the last of her life, her mind turns to forgotten stories of people and communities who had sought peace and solidarity in spite of their marginalization and dislocation. The original core of Moravians who had flown Bohemia in the eighteenth century under the pressure of religious and political persecution had merged with dissidents from France and other European countries, creating a hybrid national and linguistic mosaic which resonates throughout the novel, further enriched with the ancient languages coming from religious texts, with the language of music, and the traces of the native American languages. One gets the echo of this amalgam all along. As Mamalie recalls it, to conclude their pact of friendship the two communities had exchanged the names of two of their women, and pledged their souls to the Cause, by speaking in languages ("When they drew out the text, *I will give him the Morning Star*, the Indian medicine-men who talked mixed English and a little German with the Moravians, shouted in one voice *Heil* or *Hail* and then *Kehelle*").[39] And their voices mount and mix together, in the final sentence of the novel, in a sort of polyphonic choir, finally merging into the sound of the sirens announcing the all-clear:

> Harken to us, sings the great choir of the strange voices that speak in a strange bird-like staccato rhythm but I know what they are saying though they are speaking Indian dialects. The two voices answer one another and the sound of Anna von Pahlen's voice [...] is pure and silver and clear like a silver-trumpet.
> *I will give him the Morning Star*, reads Anna and the head of the Indian priests, who is Shooting Star, later to be baptized Philippus, answers in his own language, *Kehelle* and then Hail, and they call together to the Great Spirit and the God of the Brotherhood and the God of the Initiates...
> ... it comes nearer, it is the shouting of many horsemen, it is Philippus, Lover-of-Horses, it is Anna, Hannah or Grace who is answering. Now they call together in one voice... the sound accumulates, gathers sound... "It's the all-clear," says Bryher. "Yes," I say. (223)

[38] Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, in *Illuminations*, with an introduction by Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), 247; italics in the text.

[39] *The Gift*, 167. The reference is to Revelation 2:28.

The two most remarkable voices are those of the two women who exchanged their names in the distant year 1741. Their act is extremely telling if one thinks that it involves a double re-naming: the Mohican woman is given the name of a white woman, but also the white woman is re-named after the native one. This goes absolutely against the grain in the centuries-long practice of re-naming places and people perpetrated by the Europeans since their first colonial encounters.[40]

The other element worth stressing is the condition of dislocation, which characterizes the two groups involved in the pact. On the one hand the native tribes had been chased back more and more harshly into residual areas of the country by the white settlers and in the end had to accept the hospitality and protection of the Moravians, just before the final massacre.[41] On the other hand there is a migrant community of European exiles whose story of isolation inside the larger white community in the New World is recalled by the protagonist, who is doubly their inheritor because she re-traced their steps back to Europe, in a sort of necessary self-exile away from the suffocating atmosphere of Pennsylvania.[42] Thanks to the palimpsestic structure of her narration the great and tragic History of the extermination of the native peoples of North America and the history of an episode of peripheral contact between fringes of different ethnic

[40] Tzvetan Todorov was among the first scholars who studied this disquieting aspect of colonialism in his *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984).

[41] The same massacre is narrated in Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* as indicated in one of the notes H.D. appended to *The Gift*, 237-8.

[42] See my " 'Separated from the separated' ", quoted above.

communities is re-activated in a present inhabited by ghosts and memories.[43]

This loving re-evocation of past experiences, with its bold intersection between History and the stories of common people, calls to mind what Hélène Cixous says of her first encounter with Colonial History. She was less than four years old when she saw the "liberation army" cross a square in her native town of Oran, in Algeria, while she was playing with her hen on the terrace of her house. She was dimly aware that the immense historical tragedy of war was flaring up everywhere and reaching her home steps. Caught with her family in the double plight of half German Jewish and half Algerian ascendancy, she was starting to understand the "principal and secondary persecutions" of History. As she writes in "Apparizioni",

> The menacing forms of exclusion, exile and massacre were visible everywhere. I saw Fortinbras De Gaulle and the allied forces enter the parade ground. We had been liberated, but the Algerians were more enslaved than before.[44]

In her desperation she was sustained, like H.D., by the necessity, almost by the obsession, to build an elsewhere for herself "where it [was] possible to write, to dream, to invent new worlds". She "felt recruited as the guardian of survival – not of life, but of mere survival – as the Keeper of the Night".[45] Faced with the unfeeling storm of history, she felt that she had an obligation that was not too dissimilar from the gift passed on from Mamalie to Hilda Doolittle in *The Gift*. As Cixous writes,

[43] Walter Benjamin's *Theses* come to mind once more, with their insistence that "History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now", and that historical re-evocation "is a tiger's leap into the past" (*Illuminations*, 252-253).

[44] Hélène Cixous, "Apparizioni", in Paola Bono, ed., *Scritture del corpo. Hélène Cixous variazioni su un tema*, (Roma: Sossella, 1999), 108. The essay, presented at the Conference of the Società Italiana delle Letterate held in Orvieto in November 1998, was published in Italian (my translation).

[45] Ibid.

> The mission that my father entrusted me with can be roughly described as follows: to do everything in my power to save myself and people like myself from being blown away by oblivion and indifference, to keep my vigilance and hold the dead, the murdered, the prisoners, the excluded, above the jaws of death.[46]

In this effort she is certainly reminiscent of the predicament of Benjamin's Angelus Novus, although advocating a different course of action. In his ninth and most famous thesis Benjamin describes the tragic impotence of the angel to save the subjects of History by weathering the storm of futurity.

> The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned.[47]

Cixous' entire work is an illustration of her determination to contrast the storm of official History by allowing the congregate strength of subaltern histories to deconstruct and redirect it. An increasing number of post-colonial writers are endeavouring to keep the "corridors of memory" open.[48] They are striving to keep counter-memories alive by writing histories or telling stories; they seek to re-vision historical archives in order to do justice not only to the past, but also to the future. In fact if it is true that the angel of History is irresistibly, though unwillingly, propelled into the future, it is also true that the historian's ethical obligation towards the dead is to fan "the spark of hope in the past", in order to prevent the "enemy" from becoming invincible.[49]

Post-colonial writers have familiarized us with this re-visionist practice. The notion of palimpsest is central to this re-appropriation of suppressed histories, as the work of writers like Hélène Cixous, Assia

[46] Ibid., 109.

[47] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 249.

[48] See *The Gift* , 84, quoted above.

[49] See *Illuminations*, quoted above.

Djebar and many others demonstrate. Anglo-Australian migrant writer Paul Carter uses the word 'palimpsest' to describe the textual processes through which the dense environment that we call 'place' is brought into being.[50] Guyanese novelist and critic Wilson Harris uses the same word as a metaphor for the rich complexity of modern Caribbean societies.[51] The white, cosmopolitan, modernist writer and intellectual H.D. had used the same word in a different historical and cultural context. Her intuitions predate the post-modern and post-colonial understanding of the layering effect of history, which always keeps half-erased traces of the past to haunt its present. She anticipates the post-colonial urge to read back into the past its "hatched" potentialities in order to comprehend the density and complexity of the present. She short-circuits past and present in order to illuminate them reciprocally and allow a reading against the grain of official interpretations. In so doing she endeavours to save vestigial remains of subaltern stories from being eliminated from the victors' History and hold the victims "above the jaws of death".[52]

[50] See the entry "palimpsest" in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds., *Post-Colonial Studies. The Key Concepts* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 174-6.

[51] Ibid.

[52] See "Apparizioni", 109 quoted above.

THE AESTHETICS OF MEMORY

Bianca Del Villano

Re-membering and Forgetting in *Memento*

Memento (2000), a film directed by Christopher Nolan, proposes a reflection on the mechanisms of remembering, through the story of Leonard Shelby, who totally lacks short-term memory. His attempts to gather the 'pieces' of his life may be compared with the way human mind memorises events. However, the protagonist's particular 'condition' forces him to search for his memories outside his mind, turning him into a detective of his own past, which he tries to interpret, in order to prove its reliability (and fill the gaps). In this perspective, Leonard may also be seen as an archivist, (re)collecting and giving a meaning to proofs and documents. This possible reading finds a theoretical premise in Derrida's "Archive Fever" which, in the light of Freud's theories on memory, investigates the possible connections between the structure of memory and the archive.

This article tries to detect how the construction of memory can be linked to that of an archive, in relation to the particular 'case' offered by *Memento*, presenting a preliminary discussion on Derrida's essay, followed by an analysis of the film, based above all on the fragmented and unreliable nature of memory.

The archive of memory

The description of memory, in Western psychological and philosophical studies, is often entrusted to spatial metaphors. Plato,

Augustine, Locke and Bergson, all assimilate memory to a recipient, a repository of past experiences, feelings and images.[1] Freud often uses spatial descriptions of the unconscious, preconscious and conscious systems, in relation to memory. In particular, in *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), he describes the conscious and the unconscious as two communicating rooms, separated by a small passage, through which only one pathogenic memory at a time can pass and become conscious;[2] he employs the same metaphor in *Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (1915), where he emphasises the existence of a guardian, a defensive faculty of the I, protecting the entrance from any disturbing memory.[3] This means that some memories are allowed to become conscious, while others are doomed to remain buried in the unconscious. At any rate, from the very beginning of his research, and in particular from *Studies on Hysteria* on, Freud conceived memory as a spatial dimension which, as he will state later in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), covers the unconscious and preconscious systems, on which external events are written as memory traces. Traces, in turn, once transcribed in the mind, are organised and classified according to logical and chronological criteria, a fact which transforms the mnemic systems into a sort of archive.[4] The modality of the transcription is clarified through the metaphor of the writing pad.

The mystic writing pad, or *wunderblock*, is a toy constituted by three layers, a wax slab at the bottom, a transparent sheet in the middle, and a piece of celluloid at the top. The writing appears as a consequence of the pressure of a stylus upon the superficial plane and disappears by removing the top sheet. Freud compared this effect to the working of human perception.

[1] Cfr. Federica Casadei, "*Fideliter Continere.* Su una metafora della memoria", in *La memoria e i segni* (Roma: Carocci, 2000), 16-18.

[2] Sigmund Freud, "Studies on Hysteria", in James Strachey, ed., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. II (London: The Hogarth Press, 2001), 291.

[3] Sigmund Freud, "Introduction to Psychoanalysis", in *The Standard Edition*, vol. XV, 224.

[4] See Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis's interesting discussion on Freud's conception of memory in *Enciclopedia della Psicanalisi* (Bari: Laterza, [1967] 1993), 641-642.

> I do not think it is too farfetched to compare the celluloid and waxed paper cover with the system of perception consciousness and its protective shield, the wax slab with the unconscious behind them, and the appearance and disappearance of the writing with the flickering-up and passing-away of consciousness in the process of perception.[5]

The quotation suggests a correspondence between the elements of the human memory apparatus and the layers of the writing pad, hinting at the process of perception of external traces and at their consequent inscription within the mind, where, as anticipated, they come to be organised as in an archive. In "Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression", Derrida re-considers Freudian psychoanalysis in order to re-interpret the coordinates of Freud's theory of memory, of which he emphasises the similarity with the ancient notion of archive. His starting point is the etymological analysis of the word archive, whose first characteristic is linked to the Greek *archaion*, the house of the archons, where they are not only guardians, but also official interpreters of the documents it contains.

> It is thus, in this *domiciliation*, in this house arrest, that archives take place. The dwelling, this place where they dwell permanently, marks this institutional passage from the private to the public, which does not always mean from the secret to the non-secret. [6]

The quotation suggests a blurring of the distinction between public and private, official and secret, insofar as what is kept *inside* the archive is supposed to pertain to the *official* history of a place; in other words, the passage from the private to the public is marked by the entrance in the domestic space of a house. As the French philosopher makes clear, however, this passage is not necessarily from the secret to the non-secret, or vice versa, so that the movement between inside and outside, secret

[5] Sigmund Freud, "A Note Upon the Mystic Writing Pad", in *The Standard Edition*, vol. XIX, 230-231.

[6] Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression", *Diacritics* 25.2 (Summer 1995), 10. This essay translated from the French has later been published as Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

and non-secret makes the archive a sort of uncanny threshold, insofar as evidences might be occulted rather than preserved from the passing of time. The power of the archons depends on these opposite possible uses of the archive. On the one hand, indeed, there is no archive without the faculty of "consignation".

> The archontic power, which also gathers the functions of unification, of identification, of classification, must be paired with what we will call the power of *consignation*. … *Consignation* aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration. In an archive, there should not be any absolute dissociation, any heterogeneity or *secret* which could separate (*secernere*), or partition, in an absolute manner. The archontic principle of the archive is also a principle of consignation, that is, of gathering together.[7]

On the other hand, every archive is marked by a sort of death drive, what Derrida calls 'archive fever', aiming at destruction.

> As the death drive is also, according to the most striking words of Freud himself, an aggression and a destruction (*Destruktion*) drive, it not only incites forgetfulness, amnesia, the annihilation of memory, as *mneme* or *anamnesis*, but also commands the radical effacement, in truth the eradication, of that which can never be reduced to *mneme* or to *anamnesis*, that is, the archive, consignation, the documentary or monumental apparatus as *hypomnema*, mnemotechnical supplement or representative, auxiliary or memorandum.[8]

Consignation, which is the faculty of gathering together, and archive fever, which works to disorganise and destroy the archive, could be associated to two psychic impulses corresponding respectively to the faculty of recollecting and to that of repressing/suppressing mnemonic traces. This idea is emphasised in particular in the section of "Archive Fever", in which Derrida considers the word 'impression' in relation to the pad and to the mechanism of memorising. The impression refers to

[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid., 14

the "inscription which leaves a mark right on the substrate" and one of the strongest 'impressions' on the archive is that of its semantic contraries, 'repression' and 'suppression'.[9] Both these mechanisms "directly concern the structures of archivization" and also point to different psychic functions:

> Unlike repression, which remains unconscious in its operation and in its result, suppression effects what Freud calls a "second censorship" – between the conscious and the preconscious – or rather affects the affect, which is to say, that which *can never* be repressed in the unconscious but only suppressed and displaced in another affect.[10]

Thus, the 'impression' of the traces, organised by the archontic faculty of consignation, is counterbalanced by the possibility of a 'suppression' or a 'repression', two aspects of archive fever; if, on the one hand, these figures of the death drive are a "negative charge", continuously hinting at the possibility of destruction and annihilation of the archive, on the other, it is in virtue of that negative possibility that the archive can be realised. This idea finds its origin in the Greek distinction between *mneme* and *hypomnema*, respectively, memory as objective fact, and memory as a reminder of the fact, a sign standing for memory itself. *Hypomnema* repeats and substitutes memory, infecting, contaminating its purity, at the same time, representing the only possible form in which memory can survive and be preserved.[11] The gap between *mneme* and *hypomnema*, then, could be considered the site where repression and suppression can act. Yet, this awareness may turn the gap into a door towards the future:

> It follows, certainly, that Freudian psychoanalysis proposes a new theory of the archive; it takes into account a topic and a death drive without which there would not in effect be any desire or any possibility for the archive. But at the same time, […] the concept of the archive must inevitably carry in itself, as does every concept, an

[9] Ibid., 22-23.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy", in *Disseminations*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone, 1981), 61-171.

> unknowable weight. The presupposition of this weight also takes on the *figures* of "repression" and "suppression", even if it cannot necessarily be reduced to these. This double presupposition leaves an imprint. It inscribes an impression in language and in discourse. The unknowable weight which imprints itself thus does not weigh only as a negative charge. It involves the history of the concept, it inflects archive desire or fever, their opening on the future, their dependency with respect to what will come, in short, all that ties knowledge and memory to the promise.[12]

The "unknowable weight" of the death drive with its figures of repression and suppression may turn into a positive charge if its "impression in language and discourse" comes to the surface. The awareness of the hypomnesic nature of the archive can change the destruction drive into a deconstruction drive, continuously relativising the concept of archive, continuously underlining its 'textual' nature.

If the first urge for a renewed theory of the archive derives from Freud's psychoanalysis, it is also true that psychoanalysis itself can receive new impulses from Derrida's intuitions. It would be interesting, in this respect, to consider what the consequence of the archival death drives in relation to human memory could be, especially considering that Freudian memory shares a hypomnesic nature with the notion of the archive. Indeed, Freud states that human memory is constructed as a text; memory traces are only psychic representations of what the psyche experiences and perceives, which thanks to the writing-pad-mechanism come to be 'written' into the preconscious/unconscious systems, within a net of other traces. This means that no memory as fact, but only memory as representation is contained in the psychic archive of the human mind, so that human memory itself can be deconstructed and relativised by its own death drive.

These theoretical premises can help investigate how the human archival mind functions as a text. In *Memento* (2000), a film by Christopher Nolan, the protagonist's death drive suppresses the possibility of questioning and deconstructing the information

[12] Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever", 24.

contained in the archive of his mind, causing the non-acceptance of the relativity of his own subjectivity.

The detective as an archivist

As a consequence of the defensive action of the 'I' which organises and interprets the psyche, some of the mnemic traces, which dwell in the unconscious and preconscious systems, are allowed to become conscious, while others are not.[13]

The 'I' like an archon has the task of consignation, that of "coordinat[ing] a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unit of an ideal configuration",[14] which in psychoanalytic terms implies that the 'I' unifies all the contrasting elements of the psyche, in order to form a coherent identity. This does not mean that identity *is* a cohesive unity, but simply that its numerous aspects are made harmonic by the 'I'. In this respect, the death drive may correspond to the repressing/suppressing faculty of the 'I', but it could also serve the purpose of relativising the textual creation of the archon. In the former case, the construction of identity would be safe from the menace that self-analysis may represent, but it could generate an unconscious or preconscious secret, whose unveiling could split the identity of the subject and so disorganise the archive of the mind. The latter vision, instead, would prove a possible positive 'use' of the death drive, in relation to a subjectivity in which consignation and archive fever would not produce an opposition or a dialectic, but rather a sort of continuity, in which the organisation and suturation of the parts of an identity would be rendered flexible by the awareness of its gaps and contradictions.

[13] Elizabeth Swanstrom's words best sum up this point: "the ancient conception of archive [...] becomes fundamentally revealing of Freud's formulation of the psychical apparatus, and a human subject can be seen as an archival house in which a variety of documents, including traces, memories, impressions, and repressions, is stored, and over which the conscious mind acts as guardian and interpreter (i.e., archon)". Elizabeth Swanstrom, "Wax Blocks, Data Banks, and File #0467839: The Archive of Memory in William Gibson's Science Fiction", *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 1.2 (2005), 10-11.

[14] Derrida, "Archive Fever", 10.

Memento presents an interesting example of a suppressing death drive, causing the refusal of self-deconstruction, on the part of the protagonist. The archive of his mind is affected by the lack of short-term memory, to which he reacts by writing and re-writing the moments of his life, that is the text of himself, creating a unique version of events, on which his entire life depends.

Leonard Shelby, a former insurance investigator, is the protagonist of the movie, set in Los Angeles in the 1990s. The loss of his short-term memory was caused by a burglar who had attacked him and also raped and killed his wife. Leonard becomes incapable of producing new memories and even if he is not amnesiac – he uses to say "I know all about myself" – he cannot remember the people he meets, nor is he able to remember his own hotel room and recognise his car. Hence, to make his life possible, he writes notes about what he has to do next and takes Polaroid photos of whomever he meets, jotting down on their back his short evaluation on them. The basic 'truths' of his life, instead, are written directly on his flesh, so that his body resembles a giant memo pad revealing the information Leonard must never question. For instance, a reversal handwriting on his chest, readable only in a mirror, says: "John G raped and murdered my wife". This is the most vital piece of information for Leonard, whose scrupulous self-organisation has the only purpose of finding and killing John G, in order to avenge his wife's murder.

Leonard appears, therefore, from the very beginning, as a detective motivated by the love for his dead wife, and an archivist, organising his life according to a precise and methodical system, in which every step about what to do next is listed and catalogued in an established order:

> You really need a system if you're gonna make it work. You kind of learn to trust your handwriting, it becomes an important part of your life. You write yourself notes and where you put the notes, that also becomes really important. You need a jacket that's got six pockets. Particular pockets for particular things. You just kind of learn to know where things go and how the system works. You have to be wary of other people writing for you. … If you have a piece of information which is vital, write it on your body, instead of on a piece of paper. That can be the answer, that's just a way of keeping a note.[15]

Leonard, then, organises the information he picks up in a hierarchy of importance, in relation to both his identity and his purpose. The events he registers and the people he meets become the pieces of a big puzzle, symbolised by the sheet of paper hanging on the wall in his hotel room, on which he glues the photos and the elements in his possession, and where everything and everyone occupies a precise and unchangeable place. In addition, he constantly reads a police file, whose basic elements are tattooed on his body. In this respect, he is both the archon, with the task of interpreting the documents and 'proofs', and the archive/writing pad, as his body is directly 'impressed' with the traces/signifiers of past events and future purposes. He brings to the surface the mechanism of memory, which is re-membering, gathering the signifiers standing for emotions felt in the past, just as an archivist (archon) does. Leonard, however, has a particular 'condition', as he calls it, for which the faculty of making connections between events and between past and present comes to be in itself something to remember and to annotate, exclusively trusting his own handwriting, as the previous quotation suggests. His purpose to find his wife's murderer is what drives him to connect various events, while the meticulousness of his 'system' is what reassures him about the rightness and infallibility of his results; at the same time, he feels reinforced in his identity, which seems to harbour no deconstructive drive. In other words, Leonard trusts only himself and never questions his own actions, a characteristic which contrasts with the general atmosphere of doubt and with the ambiguity of the two other main characters, Natalie and Teddy, whose photos say respectively "She has also lost someone, she will help you out of pity" and "Don't trust his lies". The subsequent development of the action deeply proves the reliability of Leonard's convictions, thus putting on stage the kind of deconstruction he refuses. Everything becomes more and more relative as the narration goes on, producing a

[15] All the quotations referring to *Memento* are taken directly from the movie.

climate of confusion, which is intensified by the very complex structure of the film. Indeed, the narration follows two plans, continuously intersecting: one is composed by sequences in colour narrated backwards, the other is formed by episodes in black and white narrated forwards. The backwards development makes the logical construction and comprehension of events rather tricky – and this technique probably aims to render the mechanisms of Leonard's mind; the short bursts last as much as Leonard's attention span and add new elements to the narration, allowing further interpretations and insisting on the relativity of what we watch in opposition to Leonard's untouchable convictions. Gradually, all of Leonard's assumptions prove to be as wrong as his opinions about the other characters and even his identity is eventually questioned.

This process of deconstruction enacted by the structure of the movie becomes particularly evident in the sequence in colour, beginning when Leonard finds and kills the supposed murderer of his wife, Teddy. Teddy (whose real name is John E. Gammell) is an ambiguous police officer, who may have helped Leonard after the incident, but is also involved in a sordid subplot of drugs and money, involving Natalie as well, a drug dealer's girlfriend. Gradually, as the movie goes backwards in time, the supposed 'facts' and the connections between the characters emerge: actually, Leonard had found the killer of his wife more than a year earlier with Teddy's help, but not being able to remember that, he had started to look for John G again. His search becomes a quest for truth and the only motive keeping his fragmented life together, so that he turns from an avenger into a serial killer, looking for people who fit his identikit of the murderer. Jimmy Grants, Natalie's boyfriend, is one of his victims, though his homicide is co-arranged by Teddy for reasons which remain quite obscure throughout the movie – probably money.[16] In

[16] Natalie's role is not clear either. Maybe she discovers that Leonard had killed Jimmy and Teddy was involved, and therefore, to avenge herself, drives Leonard to kill Teddy; she might also exploit Leonard's condition to get rid of Dodd, another suspicious man, with whom she has some unsettled account. At any rate, her attitude towards Leonard is ambivalent and cannot be interpreted from a single viewpoint, just as that of Teddy is. Both seem to be affectionate to Leonard at times, but they are also exploiters of his lack of memory.

this complex net of personal relationships, everybody has something to hide, and Leonard is no exception; actually, he is the most ambiguous of the characters, in spite of his apparent weakness. He seems to be the victim of the others' intrigues but, in fact, he also has an active role in them, as a consequence of his research method and archival structure. As Derrida states in "Archive Fever",

> ...[the] structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and its relationship to the future. The archivisation produces as much as it records the event.[17]

The quotation suggests that archival registration affects its content, a characteristic which Leonard prefers to ignore, as he prefers to believe that what he reports on his notes is the truth. The refusal of what could confute his version of past events is particularly evident in the first scene of the movie. Leonard is going to kill Teddy, who threatens him by making him realise that his vision of things is as partial and incomplete as his self-knowledge.

> Teddy: You don't know what's going on. You don't even know my name … You don't know who you are.
> Leonard: I'm Leonard Shelby. I'm from San Francisco.
> Teddy: That's who you were. That's not what you've become … Do you want to know, Lenny?

Leonard is unable to carry the weight of a revelation which could undermine his certainties and consequently kills Teddy. In Leonard's psyche, then, the death drive works as a suppressing/repressing force aiming at protecting the creation of the 'I' and is in total contrast with the death drive as self-questioning.[18] In addition, the last scene of the movie even shows Leonard's *conscious* refusal of deconstruction and his exploitation of his own lack of memory, in order to protect his role

[17] Derrida, "Archive Fever", 17.

[18] The present study will not investigate whether Leonard's psyche enacts a repression or a suppression, focusing exclusively on the death drive which can originate both of them. Therefore, despite their difference, they will be called into cause as a double possibility.

of 'romantic detective'. Indeed, in the final scene of the movie, after Jimmy's death, Teddy appears on the crime scene, revealing that Leonard had actually killed the real John G a year earlier with his own help; since Leonard seems to be sceptic, Teddy adds,

> You don't want the truth, you make up your own truth, like your police file. It was complete when I gave it to you. Who took out the twelve pages? … It was you … to create a puzzle you can never solve. Do you know how many towns, how many John Gs or James Gs exist? I mean, shit, Lenny, I'm a fucking John G. … Cheer up, there's plenty of John Gs for us to find. … You wander around and play detective. You live in a dream. A dead wife to pine for, a sense of purpose to your life, a romantic quest…

Leonard is upset by this revelation and reacts by engineering Teddy's murder. In the following passage, he is talking to himself:

> I'm not a killer. I'm just someone who wanna make things right. Can I just let myself forget what you've told me? … You're a John G. So you can be my John G. Do I lie to be happy? In your case, Teddy, yes, I will. … I have to believe in a world outside my own mind. I have to believe my actions still have meaning even if I can't remember them. I have to believe that when my eyes are closed, the world's still here.

Simultaneously, he writes, "Don't believe his lies" on the back of the Polaroid of Teddy and notes down Teddy's plate number as that of John G.; thus, not only does he deliberately produce false proofs, but he also plays on his lack of short-term memory, which will make him completely forget his own 'contribution' in the construction of the 'truth'.

The fact that Leonard creates and strongly defends this truth, rendering it 'absolute' and unquestionable, appears disproportionate if considered in relation to the world described in the film, where everybody seems to be aware of the possibility and even necessity to lie. To defend the truth has, then, for Leonard a meaning that goes beyond the simple purpose of giving a significance to his fragmented life and is probably connected with his fear of self-questioning.

Memento (mori)

Leonard's attempt to control his life, as we have seen, is based on a methodical gathering of elements, reinforcing his ideal self. To succeed in this reinforcement, he has to avoid self-deconstruction, denying, in Derridian terms, the existence of a gap between reality and his own interpretation of it. In his mind his notes are not considered as hypomnesic traces but as facts. Besides, he exploits his own lack of short-term memory, which allows him to systematically forget all his manipulations; what he never fails to remember, however, is his search for John G.

His memorandum is obviously his body, 'impressed' with the "vital information" about his case; in this respect, the use of the word 'vital' may hint at the fact that these tattoos are indispensable for his survival as a coherent subject. Indeed, the tattoos indicate the signified Leonard wants to give to the signifier of himself, through an indissoluble 'impression'. In particular, two tattoos define his personality: one is impressed on his chest and says "John G. raped and killed my wife", the other is impressed on his hand and says "Remember Sammy Jankis" and refers to another mysterious character belonging to Leonard's past before the incident.

Sammy Jankis was one of the most important cases assigned to Leonard when he worked as an insurance investigator, and is also the person with whom Leonard compares his condition. He lost his short-term memory, after a car accident and had to leave his job, since his 'disease' did not allow him to concentrate for more than two minutes at a time. The insurance company that should have sustained Sammy economically, assigned the case to Leonard, who was determined to discover whether Sammy was a fake. Leonard was (and is) convinced that he is able to "read people" by their body language, little gestures or facial expressions revealing whether they are lying or not; thus, when he seemed to catch "a slight look of recognition" in Sammy's eyes, he ordered further medical exams and, in particular, a test to verify whether the problem was psychological or physical. According to the test, Sammy should have recognised a series of electrified objects not through memory, but through an instinctive mechanism of self-conditioning. The repetitive touch of the electrified object should

have driven Sammy, after a number of attempts, to avoid that object. Sammy, however, failed. So his condition was declared psychological, and therefore not eligible for economic sustenance. The story also involves Sammy's wife, who misinterpreted the word 'psychological' and believed Sammy was pretending to have this memory problem. One day, to try him and, at the same time, to help him out of his block, she asked him to inject her usual prescribed amount of insulin many times; unable to remember his own acts, Sammy caused her death.

This story obsesses Leonard, apparently because Sammy's vicissitudes help him "to understand [his] situation", also warning him about what *not* to do. But its real significance can be caught again in the last scene of the movie, where the following dialogue between Teddy and Leonard takes place.

> Teddy: The story [of Sammy Jankis] gets better every time you tell it. So, you lie to yourself to be happy. There's nothing wrong with that. We all do it. Who cares if there are a few little details you'd rather not remember.
> Leonard: What the fuck are you talking about?
> Teddy: Your wife surviving the assault, her not believing your condition. The torment, pain and anguish tearing her up inside. The insulin.
> Leonard: That's Sammy. Not me ...
> Teddy: Like you tell yourself over and over again, conditioning yourself to remember, learning through repetition. ... Sammy didn't have a wife.[19]

This ending forces the public to revise all their previous opinions about Leonard. If we re-consider Leonard's story in the light of the final revelation, his thirst for revenge suddenly turns into a stratagem to hide his sense of guilt. In fact, if Teddy's interpretation is right and Sammy's story is actually that of Leonard, this means that his wife's death has been an indirect consequence of his disease, which renders this buried truth the prime mover of Leonard's actions. In fact, the 'I'/archon of Leonard's psyche has produced a suppression or a repression, in order to survive, and has re-written his own identity in such a way as to hide his uxoricide. Indeed, the other tattoo "John G

[19] Teddy's words are confirmed by one of Leonard's tattoos saying "Learn by repetition".

raped and *killed* my wife" (italics mine) is used by Leonard to condition himself into believing in the existence of another culprit for his wife's death and to project his frustration and aggressiveness outside. In this respect, the scene in which Leonard looks in the mirror and watches himself with the reversal tattoo is highly revealing, because it conveys the sense that Leonard is constructing a 'new' subjectivity as in a Lacanian mirror stage, denying the reality of being his wife's murderer. The 'impression' of the memory of the incident (manipulated by him according to Teddy's version) corresponds to the repression/suppression of the modalities of his wife's tragic death. If, on the one hand, he is unable to overcome the grief for her death, on the other, he cannot accept his own involvement, of which his lack of memory becomes both the cause and the effect.[20] He suffers from being fragmented but he cannot help being fragmented, if he wants to forget his past efficaciously and 'become' the investigator, who has to "make things right".

This fixed role is in opposition with the extreme mobility of the other characters, interpreting ever-new roles and changing according to each context. In this respect, Daniel Jones writes that a profound postmodern atmosphere marks *Memento*, "... for the textual 'world' created in the film is forced, through the narrative's reversal, to be constantly erased, reconstructed and revised .... Throughout the story, each 'objective' reality is called into question almost as soon as it is created, and the audience is left wondering whether anyone can be trusted as giving the 'truth'".[21]

The principle of erosion of 'objective' reality permeates every section of the movie, because the 'facts' about Leonard's past are all reported by Teddy, who is rather ambiguous. His version of Leonard's

[20] In this respect, Leonard is conscious that he cannot 'heal' from his wife's death, because he has no sense of time. So, he is doomed to never overcome her death; he says, "I can't remember to forget you". In addition, he periodically burns her objects as in a ritual, in order to get rid of her memory (maybe he is conditioning himself to remember that he has to forget her). At the same time, however, remembering that she is dead, reminds him of the purpose of his life, without which he would be lost.

[21] Daniel Jones, "Split Identities and World(s) Under Erasure in *Memento* and *Falling Angel*: Playing on the Detective Figure in Postmodern Crime Fiction", *Crime Culture* (Autumn 2002), 4, available at www.crimeculture.com/contents/DanJones.

wife's death, however, is further confirmed by some filmic sequences. For example, during Teddy's talk, the images of Sammy and Leonard come to be superimposed for a second, pointing at the fact that Sammy *was* actually Leonard's projection. Besides, another episode proposing a scene in which Leonard is pinching his wife's thigh turns into an almost identical scene, in which however, Leonard is injecting insulin in his wife's thigh. The hypothesis that Sammy's story had been manipulated by Leonard, in order to make it similar to his own, is also reinforced by the fact that Sammy could not have narrated the recent events of his wife's death, for his lack of anterograde memory, and therefore Leonard could not have known of it.

However, even if these elements seem to confirm Teddy's recount about Sammy, another question proves to be puzzling: if Leonard had lost his short-term memory, he could not have remembered the events related to his wife's death, he could not have known he was his wife's killer, nor remember that his wife had been raped and killed by John G.

The questioning of the 'truth' involves *Memento* in all its aspects, so that any interpretation is just one among a variety of possibilities. The present study has tried to develop one aspect of the movie, related to Leonard's archival obsession, which can also be of help in the attempt to find a probable answer to the above questions. In fact, gathering the elements offered by Leonard and Teddy, we might conjecture that Leonard, with Teddy's help, after the incident, might have reconstructed his own story little by little, availing himself of his 'system' and deciding, from time to time, to modify what troubled him, playing on his lack of memory. Thus, he had conditioned himself to remember his own version of the events. If that has been Leonard's course, he is obviously afraid of *any* deconstruction, a fear that has been impressed on him presumably during the numerous attempts at self-reconstruction. Just as Sammy should have learnt to avoid electrified objects, so Leonard had learnt to avoid questioning. In this perspective, it is of no importance whether Teddy's revelations are true; the problem for Leonard is that they *might* be true.

Therefore, whether we decide to trust Teddy or not, what remains a fixed point in *Memento* is Leonard's fear of self-questioning. He is convinced he knows everything about himself, but the way of making his identity coherent generates splits and contradictions. In Derridian

terms, Leonard's 'consignation' can succeed only through the repressing/suppressing power of the death drive, concretised by the 'impression' of the tattoos on his body, replacing the past he rejects and re-writing the text of his identity. Playing with words, as Derrida does in "Archive Fever", it is possible to compare the compulsive 'impression' of the role of his wife's avenger, a fixed identity for Leonard, with 'impression' as feeling, possibility, which could hint at the relativisation of one's own position in the world, that is self-deconstruction. The former banishes the latter in Leonard's mind, but both are present in *Memento*, through the other characters and the overall structure of the movie.

The title too reflects this ambivalence: *Memento*, indeed, means 'remember', which for Leonard may mean both that he has to remember the past he himself has built, and that he has to remember the past he has rejected. In addition, if we consider that the movie is inspired by a short story by Jonathan Nolan (Christopher's brother), titled *Memento Mori*, a further interpretation is possible.[22] 'Remember to die', or 'Remember you have to die' becomes the threat of textual erosion that Leonard wants to avoid at all costs. Not by chance, in the title of the film, the word *mori* has been omitted.

[22] Jonathan Nolan's short story *Memento Mori* is available on the Internet at http://www.esquire.com/features/articles/2001/001323mfrmemento1.html.

Manuela Esposito

The Archive of Natural Elements: Woolf, Irigaray and Zambrano

> The archive arises spontaneously as a documentary sedimentation of a practical, administrative and juridical activity. For this reason, it consists of a set of documents, mutually connected by an original, necessary and determinate bond, therefore each document conditions the others and is conditioned by the others.[1]

According to the professional archivist Elio Lodolini, an archive made up of papers, letters, historical documents requires arranging and ordering – in bundles, files, series, registers.[2] It is an organization that preserves records, the place where official acts are stored. A more poetical vision of the archive is given by Arlette Farge in her inspiring *The Pleasure of the Archive*:

> The archive resembles neither texts nor printed documents, letters, journals or autobiography. It tires physically because it is excessive; intrusive like equinoctial tides, avalanches or floods. The comparison with unforeseeable and natural phenomena is not casual; it often happens to

[1] Elio Lodolini, *Archivistica. Principi e problemi* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2002), 16; my translation.

[2] As to the various meanings of the concept of the archive, see Carucci, *Le fonti archivistiche: ordinamento e conservazione* (Roma: NIS, 1997).

> people working in the archives to imagine their way in terms of diving, immersion, even shipwreck … then, the sea is always present .[3]

Farge draws a vast landscape of primary elements where the archivist's involvement and interaction in terms of immersion and diving focuses on the sensations and the knowledge given by a 'natural archive'. She provides a conceptualisation of the archive that goes beyond its material constitution, techniques and criteria. Fascinated by her description, I wonder: what could this archive be like? What purposes could it serve? Farge is a woman – could a 'natural archive' be linked to femininity and the notion of sexual difference? A 'natural archive' could refuse the monolithic features of unity and homogeneity, and be limitless. Beyond all static conceptions of the archive as layers of documentation, it could express fluidity, mobility and becoming. As a form of empowerment for women, it could account for the intriguing presence of primary elements in many works by female writers, thinkers and poets. It could even give up its traditional authority, and gently provide a starting point for possible research about the creation of other feminine archives.

My essay analyses *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf, *L'oubli de l'air* by Luce Irigaray and *De la Aurora* by Marìa Zambrano. These works belong to different historical periods, and are different in their literary, philosophical and prophetical aspects. At the same time, they seem to be united by a common love for the 'natural archive'. Beautifully, philosophically, poetically, they try to record, reflect upon and materialise natural fluidity, transparency and radiance. It is a creative material that cannot be submitted to any catalogue or alphabetical order; differently, it only constitutes the light substance for the deep correspondences and rhythmical movements of a writing that re-evaluates nature and interconnects it with sexual difference: birth, breathing, female vision.

Water, air, aurora/maternity, female subjectivity, poetic knowledge: the art of Woolf, Irigaray and Zambrano keeps the traces

[3] Arlette Farge, *Il piacere dell'archivio* (Verona: Essedue, 1991), 16; my translation.

of what would otherwise be lost, represents a new female *savoir*, and calls for the imagination of a new and 'different' archive.[4]

The Waves by Virginia Woolf[5]

The element of 'water' permeates the experimental novel *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf.[6] The wave, the most suitable form for the complexity of life, is 'fluid', liquid, maternal and reassuring; its eternal and incessant rhythm symbolises memory, made of continual returns, inner sounds and images. Like waves, Virginia's memories come back as the *leitmotif* of the novel, revolving around the figure of her mother: "we think back through our mothers if we are women".[7]

[4] Hélène Cixous, "Coming to Writing", in *Coming to Writing and Other Essays* (Cambridge; Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991), 2. Writing aims at "loving: keeping alive: naming": this is what Woolf, Irigaray and Zambrano mean in their constitution of a natural archive.

[5] The 'waves' are to be intended in a double sense: they refer to the title of Virginia Woolf's novel, but also to the movements of the sea. The choice expresses the author's desire to keep the (im)possible traces of the sea in her own archival writing.

[6] In order to carry on a feminine research on 'water', it would be wrong to recollect all the works by women on this element. In so doing, I would not avoid the danger of creating a linear 'alphabetical sequence', very distant from Woolf's thought. In *To the Lighthouse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 47, this danger is shown through Mr Ramsey: the way his mind works portrays the mechanism of the patriarchal archive, particularly responsible for the exclusion of women. Woolf compares Mr Ramsey's reasoning to the train platforms and to the alphabetic order, thus emphasizing the linearity and rationality that characterize the male mind – "lean as a knife" – in opposition to the more emphatic female one. "For if thought is like the keyboard of a piano, divided into so many notes, or like the alphabet is ranged in twenty-six letters all in order, then his splendid mind has no sort of difficulty in running over those letters one by one, firmly and accurately, until he reached, say, the letter Q. He reached Q.…But after Q? What comes next? After Q there are a number of letters the last of which is scarcely visible to mortal eyes, but glimmers red in the distance. Z is only reached once by one man in a generation. Still, if he could reach R it would be something. Here at least was Q. He dug his heels in at Q. Q he was sure of. Q he could demonstrate. If Q then is Q – R".

[7] In "Women and Fiction", in Michèle Barret, ed., *Women and Writing*, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1979), 45-52, Woolf makes a direct reference to the absence of woman in history and literature, underlining the specific difficulty in that a woman writer does not posses a female tradition. Hence she expresses the contemporary urgency of re-discovering her literary mothers such as Jane Austen, George Eliot, Emily Brontë. The quotation comes from Virginia Woolf, *A Rooms of One's Own* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1929), 79.

She invokes the urgency of a feminine (re)'memory', the creation of an archive for/by women by re-establishing a contact with the origin and the mother. Whether dead or alive, she remains the "source". According to Farge,

> The source [of the archive] ... seems to realise wonders, to reconnect the past with the present; by discovering it we think that we do not work with dead people any more. It is a rare sensation, provoked by the sudden encounter with unknown existences ... that mingle ... the near ... and the far, the dead person.[8]

The Waves writes a 'personal archive' that mingles the past and the present, the living and the dead, Virginia's reflections on the meaning of life and individual relations, the main events of her existence lost in time.

Within this framework, the practice of the archiving is always linked to the origin. According to Paul Ricoeur, the archive arises only with writing, since it is meant to be consulted, that is, read. It concerns human beings in time: the relation between the past and the present is a necessary passage to understand the one through the other, and corresponds to the instant of the archive's initial constitution.[9] This is relevant to Virginia's creative writing whose purpose is to recover a 'natural' origin. The opening scene of the novel frames the act of creation, the division of chaos, the separation of light from darkness, day from night.

> *The sun had not yet risen. The sea is indistinguishable from the sky... Gradually as the sky whitened a dark line lay on the horizon dividing the sea from the sky and the grey cloth became barred with thick strokes moving, one after another, beneath the surface, following each other, pursuing each other, perpetually. ... The sky cleared as if the white sediment there had sunk, or if the arm of a woman couched beneath the horizon had raised a lamp and flat bars of white. Green and yellow spread across the sky like the blades of a fan.*[10]

[8] Farge, *Il piacere dell'archivio*, 10-11.

[9] Cfr. Paul Ricoeur, *La memoria, la storia, l'oblio* (Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2003), 234.

[10] Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3. Italics are in the text, always marking the writing of the novel's 'interludes'.

Woolf's primordial myth is more archaic than the sun. The act of genesis is indeed achieved by Aurora, the goddess of dawn.[11] At "the dawn of time", human origin is associated to the awaking to life.

> 'I see a ring' said Bernard, 'hanging above me. It quivers and hangs in a loop of light'.
> 'I see a slab of pale yellow', said Susan, 'spreading away until it meets a purple stripe'.
> 'I hear a sound', said Rhoda, 'cheep, chirp, cheep chirp; going up and down'.
> 'I see a globe' said Neville, 'hanging down in a drop against the enormous flanks of some hill'.
> 'I see a crimson tassel', said Jinny, 'twisted with gold threads'.
> 'I hear something', said Louis. 'A great beast's foot is chained. It stamps, and stamps, and stamps'.[12]

Six characters are in the process of reaching the awareness of themselves and of the world through the elemental intuitions of what they see and hear.[13] The beginning of their existence marks the birth of Virginia herself – her first memory of the perception of the world is associated with the movement and the sound of the 'waves':

> It is of lying half-asleep, half awake, in bed in the nursery at S.Ives. It is of hearing the waves breaking, one, two, one, two, and sending a splash of water over the beach; and then breaking, one, two, one, two, behind a yellow blind. It is ...of feeling the purest ecstasy I can conceive.[14]

Six friends - three boys, Neville, Louis Bernard, and three girls, Susan, Rhoda, Jinny - narrate their experiences from childhood to old age – throughout this time the waves beat on the shore. Their

[11] Maria Di Battista, *Virginia Woolf's Major Novels: The Fables of Anon* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1980), 149-151.

[12] Woolf, *The Waves*, 5. See note 10. The question of the formal interplay between interludes/episodes and soliloquies, as in the quoted instance, refers to a different constitution of the 'archive'.

[13] Leatska Mitchell, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf from Beginning to End* (London: Weidenfeld and Micolson, 1997), 161.

[14] Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1985), 64.

soliloquies try to record the memories, the sensations and the emotions of their lives, deeply affected by the sudden death of Percival.[15] As Virginia writes in her diary, this character is modelled on her brother, Thoby, suggesting the idea that *The Waves* represents an 'auto-biographical archive' of her own existence:

> I have been sitting these 15 minutes in a state of glory, & calm, & some tears, thinking of Thoby & if I could write Julian Thoby Stephen 1881-1906 on the first page. I suppose not" (7 feb. 1931).[16]

Women are not supposed to write a personal archive. However, they can keep the traces of the 'elements' of the archive. It is the instance of the centrality of its space. As Jacques Derrida reminds us, the archive is concerned with 'dwelling' – the primary condition of the existence of the archive is that it consists of the place where papers are preserved.[17] The 'dwelling' for Virginia's archive is Talland House, the unforgettable paradise of her summers, the centre of her memory. At S. Ives, Cornwall – " the very toenail of England" – she hears the sound of the water beating on the rocks and infusing calmness, peace and ecstasy. In the very act of writing, Virginia's memories express her will of archiving the tiniest details of the "perennial" and "invaluable" moments of her childhood.[18]

Immersion – Talland House, the locus of Virginia's childhood, inscribes the traces of Julia Jackson: "it was full of her". Her mother

[15] In a final summing up, Bernard, the principal character of the book, re-tells his/their life/lives to a hypothetical listener, offering an explanation that sounds as a final 'archive' of the text's intents and purposes. See Delia Donahue, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1977), 121-122.

[16] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979-1985).

[17] Derrida, *Mal d'archivio*, 9.

[18] In Talland House, Virginia experiences what she calls "moments of being"; those instants of utmost intensity that only make life valuable. If existence is embedded in many moments of non-being, then a sudden and violent shock makes an event unforgettable. The 'moments of being' beat recollection: the past, enriched with meanings never to be perceived otherwise, becomes part of the present which, on its part, assumes unforeseeable nuances.

is "at the very centre of that cathedral space which was childhood". Her death, and the intense mourning that followed, deeply affect Virginia, intensifying her mental fragility, the fear of madness that will cause her death in 1941. Virginia's suicide is 'death by water': no weapons, blood or violence, only the sinking into the amniotic fluid, the prenatal phase when mother and daughter suffer no separation. It is as if Virginia wished to go back to the 'origin'. Here the baby is still in his/her mother's womb, his/her first nurturing and protective environment. Death is the way to re-encounter the mother. And Julia Jackson – "one of those invisible presences who ... play such an important part in people's life" – is the core of an (im)possible love, inspiring and inhabiting all her daughter's writing.[19]

In the novel's archive of life and death, according to the undulating movements of the waves, in serenity and madness, memory explores the tie between childhood, the mother and water. The most important discovery is that mythology is what can illuminate the creative experimental writing. It is Virginia's identification with the subversive power of matriarchal origins through the figure of Kore, in her continual search for Demeter.[20] In the patriarchal context, this myth represents an example of feminine genealogy sacrificed to the underworld. Being captured within a paternal genealogy, Kore denies the feminine. Later, in a sort of the "return of the repressed" and thanks to her mother, she comes back to the earth, realising a new relationship with her mother that turns her into an example of an-'other' culture, a feminine culture.[21]

Virginia chooses to re-articulate this myth through two figures: the 'mother' and the 'virgin', respectively 'earth' and 'water'. The maternal figure is symbolised by Susan who is like Demeter, and

[19] Woolf, *Moments of Being*, 80.

[20] Jane Dunn, *Virginia e Vanessa* (Milano: Saggi Bompiani, 2004), 329.

[21] Carried off by Hades, Kore weeps, unseen, beneath the earth. Her rape provokes the fury of her mother Demeter, the goddess of earth, who can hear her daughter but does not know where to look for her. Suffering from this separation, Demeter blocks natural life, obliging Zeus to state a compromise according to which Kore remains with her husband in winter, while she comes back to the surface (and to her mother) in spring and summer, when nature is fruitful. Cfr. Rosa Agizza, *Miti e leggende nell'antica Grecia* (Roma: Newton Compton Editori, 2003), 87-92.

represents the love for the elemental life of her country, its natural landscape.[22] Rhoda, on her part, is the virgin defined by Bernard as "the nymph of the fountain always wet". Due to her elusive nature, she is associated with the ocean's vastness. Like Kore, always in search of something, her sense of loneliness and solitude will drive her to suicide. Being a nymph, Rhoda can go back to water – as Virginia will do herself some years later, letting herself drown into the fluidity of the water.

This is not a melancholic note for the lyrical conclusion of the life of a strong and inspiring woman. It is, on the contrary, Virginia Woolf's determination to archive what cannot be archived through the natural elements of liquidity and fluidity. Her experiment is a success: it improves the quality of the history of feminine creativity and constitutes an extraordinary attempt at retracing a hereditary line of female thought.

The Forgetting of Air by Luce Irigaray

> The archive speaks of "her" and makes her speak. Motivated by the urgency, a first deed is imposed: to find her again … to sketch her portrait as a remedy to forgetting, delivering the trace…[…] the archive breaks the fixed images and, at the same time, it stimulates the reflection on sexual difference.[23]

According to Farge, a new conception of the archive consists in breaking with traditional images of the 'feminine' by emphasising the existence of a "difference" between the sexes – in *L'Oubli de l'air*, Luce Irigaray is determined to pursue this research. Alongside the path of dominant traditions, in her philosophical approach to what has been left un-thought in 'his-tory', she identifies two repressed elements: air and woman.[24] In particular, the memory of air needs to

[22] "At this hour, this still early hour, I think I am the field, I am the barn, I am the trees; mine are the flocks of birds, and this young hare who leaps, at the last moment when I step almost on him… all are mine". Woolf, *The Waves*, 78-79.

[23] Farge, *Il piacere dell'archivio*, 33.

[24] *L'oubli de l'air* is the third text of the so called 'elemental trilogy', which also includes *Amante marine* and *Passions élémentaires,* where she engages in different dialogues with male philosophers in order to emphasize the issue of woman's subjectivity. In these dialogues, the 'repressed' feminine can emerge back to light through the elements

be rescued from the oblivion where man has left it, in order to spread its perfume on a new form of female writing.

The 'forgetting of air' is related to the forgetting of the feminine, upon which man has built his whole being. On the other side of the threshold, 'writing' about/on air means 'recording' the voices of women. *L'Oubli de l'air* is written as a long sequence of questions and answers, interrogations and assertions, a dialogical rhythm breaking the mono-tone of language. On one hand, such a structure reveals its evident discourse; on the other, it shows what has been repressed, the infinite existence of 'two' voices: the male and the female.[25]

L'Oubli de l'air is an intense example of Irigaray' s *parler femme*, her philosophy beyond the forgetting of the sexed body, the difference between poetry and phallocentric speculations.[26] Indeed, her poetical and elemental language aims at exploring the materiality and corporeality of women, which have never found their adequate representation in the symbolic order (with its male paradigms). The notion of a non-traditional materialism responds to the project of providing an identity for women by considering a corporeal specificity. The elemental language is strategic in that it provides the possibility of using a latent vocabulary that "makes women speak" as subjects.[27]

The dwelling – *L'Oubli de l'air* represents an exploration of Heidegger's philosophy: re-discovering the origin of air implies a re-

of water, *physis* and air. In particular, *L'oubli de l'air* is important because of its connections with the main topics of sexual difference – the importance of the maternal and the mother-daughter relationship. See Gabriella Stanchina, *La filosofia di Luce Irigaray. Pensare e abitare un corpo di donna* (Milano: Mimesis, 1996).

[25] The 'dialogic structure' reveals the issue of sexual difference. We need to re-think the question of Being by considering it made of 'two' subjects and rejecting the culture of the One, which is expressive of male thought.

[26] Maria Grazia Baiocco, *Divenire divine. L'etica dal femminile di Luce Irigaray* (Assisi: Cittadella Editrice, 1998), 40. See Luce Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air* (London: The Atlon Press, 1999).

[27] Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversion, Three French Feminists* (Sidney: Allen and Unwin, 1989), 168-172.

thinking of the question of Being. Irigaray criticises the philosopher for the emphasis he gives to 'earth' as the ground for life and speech.[28] Indeed, Heidegger is intentionally forgetting those elements which are not-as-solid-as-earth: water, fire, and, above all, air. Air is too fluid to attract a logic whose principles and foundations lie in solidity. By forgetting this vital element, man looks for a 'dwelling' in *logos* – "the house of Being". Language, what should be a bridge between unrelated universes, becomes instead the instrument through which man builds his own world – a world for himself. There is no mutual exchange: woman 'gives' and man 'takes'. The relation between the sexes is founded on this void. When (and if) the bridge is crossed, the movement always goes in the same direction.

> It [the bridge] is crossed both coming and going, though it goes all the while in the same direction. What is received from the world and what is given to it … pass insensibly from one to the other, one in the other, staying all the while within the same project.[29]

Irigaray borrows the notion of 'dwelling' to show that women have no place of their own: Western philosophy has always conceived them as "recipients". Consequently 'dwelling' has only and always revealed man's hatred and destructiveness - "as the two intrinsic un-thought moments that are never to be confronted".[30] Space is related to the phallocentric erasure of femininity, the refusal of her specificity and autonomy. Wishing to immobilise women, man disavows the "difference" of the feminine place. On their part, being confined in the position of support, women are never considered subjects. They become a 'dwelling' assimilated to the status of *chora* which, in his *Timaeus*, Plato described as the condition for the genesis of the material world, the origin of all things. At the same time, the ontological status of this different dwelling is never acknowledged. *Chora* is like air, it lives in

[28] In her opinion, his attachment to that element will never allow him to be free from metaphysics: "Metaphysics always supposes, in some way, a solid crust from which to raise a construction". Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air*, 2.

[29] Ibid., 31.

[30] Margaret Whitford, *Philosophy in the Feminine* (London New York: Routledge, 1991), 157.

the un-thought. At the core of all beings' existence, it remains elusive and indefinable, the emblem of a common strategy to maintain male domination by imposing silence to women.

This is why Irigaray raises the issue of a re-conceptualisation of the category of space. If buildings are constructed by men, it is necessary to understand how and where women can dwell. Even more, by proving male invasion, the plan is to provide women with those places they have been excluded from.[31] An (im)possible place could be represented by 'air'. The (im)possible issue of 'airy dwellings' opens up a chance for the archiving of sexual difference.

> Is not the air the whole of our habitation as mortals? Is there a dwelling more vast, more spacious, or even more generally peaceful than that of the air? Can man live elsewhere than the air? Neither in earth, nor in fire, nor in water is any habitation possible for him. [32]

Breath - The forgetting of air does not only mean the repression of a 'neutral' element. It is also the denial of the mother and her gift, the first and the last deed of life, the most vital act. In the first nourishment received from the mother, breathing means to be alive.[33] Such simple and shocking truth is easily forgotten and human beings breathe unconsciously and imperfectly - Irigaray invites us to breathe in a conscious way, to be aware of our life and set ourselves free. It is the only way to re-found a notion of singular identity and a different organisation of the community. To acknowledge the importance of breathing is the first step for a culture whose spirit refuses to linger on domination. Learning how to breathe means living in a different way: it 'opens up' (it is not metaphorical) a variety of new directions in our existence, and frees us from all abstract, universal and neutral knowledge. It makes us understand that a human being is always *two*: male and female, a *double* subjectivity, a *double* 'I'.

[31] Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on Politics of the Bodies* (New York, London: Routledge, 1995), 113.

[32] Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air*, 8.

[33] See Luce Irigaray, "La via del respiro", in *Tra oriente e occidente* (Roma: Manifesto Libri, 1997).

Furthermore, the practice of breathing is never detached from the body. Actually, it is essential in the education of the body and its perceptions. Words are deeds of phonation that – as sheer movement – cannot be separated from the body. Patriarchal process of censorship and repression forgets such an essential and natural link. The phallocentric tradition organises life 'out of' (here, too, it is not metaphorical) the natural world via the immolation of the body and the consequent abolishment of sexual difference. The practice of breathing restores the importance of air in thinking. The retrieval of air enables to re-think the notion of a dual ontology that would give identity back to the feminine *and* the masculine. As a consequence of an "ethic of sexual difference", Being is always to be considered as *two, double, plural*. Writing about/on air is a chance for precious feminine realities to appear, in their difference, fluidity and multiplicity.

In *L'Oubli de l'air*, Irigaray gives voice to what has never had space in writing, what is devoid of all (im)possible "repetition", "reproduction", "memorisation", "reprint".[34] Her desire is to archive what has dwelled in silence. Reading her archive is an experience that materialises the privilege of 'touching' (the reality of) air. It is as if the perceptible sensation of (the traces of) air can emerge after centuries of silence. That's how vision becomes clear.

De La Aurora by María Zambrano[35]

The archive is related to the choice and the will of the people who decide which texts deserve to become part of History and which, instead, must be effaced. Since most archivists were men, it is not difficult to understand why the feminine voice has been excluded from the archive. Today, women feel the urge to make *tabula rasa* of

[34] Derrida, *Mal d'archivio*, 19.

[35] My choice of keeping the Spanish title *De la Aurora* derives from the fact that *aurora* cannot be translated with "dawn". According to Zambrano, there is a clear distinction: dawn is time running from the appearance of the light of day to the sunrise while *aurora* is the pure light of that moment. Furthermore, Aurora is the Roman name of the goddess of dawn and Zambrano partly refers to this divinity.

what is known as tradition, by refusing the male heritage and by looking at the past with new eyes. It is time for the feminine tale of 'self-essentiality' to be told.[36] It is time for 'nature', the matrix of everything, to be retrieved from abstract thinking in order to bring what has been excluded back to light. It is time to abandon the clear light of Reason, and penetrate in the obscurity of knowledge:

> In this way the ingenuous sensation arises … of going through the darkness of knowledge, of reaching, after a long and uncertain journey, the essentiality of people and things. The archive succeeds in laying bare everything … the inaccessible and the living appear…. The taste of the archive is rooted in those encounters with vacillating or sublime figures.[37]

The natural archive gives the sensation of a living reality, because it 'registers' the essence of people and things. It also provides the chance to travel in the past through the 'encounter' with particular 'figures', like 'Aurora'. This is what happens to María Zambrano in the most dramatic experience of her life, her exile. At first it seems to be a tragic moment; but then it turns into a privileged place where Aurora allows Zambrano to go through knowledge and (re)discover the meaning of life. Exile is a space in-between, evoking the emergence of a new light mixed with the darkness of the past.[38] The result of the inspiring experience is the writing of *De la aurora*, the 'archive' of Zambrano' s philosophical enquiry:

> And … when sometimes I have to reread … a writing of mine, I always re-find, at the end, aurora; the fact is that Aurora really appears in everything I have written and in everything I have lived.[39]

[36] Annarosa Buttarelli, "Tabula rasa" in Diotima, *Approfittare dell'assenza* (Napoli: Liguori, 2002), 144.

[37] Farge, *Il piacere dell'archivio*, 45.

[38] Elena Laurenzi, "Il cammino in salita della memoria", *Aut Aut* 279 (May-June 1997), 80.

[39] María Zambrano, "Quasi un'autobiografia", *Aut Aut* 279 (May-June 1997), 130. For the references to Zambrano's texts, the translation is mine.

Her writing rises from the intention to set free "everything that, from the shadow, supports and nourishes the clearness of thought so that it could be handed on".[40] Writing opens up a place of freedom that makes "what asks to be drawn out of silence" visible. Indeed, "there are things that cannot be said" but need to be written, because Zambrano wants to 'archive' the unspeakable, to 'save' words, grant them 'stability', 'record' and communicate the truth.[41] Zambrano tries to give voice to what has been silenced by Western culture: her philosophy offers the possibility to restore those realities that need to be brought back to light. The reason underlying *De la aurora* is a certain urgency of recovering the 'un-thought' of philosophy: in other words, the relation between the 'elements' and the female body, together with the possibility to create an archive for them.

Zambrano is against the Western philosophical tradition, seen as an expression of the male voice. She wants to promote a different concept of philosophy that must sound the depth of the soul, where people harbour feelings of love and piety. She feels that philosophical systems are inadequate to her experiences as a woman – that is why she seriously starts thinking of giving up her studies. At that very moment, the apparition of "the dim light touched by joy", Aurora, clears the way for her visionary thought. The first form of vision is memory: remembering is searching for what has been lost in order to bring it back in a new light (Aurora). Only in this way can something be archived. Zambrano decides to radically "undo" (*deshacer*) the philosophy which hides, behind its presumed neutrality, male hegemony. "Undoing" means going back to the 'origin', throwing light on the darkness hidden behind the blinding light, in a deep

[40] Carmen Revilla, *Sulla necessità dello scrivere,* in C. Zamboni, ed., *María Zambrano, in fedeltà alla parola vivente* (Firenze: Allinea, 2002), 69.

[41] María Zambrano, "Perché si scrive", in *Verso un sapere dell'anima* (Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 1996), 28. Cfr. Michel Foucault, *L'ordine del discorso* (Torino: Einaudi, 2004). Foucault analyses how the systems of domination create discourses, regulating what can and what cannot be said. There is a law that governs the organisation of the archive within the practices of discourses. He argues the existence of a series of discursive practices that produce and form knowledge. Discursive rules are linked to the exercise of power and they ensure the reproduction of the social system, through forms of selection, exclusion and domination that limit the ability to speak. It is not possible to think without referring to them because it would be deemed unreasonable.

contrast with the faint light of Aurora.[42] Here, thought concerns the human dimension with its reality and concreteness, leading philosophy to re-find its contact with life through "poetical reason".

The dim light - Aurora is the emblematic figure of Zambrano's new philosophy, a place where light and darkness are fused (the day has not fully risen and the night has not completely ended). Sister of the night and promise of light, Aurora keeps the last traces of darkness. It includes a "rising state", blurring the outline of things. Its light invites to metamorphosis and transformation. In particular, Aurora rises from the combination of the four 'elements', becoming one of the most important powers of generation of the goddess Nature, in its process of infinite creation. The link between Nature and Aurora is crucial in that it shows what has been banished from philosophical tradition. Western philosophy has always been engaged in the search of an 'Essence', neglecting the reality of facts. It has denied the value of the elements by pursuing the spirit, pureness, metaphysical and universal truths. For this reason the elements have never had a 'place' in the archive. Man has always "exploited the elements", subjecting them to "betrayal". By ignoring their importance as the foundation of the universe, he relegates them to the function of material support of *logos*. Zambrano wishes to focus on the importance of nature by taking it back to its original condition. Meant as the figure of the *physis*, Aurora is the principle of all things, matter and spirit.

> …the aurora, mysterious junction of the four elements we know and others more, has been given one of the highest rank among the divinities of the cosmos.[43]

The Guide - Aurora appears as a "path of knowledge" which is a necessary journey for the individual to find his/her way in life and philosophy. This experience is supported by the 'Guide'.

[42] Annarosa Buttarelli, "Poesia madre della filosofia" in C. Zamboni, ed., *María Zambiano, in fedeltà alla parola vivente*, 16.

[43] María Zambrano, *De la aurora* (Madrid: Tabla Rasa, 2004), 121.

> Guide, then, if by guide we mean the apparition of something, an event, a presence that rescues the subject from itself, from the situation in which it is rigidly trapped in an ignorance turned into immobility: and the immobility in human being means intrascendence. To know oneself is to transcend oneself. To flow in the interiority of being.[44]

The Guide is a particular genre in-between philosophy and literature, that expresses its philosophical content through the literary form. It belongs to minor forms of knowledge, and is despised by systematic philosophy.[45] In the archive of philosophical genres, there are Treatises, Systems and Dialogues – while the Guide is not included. Zambrano wants to give it back its philosophical dignity. Now the question is whether her revaluation could be an act of 'arranging' the Guide in the archive of philosophical genres. The Guide represents active knowledge, engaging human beings in their concreteness. Thanks to its attention to reality, it represents the knowledge of experience, the expression of a *vivencia*, that is, life in the very moment it is being lived.

Because of its nature of "original feeling", Aurora as Guide is the expression of a different realism meant as an 'immersion' in one's own intimacy. It is made of enamouring figures able to enter the heart of human personality. The Guide creates a trajectory which is opposed to the "Platonic cavern". If in the Greek myth, truth can be reached by breaking the chains and giving up all shadows and passions, Zambrano proposes her new vision of the vitality of the bowels (*entrañas*).[46] As a part of the human body, they represent the "centre of suffering" which is necessary for inner knowledge.[47]

[44] Ibid., 50.

[45] Elena Laurenzi, "María Zambrano, filosofa de la Aurora", in *Aurora. Papeles del "Seminario María Zambrano"*, n° 3, February 2001.

[46] The knowledge proposed by María Zambrano becomes clear in the figure of Antigon who achieves her interior awareness when she reaches the revelation of her own destiny: going straight in the depth of being is a necessary act in order to discover the truth. See María Zambrano, "La tumba de Antígona", in *Senderos: Los intelectuales en el drama de España. La tumba de Antígona* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 1989).

[47] The treatment of the 'bowels' (*entrañas*) in Zambrano is one of the main principles aiming at retrieving the reality of the body in philosophy - recovering the dimension of bowels is the way to achieve a true knowledge through an embodied word. Consequently, writing has to stress the traces of the body and express the rhythm of the heart as the symbol of the bowels. Wanda Tommasi, *I filosofi e le donne* (Mantova: Tre Lune Edizionii, 2001), 243-251.

Aurora is a fluid image that does not forget the bodily elements. It also becomes the symbol of "sexual difference" in an alternative feminine knowledge recovered from the silence imposed by male culture. Thanks to its light, Zambrano discovers the feminine 'voice' of philosophy. It is a light ready to illuminate what is "different", "foreign" and "heterogeneous" – these are all aspects that have never found a place in the politics of archiving of Western culture.[48] Through the Guide of Aurora, the memory of the archive is given those realities that deserve to be included in thought: "It [the new auroral history] will follow the Aurora, enlightening, in the heart of history, un-known histories".[49]

Virginia Woolf, Luce Irigaray, and María Zambrano*: The Waves, The Forgetting of Air, De la Aurora* mark three different moments in time, different genres, a vast geography of intents and desires. They give voice to what has been silenced by history and that can be considered as an attempt to express female 'poetical' creativity. Would it still make sense to compare their natural archive to the male power of archiving? They respond to the need of feminine knowledge, that aims at exalting what has been concealed and consequently not archived: Nature, the experience of life. The (im)possible feminine 'natural archive' hints at the record according to which women never forget their body and sexual difference. 'From water, through air, to Aurora' is an itinerary of a feminine "difference" starting at a point, ending at another, coming back to itself. Like waves breaking on the shore, a perfume infusing the vast air, a morning star illuminating the day…

[48] See Carlo Ferrucci, *Le ragioni dell'altro* (Bari: Dedalo, 1995).

[49] Zambrano, *De la Aurora*, 175.

Serena Guarracino

Voicing the Archive
Sexual/national politics in early music

There is nothing false about falsetto.
(Michael and Mollie Hardwick, *Alfred Deller*)

This essay starts in an archive; not any archive, anywhere, but in a very definite place. "*There,* we said, and *in this place*".[1] The place is the British Library, London. The archive is the National Sound Archive, the audio division of the Library, "one of the largest sound archives in the world".[2] There, for the first time (and the fascination of an original moment should never be underestimated) I was confronted with one of the sounds that will haunt the following pages, the voice of countertenor Alfred Deller.

A countertenor is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "a part higher in pitch than the tenor, sung by a high male voice". As the tenor is the highest of male voices in Western classification, it follows that countertenors sing in an aural realm usually associated with women – generally contralto or mezzo, more rarely soprano. It is from the experience of this unfamiliar, uncanny sound, blurring the aural marks of 'man' and 'woman', that I started to track down the stories, traditions and performing practices of countertenors, only to discover that the voice itself, its publicity and resonance, was the

[1] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 1.

[2] As defined on the British Library website <www.bl.uk>.

result of archive fever. The countertenor voice literally *embodies* the desire for the archives of English early music; it marks the body of the archive as both place of re-memory and locus of cultural desire. As Derrida writes toward the end of his *Archive Fever*, "we are *en mal d'archive*: in need of archives".[3]

As a consequence, I started to search archives, first the hidden repositories of the National Sound Archive and then innumerable on-line archives of libraries and recording companies, to find more and more specimens of countertenor voices. These waves of sound are the privileged items of *my* archive, the archive of *my* desire and quest, as it will emerge from the following pages. Being an archive of (mainly recorded) sounds and (mainly absent) bodies, it may appear to resist the fixedness of print, and thus, maybe, any Derridean "*pressure* of the *printing*, the *impression*, before the division between the printer and the printed".[4] Yet Derrida's 'Freudian impression' (the subtitle to his text) will be reproduced by this archive bearing the traces of many incisions, from wax cylinder to laserdisc. On one hand, these incisions mirror the exteriority of the memory aid Derrida identifies in Freud's Mystic Writing-Pad; on the other, they lend to the archive a permanence denied to the Mystic Pad, whose marks in wax can be erased at will. The question of the voice under this impression thus echoes Derrida's question: "do these new archival machines change anything?".[5]

Countertenor voices, then, emerge as the *musical* impression of the newly impressed/recorded early music archive. Here, the recorded voice allows space for the singer's body, whose Barthesian "grain" every item in this archive desperately voices.[6] These voices, caught in

[3] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 91.

[4] Ibid., 18.

[5] Ibid., 14; see also Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 227-28. Freud's Mystic Writing-Pad is a child's toy, constituted by a transparent sheet of celluloid laid over a wax slab, on which one can write. Once the plastic is lifted, though, the writing disappears. See Sigmund Freud, "A Note on the Mystic Writing-Pad" (1925), in James Strachey, ed., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XIX (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953-74).

[6] Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice", in *Image/Music/Text*, ed. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 179-189.

the death drive of their inescapable time-bound existence, offer an archive always repeating, and yet also always undermining itself, queering the very possibility of the archive.[7] A queer early music archive is thus the somewhat erotic object of this writing, following the suggestions of a voice, or better, of the multiplicity of voices emerging from the resonating impressions of singing bodies.

The quest for the archive

We are all, then, in quest of archives. For scholars and artists who have spent their time and research on what is generally called the early music revival, it was initially the quest for an object called 'early music', that is, music before the age of classicism and Mozart. It was and still is mainly a question of searching for archives, but also for what has been *archived* in the history of music, here in the sense (borrowed from computer science) of "transfer[red] to a store containing infrequently used files, or to a lower level in the hierarchy of memories" [OED]. The archive, in this sense, is not only the place of the *arkhē*, of the "*commencement* and the *commandment*," it is also the place of forgetfulness Derrida himself points to as one of the main features of archival memory.[8] Yet, as everything suppressed or repressed must in due time return, as Derrida's Freudian impression seems to suggest, so early music emerged from its forgotten archives to haunt concert halls and hit parades.[9]

[7] Reflecting on the different meanings of the verb 'to queer' (among them, the OED lists "to interfere with or spoil the business"), Wayne Koestenbaum writes: "The word 'queer' opens beauty's floodgates, enables a serious consideration of aesthetics." Wayne Koestenbaum, "Queering the Pitch: a Posy of Definition and Impersonation", in Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas, eds., *Queering the Pitch. The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 3.

[8] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 1. See also 19: "There would indeed be no archive desire without the radical finitude, without the possibility of a forgetfulness which does not limit itself to repression."

[9] To give an idea of the widespread production and massive investment in the concept of 'early music' by the music industry, it must be mentioned that a search for 'early music' on Amazon.com results in 2,099 entries for the 'Classical Music' category alone, and an outstanding 1,029 entries for the 'Popular Music' category.

What then is to be found in an archive? In her methodological foreword to "The Rani of Sirmur", Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak underlines the pivotal role of archives in Western historiography: "a hegemonic nineteenth-century European historiography has designated the archives as a repository of 'facts'".[10] Thus, well-provided with the authority of 'facts', historians/archivists can elaborate a narrative of the past, or, in the words of Hayden White, "find the form of the reality that will serve as the object of representation in the account that they will write 'when all the facts are known' and they have finally 'got the story straight'".[11] Yet, as we will see (or hear) in the case of early music, the story often does not sound 'straight' at all. The sexual *double entendre* is not unintentional, and not only because there seems to be a lot of queerness more or less archived in the early musical practice of the countertenor voice. There is a sort of queerness in musical practice itself, happening as it does right through the (male or female) body of the performer.[12] As White argues elsewhere: "[there is] a specifically 'musicogical' ideology: namely, the belief that the meaning borne by musical utterance has to do with rhythms, meters, and modes of bodily existence".[13]

This musical body becomes thus peculiarly ungendered, or gendered according to different features in its privileged relation to the musical event. In this setting the written word of the Derridean archive can function only as proxy, a surrogate for the musical experience: it is not the place where music happens. This distinctive quality of music, according to White, puts it in an unusual relation to the workings of narrative historicism, the one that aims at 'getting the

[10] Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak, "The Rani of Sirmur. An Essay in Reading the Archives", *History and Theory* 24.3 (1985), 248.

[11] Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 126.

[12] Koestenbaum seems to imply as much as he writes: "The two coming-outs rhyme. 'I'm musical' hurts – and heals – as much as 'I'm queer'." Koestenbaum, "Queering the Pitch", 4.

[13] Hayden White, "Form, Reference, and Ideology in Musical Discourse", in Steven Paul Scher, ed., *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 300.

story straight'. For "whatever else narrative discourse may be, it differs from dissertative discourse in virtue of its efforts to capture in language the conflicts, dissonances, and contradictions of human existence and social being".[14] Music, even the most analytically structured (here White is writing on Haydn's *Creation*) resists closure, always evoking the 'elsewhere' of bodily existence.

Nonetheless, musical archives exist, written or otherwise. The musical scene is indeed as much 'in need of archives' as any other, as desiring its fair share of 'facts' to ground its story on. Desire is itself another name for 'archive fever', as Derrida himself writes.

> [Archive fever] is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away. It is to run after the archive, even if there's too much of it, right where something in it anarchives itself. *It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement.*[15]

So where there is the archive, there is also the *desire* for the archive; we could even speak of an eroticism of the archive, or of an eroticization of the archive for its insatiable speculators, in a symbolic economy where the 'past' becomes not only a cultural commodity, from academic writing to recording industry, but an object of desire. As Iain Chambers writes, "memory evokes the eroticization of the past".[16]

Musicologist Gary C. Thomas, who clearly shows his interest for archive research in his "Was George Friedrich Handel Gay?", best summarizes the desire of culture for its original moment, in the double movement that first constitutes and then analyzes it: "We thus get to enjoy our heroes twice, first in the putting on, then in the taking off, of their clothes; if anything, the latter is more pleasurable".[17]

[14] Ibid.

[15] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 91; my italics.

[16] Iain Chambers, *Culture after Humanism. History, Culture, Subjectivity* (London: Routledge, 2001), 119. For Spivak too, "what is marked is the site of a desire" ("The Rani of Sirmour", 251).

[17] Gary C. Thomas, "Was George Friedrich Handel Gay? On Closet Questions and Cultural Politics", in Brett, Wood, and Thomas, eds., *Queering the Pitch*, 155.

Well-represented by Handel himself, together with other composers from Elizabethan times to Henry Purcell, this forgotten/archived repertory is the origin the early music revival has been craving for, embodied in the original, authentic sound of pre-classical music. Yet, sound prior to recording technology (some would even say before digital technology) is exactly the place where the musical archive 'anarchives itself', where music is always missing in the written documents that can only evoke, describe, and endlessly defer any notion of authentic sound. The authenticity of the original sound, following the directions of the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, is to be obtained only by "the use of performing techniques *documented* in the composer's own era,...performance based on the *implications of the original sources* for a particular work,...an attempt to *re-create the context* of the original performance; and an attempt *to recreate the musical experience* of the original audience"; all elements to be found, with some degree of interpretation, only in written and pictorial archives of the time.[18]

Handel's works – both English oratorios and Italian operas – are the most involved in the revival's quest for original music; a quest strictly interwoven with the narrative of English musical tradition itself. As Harry Haskell writes in his account of the history of the early music revival,

> In the fifties and sixties, the torch of the Handel Renaissance was passed from Germany to England, where the Handel Opera Society, founded in 1955 by Dent and the conductor Charles Farncombe, pointed the way to a more historically orientated style of production.[19]

It is interesting that Haskell presents the Handel Renaissance as a contention between the two countries that could legitimately take credit for the composer's own origin. Germany was his native country, or rather the native country of one Georg Friedrich Händel,

[18] John Butt, "Authenticity", in Stanley Sadie, ed., *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. II (London: Macmillan, 2001), 24; my italics.

[19] Harry Haskell, *The Early Music Revival. A History* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 1996), 147.

who, having moved to England in the early eighteenth century and become one of its most famous composers, had by the time of the Handel Renaissance long lost the umlaut and gained the final 'e' for 'George' in its stead.[20] In these terms, the need expressed by the early music revival was to go back to an original, authentic Handel, that is, to a musical practice that recuperated lost instruments and techniques to give the audience at least an idea of how Handel sounded in Handel's times.

This operation followed a centuries-long trend that had made of Handel what Thomas defines as "a British national institution, religious icon, hero revered by a musical cult (the Handelians), fort of cultural nostalgia, and finally...'a complete industry'".[21] The creation of Handel as a cultural icon was deeply intertwined with the "necessity of an 'English' oratorio as well as a mythical 'English' Handel" to give shape to a specific 'British' musical/national identity:

> [Handel's] music [was] now understood as defender of the British state, or as somehow embodying British*ness* per se. What this amounts to, in other words, is the appropriation of both Handel and oratorio into vast second-order signifying systems working to suppress the Italian-homosexual-effeminate in favor of its ideological opposite (and "preferred reading"): the British-heterosexual, if celibate-masculine.[22]

Thus, through Handel (but not forgetting Purcell and the Elizabethans) the double bind between English identity and the early music revival is established, as the "England" headword in the *New Grove* makes clear. Here the tradition of church oratorios of which Handel is so towering a representative is defined as "a national expression of musical sublimity" and a representation of "Protestant Englishness".[23] A little further on, the early music repertoire as a

[20] This national appropriation is paramount in the Handel Renaissance: quite significantly, no advocate of historically informed performance has ever proposed going back to the original spelling for 'Händel'.

[21] Thomas, "Was George Friedrich Handel Gay?", 155.

[22] Ibid., 186; italics in the text. It must be underlined that Thomas often uses 'English' and 'British' almost interchangeably, as in this case.

[23] Stephen Banfield , "England: 2. Art and Commercial Music", in *The New Grove Dictionary*, vol. VIII, 217.

whole is listed under the heading "English Musical Identity" as "an unequalled nexus (still thanks partly to the tradition of the Anglican church, apt to take too little credit)".[24] And the *New Grove* is not the only source to back such musical/national discourse. In his preface to the volume of the *Blackwell History of Music* on sixteenth century music, Roger Bray is keen to underline the "Englishness" of Tudor and Jacobean choral music.[25] Yet it is in the context of church music and oratorios that the countertenor voice, this perverse coupling of a woman's voice and a man's body, was born and kept in subdued singing, until the early music revival went for it.

Following St. Paul's dictum "Mulier taceat in ecclesia" (Woman be silent in church) the participation of women in church choirs was forbidden throughout Europe until the second half of the Twentieth century. In Italy this performing practice had led to the castration of young boys for musical ends, creating the grounds for the most amazing musical phenomenon of the eighteenth century, the widespread use of *castrati* in every European opera house, including London – the "Italian-homosexual-effeminate" stereotype Thomas writes about. Handel's use of *castrato* voices in his operatic production was extensive and pervasive; yet, as he moved to the more severe (and more lucrative) oratorio, he started to write for countertenors, the English solution to the 'woman problem'. The musical/religious aspect thus drifts into the national. As Richard Taruskin writes, "Handel, who knew perfectly well what the falsettists *of his adopted country* sounded like, never wrote for them until he abandoned opera for English-texted oratories that drew upon *indigenous* talent and traditions".[26] The church choir is the place where English music finds its repository, its archive of male singing

[24] Stephen Banfield, "England: 5. English Musical Identity", in *The New Grove Dictionary*, vol. VIII, 223.

[25] Roger Bray, "Preface", in Roger Bray, ed., *The Blackwell History of Music in Britain. The Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), xiii.

[26] Richard Taruskin, *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 166; my italics.

bodies: the *Grove* mentions the "national *male* trait" of English musical identity alongside the early music repertoire, as it is the mainly oral tradition of church choirs that has been able to preserve this voice of English musical history.[27]

To 'rediscover' the original sound of the English musical tradition, then, old musical practices had to be tracked down, in a double movement of an-archivization and re-archivization under the heading 'early music'. As composer Michael Tippett, one of the main promoters of the early music revival, was on his personal quest for the voice that would allow him to resurrect the Elizabethan and Restoration music he had recently rediscovered, he fortuitously bumped into Alfred Deller, singing in Canterbury in 1944. His words, quoted in Deller's biography, cast this discovery as a moment of revelation: "I heard Alfred Deller sing Purcell's *Music for a while*. It was not a very good arrangement of it; but for me, in that moment the centuries rolled back".[28]

Here Deller's voice, his singing body, becomes transfigured from lay clerk into what Dominick La Capra defines as archive, "a stand-in for the past that brings the mystified experience of the thing itself – an experience that is always open to question when one deals with writing or other inscriptions".[29] Deller's voice does not, and cannot, remind anyone of a memory that no-one preserves, the countertenor voices of Purcell's times (including Purcell's own voice). Nonetheless, it is made to bear its *impression*, what La Capra calls its 'inscription', and thus *becomes* that voice, enacting past music for present ears. In this sense, Tippett's fascination for Elizabethan and Restoration music joined forces with his efforts towards 'period' performance – according to which, for example, it would be "artistically unsatisfying" to "use a female contralto for the essentially masculine countertenor part" in Purcell's works.[30] Tippett's quest for

[27] Stephen Banfield, "England: 5. English Musical Identity", 223; my italics.

[28] Michael and Mollie Hardwick, *Alfred Deller. A Singularity of Voice* (London & New York: Proteus, 1980), 74

[29] Dominick La Capra, *History and Criticism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 92 n. 17 (quoted in Spivak, "The Rani of Sirmour", 249).

[30] Michael and Mollie Hardwick, *Alfred Deller. A Singularity of Voice*, 72.

the countertenor voice can thus be easily recognized as a moment of archive fever.

Performing the archive

The quest for the countertenor voice is also a quest, and a question, of terminology. The contested term 'falsettist', as employed by Taruskin and others to indicate countertenors, originates from the singing technique, called 'falsetto', used by singers to acquire their peculiar vocal range. Yet, today, the term 'countertenor' is widely preferred to both 'falsettist' and 'sopranist', as it refers back directly to the English singing tradition; so much so that Peter Giles, defining the term in the *New Grove*, feels it necessary to make clear that "contrary to popular understanding, the high male voice employing 'falsetto' was never an exclusively English phenomenon".[31] Giles, on the other hand, uses shock quotes for the term 'falsetto', and with apparently good reason, for under "Falsetto" Giles himself (with other curators) writes that "the phonatory mode known as 'falsetto' has been equated with 'unnatural' as opposed to 'natural', partly through misleading philological usage".[32] Although, as Deller's biographers half-jokingly write, "there is nothing false about falsetto", the haunting effects of this terminology trouble falsetto technique, and the singers making use of it.[33]

With falsetto, the vocal folds are made to touch and vibrate during the production of sound in order to generate a voice with a higher pitch than the one produced by the standard, first-mode phonation. So it is indeed an 'artificial' sound, the result of the singer's will to play with his (or her, as falsetto can also be used by women singers) voice

[31] Peter Giles, "Countertenor: 2. The Voice", in *The New Grove Dictionary,* vol. VI, 571. Nonetheless, under "Falsetto" we read that "it is only in England that second-mode singing enjoyed an uninterrupted, widespread tradition, particularly in all-male cathedral and collegiate choirs, academia, and in the glee club tradition." V.E. Negus, Owen Jander, and Peter Giles, "Falsetto", in *The New Grove Dictionary*, vol. VIII, 538.

[32] Negus, Jander, and Giles, "Falsetto", in *The New Grove Dictionary*, vol. VIII, 537. As a consequence, "the correct term, second-mode phonation, is preferred here to both 'falsetto' and 'pure head register'." (Ibid.)

[33] Michael and Mollie Hardwick, *Alfred Deller*, 78.

register. As musicologist Wayne Koestenbaum writes, "falsetto seems profoundly perverse: a freakish sideshow: the place where voice goes wrong".[34] As a consequence, there is something wrong, definitely not 'straight' in falsetto, all efforts to 'get the story straight' notwithstanding. Indeed, Koestenbaum again writes, "falsetto is part of the history of effeminacy .... Long before anyone knew what a homosexual was, entire cultures knew to mock men who sang unconventionally high".[35]

Deller himself knew what it meant to be mocked; even late in his career, one conductor greeted his entrance in the concert hall with the joke: "I see we have the bearded lady with us tonight".[36] The beard itself, a characteristic of the singer's image throughout his career, was not only a period item that would make him look somewhat 'Elizabethan', but also a feature that would prevent any doubt over his masculinity – as was his keenness to underline the presence in his ensemble to underline the presence in his ensemble of his son Mark, first of three, and also a remarkable countertenor. More recently David Daniels, American countertenor and one of the most renowned interpreters of Handel today, tells in an interview of the "fumbling of programs and funny looks, giggles" that accompanied his first performances in the 1990s.[37] As musicologist Joke Dame writes about the first time he listened to a countertenor (probably Deller himself), "when I heard a counter-tenor, or male alto, I was at a loss. Gender confusion tends to make one nervous".[38]

Moreover, the ludicrousness of falsetto in men presents a singular intertwining of the history of effeminacy with that of racial and ethnic discrimination. Again in the *New Grove* can be found the apparently dispassionate information that the 'natural' use of falsetto, even in speaking, can be found among Indian communities in Great Britain.

[34] Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat. Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire* (London: Penguin, 1994), 164.

[35] Ibid., 165.

[36] Ibid., 149.

[37] "David Daniels. The countertenor superstar on Handel, personal openness and how he got his voice", interviewed by Jason Serinus for <www.andante.com>

[38] Joke Dame, "Unveiled Voices. Sexual Difference and the Castrato", in Brett, Wood, and Thomas, eds., *Queering the Pitch*., 139.

> [T]he condition known as 'pubephonia' persists at an age at which white youths are all using adult first-mode phonation; some Indian youths have to be coached in first-mode phonation to free them from what, to Western ears, may sound oddly juvenile.[39]

This phenomenon finds an odd echo in the diaries of sound engineer William Gaisberg, who in 1906 spent some time in India in order to record the performances by local artists for the Gramophone Company. Here, he writes, the most famous male singers sing so much like women that, on record, "one could not tell [their] voice from a woman's".[40] There is something that makes Indian men speak like boys, at least to the British colonizers' ears; but the causes of this stubborn adherence to the high voice register is not investigated further either in Gaisberg's diaries or in the *New Grove*.

A possible answer may be found, on the other side of the Atlantic, in Francis Marmande's observations on falsetto in jazz and blues: "Under segregation, black males...were expected to sound subjugated, to speak in a high, bleating voice: a female voice, or a child's....The Master infantilises his servant by reducing him to the status of a woman, already designated as inferior".[41] As a consequence, for Mermande, the use of falsetto by singers from Skip James to Robert Johnson and Muddy Waters is an "act of resistance" through the appropriation of the master's strategies, what Homi Bhabha would call "mimicry".[42] Thus he describes the widespread use of falsetto from early jazz to garage artist and rapper Dizzee Rascal: "Now high voices are in fashion", he writes, recalling in a footnote the importance of Alfred Deller for the return of the high male voice on the classical music scene. Quite interestingly, through, the note, and so Deller, disappears in the English edition of the

[39] Negus, Jander, and Giles, "Falsetto", in *The New Grove Dictionary*, vol. VIII, 537-38.

[40] Quoted in Santosh Kumar De, *Gramophone in India. A Brief History* (Calcutta: Uttisthata Press, 1990), 11.

[41] Francis Marmande, "Les aigus, c'est grave", *Le monde diplomatique* (December 2004); "River deep, mountain high", trans. Gulliver Craig, *Le monde diplomatique*, English Edition (March 2005).

[42] See Homi K. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man", in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 85-92.

article: again, gender confusion, and the rebellion it echoes, tends to make one nervous.

The problem is that the countertenor voice, unearthed from musical archives to give shape to the national narrative of English music, breaks with the gender conventions of voice and pitch established in nineteenth century as a consequence of what Foucault terms '*scientia sexualis*'.[43] It also brings havoc in singing technique, as interpreters are allowed, still according to the *New Grove*, to go back to a musical time where male voices were considered a far more flexible instrument than today.[44] Not to speak, of course, of the troublesome experience of falsetto for hearers, who are confronted with a man who sings quite comfortably in a range usually associated with women – and take delight in it. As bits and pieces of this musical archive are constantly brought to light, then, what Homi Bhabha calls 'slippages' in the national discourse embedded in early music also appear.

> As an apparatus of symbolic power, [the 'nation' as a narrative strategy] produces a continual slippage of categories, like sexuality, class affiliation, territorial paranoia, or 'cultural difference' in the act of writing the nation.[45]

Thus, as it moves from the pedagogical and normative role of national narrative to its performative dimension, the musical archive refuses to be disciplined: Deller's successors, the male bodies and voices of this singing archive, definitely did.[46] Contravening to the rule of their illustrious predecessor, who advised aspiring countertenors not to sing anything that had not been written specifically for their voice,

[43] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*. Vol. I: An Introduction (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

[44] See Giles, "Countertenor: 2. The Voice", in *The New Grove Dictionary*, vol. VI, 572.

[45] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 140.

[46] As Bhabha writes, "the people are the historical 'object' of a nationalist pedagogy... [and] are also the 'subjects' of a process of signification...as that sign of the present through which national life is redeemed and iterated as a reproductive process." Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 145.

today's singers have appropriated the wide repertory of music written for *castrati*, thus resurrecting in one stroke one of the most troubling episodes of European musical history, and the "Italian-homosexual-effeminate" Handel that had been purged from English musical history.[47]

The choice itself is not devoid of misogynistic overtones. The HMV Classics anthology *The Art of the Countertenor* explicitly defines this move a reappropriation of this repertory from "usurping females"; while in the booklet accompanying an anthology by Michael Chance, one of the best-known countertenors today, Tom Sutcliffe candidly writes that "falsetto singing is thus, in a way, a monument to the exclusion of women from cultural and political visibility".[48] This is maybe why musicologists sensitive to gender politics in music have recoiled in front of these virile show-offs. Joke Dame, supporting the use of women in former *castrato* roles, explicitly states that the use of countertenors "is far from ideal, since the sound of the countertenor's falsetto…is softer, less penetrating, less piercing, and less powerful" than *castrato* voices, at least according to evidence from the period.[49] On the other hand, Dame reads the lesbian overtones of casting women singers in both leading roles in most Baroque operas, where the hero's *tessitura* is sometimes higher than the heroine's, as "a present from history", a view shared by many a woman critic.[50]

Margaret Reynolds, writing about Handel's *Alcina* (1735), writes that "for the lesbian audience this is now the most tantalizing of operas, for all four main characters are played by women…and all the

[47] "[Countertenors] should, in my opinion, be very careful to confine themselves to the music written from the voice and not try to embark on things which were never intended for the male alto to sing." Interview to Alfred Deller, in Michael e Mollie Hardwick, *Alfred Deller*, 190.

[48] A.A.V.V., *The Art of the Countertenor* (EMI 1999); Thomas Sutcliff, "Countertenors – Novelty and Revival", *The Art of Countertenor – Michael Chance* (Deutsche Gramophone, 1999), 3.

[49] Dame, "Unveiled Voices", 149. Dame's reference to evidence from the period, again, tells much about the need for archives, and the slippery quality of musical impressions.

[50] Ibid., 151. One of the most poignant cases for women singers in former castrato roles is poetically made by Hélène Cixous in her "Tancrède continue" (1983), translated in English as "Tancredi continues", in Corinne E. Blackamer and P. J. Smith, eds., *En Travestie. Women, Gender Subversion, Opera* (N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1995), 152-168.

love interests, all the wooing and the teasing…happen between women".[51] Yet she is also aware of the multiple possibilities of gender crossing brought into play by countertenors, for "sometimes both appear on stage, the mezzo taking the hero's role and the countertenor taking the second lead".[52] Indeed, while countertenors are perfectly able to interpret parts written for women and second lead characters, most of them would not be able to sing in the soprano range required for some heroes of early opera. This allows not only for intriguing possibilities of gender interplay in opera performances, but also for a different public *persona* for the artists themselves.

In opposition to the idea that the countertenor revival could be driven by a comeback of masculinity and an attempt to exclude women singers from the stage, many singers love to play with their own sexual identity. Daniels is not afraid to be portrayed as "a gay man, playing the role of a woman while standing opposite a male character and singing a love song to him".[53] The same attitude is shown by his colleague Brian Asawa, also openly homosexual, who played Prince Orlofsky in *Die Fledermaus* (1874) by Johann Strauss, jr., "an unforgettable image of aristocratic degeneracy, adroitly cast by Strauss as a mezzo [i.e., a woman singer] in drag".[54] In his one-man show *True or Falsetto?* fringe artist Ernesto Tomasini, an Italian countertenor working in London theatres for the past decade, interprets *both* Don José *and* Michaela in his (outrageously funny) rendering of their first act duet from Bizet's *Carmen* (1875); while a 1990 production of Brecht/Weill's *The Seven Deadly Sins* (1933) featured countertenor Ludwig "Lucky" Boettger as Anna I against dancer Katja Bellinghousen as Anna II, exposing the gender politics in the relation between the two sides of the main character, Gesamt-Anna (Whole Anna), the victim of a male-dominated society.

[51] Margaret Reynolds, "Ruggiero's Deceptions, Cherubino's Distractions", in Blackamer and Smith, eds., *En Travestie*, 147-148.

[52] Reynolds, "Ruggiero's Deceptions", 146.

[53] "David Daniels. The countertenor superstar on Handel, personal openness and how he got his voice", interview by Jason Serinus for <www.andante.com>

[54] Matthew Boyden, *The Rough Guide to Opera* (London: Rough Guides, 2002), 285.

This staging also included multiple cross-dressing, as Boettinger, although playing a female character, sometimes dressed as a woman, sometimes as a man, literally multiplying the gender-crossing possibilities embodied by countertenor voice and performance. Yet, discussing this production, Ralph P. Locke again raises the question of women's exclusion from the stage: "is a man taking from a woman one of the few paying jobs...that are uniquely hers?".[55] To make his point further, in a note Locke also refers to Brian Asawa, this time playing the mezzo role Baba the Turk (a bearded lady) in Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* (1951).

Yet, another question fails to be addressed here, the troublesome question of an archive embodied in performance. What happens to the 'national male trait' of English early music when Asawa, a Japanese-American gay countertenor, plays the role of a racialized *and* womanized 'Other' in a contemporary opera? This interplay of drag and irony in performance foreshadows a dismemberment of the musical archive, and the history coming out from this archive cannot be but a "deconstructable history," an endless shifting in the politics of the archive.[56] Thus in its echoes and reverberations the archive of early music brings to light what Derrida calls "the nearly *formal* fatality of a performative effect".[57] It is in the realm of the performative that the national past embodied by the early music revival, as the 'thing itself' any historically informed performance aims at representing, does not end up with a familiar tale of origin, or with the comforting experience of bringing back any 'original' music in the sense of "pertaining to the origin, beginning, or earliest stage" [OED]. On the contrary this object of desire of archive fever, of English and early music, shows the uncanny quality of a performance coming out as 'original', but in the sense of "such as has not been done or produced before; novel or fresh" [OED]. This is the originality of the countertenor voice as an archive in performance, questioning its possibility in the very

[55] Ralph P. Locke, "What Are These Women Doing in Opera?", in Blackamer and Smith, eds., *En Travestie*, 80.

[56] Ibid., 4.

[57] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 63; italics in the text.

moment of its constitution. Thus the countertenor voices Bhabha's question: "how does one encounter the past as an anteriority that continually introduces an otherness or alterity into the present?"[58].

[58] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 157.

Tiziana Rosapane

"Just a Word on a Page and There Is the Drama" Sarah Kane's autobiographical archive*

The statement at work

> The archive is not that which ... safeguards the event of the statement, and preserves, for future memories, its status as an escapee; it is that which, at the very root of the statement-event, and in that which embodies it, defines at the outset the system of its enunciability. Nor is the archive that which collects the dust of the statements that have become inert once more, and which may make possible the miracle of their resurrection; it is that which defines the mode of occurrence of the statement-thing; it is the system of its functioning .[1]

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault directs his analysis towards the 'statement' as the atom or the fundamental unit of discourse, which is not to be confused with a proposition. The statement is the set of rules, which makes propositions meaningful: a sentence is not meaningful if it follows the rules of grammar, but if it complies with the rules of meaning. The functioning of the statement is determined by the archive.[2]

* The quotation in my title is taken from Sarah Kane's last play, *4.48 Psychosis*.

[1] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 129-130.

[2] Foucault refers to the relation between the 'statement' and the archive in the third section of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, entitled "The statement and the archive".

By applying Foucault's assumption to the written theatrical text as the 'archive' of the statement, I will consider some plays by Sarah Kane, who killed herself on, February 20, 1999 at the age of 28, after a serious state of depression. By using the concept-practice of the archive, I will discuss the autobiographical strand in her work, and the so-called 'vital prophecy' of her writing, which is evident in her last play, *4.48 Psychosis*.[3]

In some of Kane's dramas, the text-archive is the *raison d'être* of the statements and facilitates their actualisation. For instance, in Kane's first play, *Blasted* (1995), statements are actualized through horizontal strokes – 'dashes' or 'hyphens'. These are like the *punctum*, which, according to Roland Barthes, is the unaccountable detail striking the observer like an unexpected flash of lightning, thus completely unsettling the gaze. The reader is allowed to enter a dimension, beyond the field of the immediately visible, in the open space of the infinite possibilities of representation.[4] The *punctum* is the sign whose discreet presence on the page seems negligible, while obviously it is not, and indeed *must not be.*

In *Blasted*, the hyphen characterizes Cate's way of speaking. She is a naïve young woman who stutters when she is under stress, as happens when her lover, Ian, wants to have sex with her. In the first scene, she signifies the impossibility of intimacy with Ian by breaking her words: "I t-t-t-t-t-t – told you. I really like you but I can't do this".[5] The author resorts to dashes or hyphens in Ian's lines as well. He is a middle-aged journalist who, after a long time, meets Cate in an expensive hotel room in Leeds. Suddenly, a soldier enters the room, and in the third scene, after finding out that the soldier's girlfriend has been raped and brutally

[3] Sarah Kane is among the most important British playwrights of the 1990s, especially for the content-form originality of her five plays – *Blasted* (1995), *Phaedra's Love* (1996), *Cleansed* (1998), *Crave* (1998) and *4.48 Psychosis* (2000).

[4] See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 26-53. A few months before his death, Barthes reflected on photography. Interweaving remarks and digressions, leading to his autobiography, he sought support for the idea of photography through the notions of *studium* and *punctum*. *Studium* is the careless desire, which determines the author's generic approach to photography.

[5] All quotations are taken from Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays* (London: Methuen, 2001).

killed, Ian tries to express his indescribable sorrow, fragmenting his speech with dashes.

Ian	I'm sorry.
Soldier	Why?
Ian	It's terrible.
Soldier	What is?
Ian	Loosing someone, a woman, like that.
Soldier	You know, do you?
Ian	I –
Soldier	Like what?
Ian	Like –
	You said –
	A soldier –
Soldier	You are a soldier.
Ian	I haven't –

The same happens to the soldier when he tries to describe his girlfriend.

Soldier	Close my eyes and think about her.
	She's –
	She's –
	She's –
	She's –
	She's –
	She's –
	She's –

The unexpected use of dashes or hyphens, visible in the archiving of the written text, projects the reader/spectator into the dimension of the unsaid, even unsayable, and therefore ineffable.

In *Crave* (1998), the 'statement' which makes propositions meaningful is the 'fragment'. Theatre is the art of the fragment, in that it can represent existence through the metonymic modalities of the 'part'. Although sojourning in the supreme world of the creative, the playwright connects herself to the rest of humanity because she cannot relate the part, and therefore the fragment, or even one of its

details, to the whole. In the theatre, the division of the two contexts – the fragment and the whole – is remarkable: by imposing its predominance over any view of the whole, the partial gaze allows a straightforward fragmentation of reality.[6]

In *Crave*, the technique of the fragment is applied because there is not a plot as such, but one which can still be intuitively reconstructed on the basis of disjointed and broken phrases, which score the page like cryptic riddles. The language lacks linearity, closure, or chronology. As E. Voigts-Virchow has noticed, "The play's action ... consists of its language, it is anti-linear and anti-final, static and achronological. The language is virtually dissociated from character".[7] The characteristics of a verbalism of the fragment can often be found in the dramatic avant-garde from Beckett to Kane. As Emilie Gouband states, "... if Sarah Kane revives some themes cherished by Beckett, she is inspired by his theatre above all on the formal level. In fact, both playwrights aim at a minimalist and simple language in order to achieve a greater intensity....".[8] The beginning of the play in which brief disjointed phrases follow one another is an example of the "minimalist attitude", which unites the two authors.

C You're dead to me.
B My will reads, fuck this up and I'll haunt you for the rest of your fucking life.
C He's following me.

It is as if the individual phrases were the jumbled-up parts of a mosaic or the scattered pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, demanding to be put back together so as to re-create the image, the meaning, they once represented.

[6] Peter Brook is sensitive to this dynamic and highlights it in *The Empty Space* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 40.

[7] Eckart Voigts-Virchow, "Sarah Kane, a Late Modernist: Intertextuality and Montage in the Broken Images of *Crave*" (1998), in Bernhard Reitz and Heiko Stahl, eds., *What Revels Are in Hand: Assessment of Contemporary Drama in English in Honour of Wolfgang Lippke, CDE-Studies* 8 (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2001), 211.

[8] Emilie Gouband, "Sarah Kane: Dramaturgie de la Violence", http://www.iainfisher.com/ (my translation).

In the text-archive of *4.48 Psychosis* (2000), the 'statement' finds its "mode of occurrence" through the language of depression, with its attributes of reiteration and monotony, together with a strange concatenation-absence of meaning that echoes the senselessness of life. The protagonist is pushed towards the decision to commit suicide. On the one end, the reason is existential, a generalized *mal de vivre*; on the other, it is the suffering from unrequited love. The mood is transferred to the words, which construct a discourse on the page, where signified and signifier lose their meaning. According to Julia Kristeva, this language is "asymbolic" in that it repudiates the semantic value of both the symbol and the object it designates.[9] Repetition rules the page, calling into question the limits that dictate one's own boundaries.

Where do I start?
Where do I stop?
...
How do I stop?
How do I stop?
How do I stop?
How do I stop?
How do I stop?
How do I stop?
How do I stop?
How do I stop?

Monotony characterizes a long list of some infinitive verbs, which convey the various goals of the individual.

To achieve goals and ambitions
To overcome obstacles and attain a high standard
To increase self-regard by the successful exercise of talent
To overcome opposition
To have control and influence over others...

[9] See Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 33-51.

The language is interwoven with strange concatenations

> Please…
> Money…
> Wife…

According to Foucault, the archive is the "system of functioning" of the statement and it is in their written form that Kane's plays acquire their archivistic connotation. The reader's eye can see more deeply than the gaze of the audience as it benefits from graphic representations – the dash or the hyphen, the fragment and the attributes of the language of depression. These 'statements' become visible among the lines of the text-archive that dictates the mode by which they function, thus giving to propositions the 'meaning' of ineffability, fragmentariness and depression .

The *impression* of the word

While Foucault devotes a section of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* to the idea of the archive, Jacques Derrida writes *Archive Fever* in which, together with an intense reflection on the future of psychoanalysis, Freud's concept of the archive is re-considered.[10] According to Derrida, the development of new technologies has superseded the traditional recourse to memory and reminiscence, so that issues of heritage and responsibility need to be read from a new perspective. Considering its etymology, the author points out the semantic connotations of *commencement* and *command* contained in the word 'archive' as well as the idea of *bringing together*.

> Let us not begin at the beginning, nor even at the archive. But rather at the word "archive" – and with the archive of so familiar a word. *Arkhē*, we recall, names at once the *commencement* and the *commandment.* This name apparently coordinates two principles in one: the principle according to nature or history, *there* where things

[10] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

> *commence* – physical, historical, or ontological principle – but also the principle according to the law, *there* where men and gods *command, there* where authority, social order are exercised …. The meaning of "archive," its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek *arkheion:* initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons,* those who commanded. This archontic function … does not only require that the archive be deposited somewhere, on a stable substrate, and at the disposition of a legitimate hermeneutic authority …. The *archontic* principle of the archive is also a principle of consignation, that is, of gathering together.[11]

As Derrida points out, the *archons* are not only the supreme magistrates who write and interpret the law; they also encompass the task of re-uniting what someone else has gathered. The *archon* is the prosopopœia of the archive and of its intrinsic peculiarities.

The sub-title of *Archive Fever* is "a Freudian Impression". Derrida stresses the semantic value of the term 'impression', examining its three senses of typographical inscription, notion or sensation of an idea, and the indelible imprint left in memory.[12]

It is convenient to use this threefold meaning of 'impression' as a starting point for uncovering further peculiarities of Kane's theatrical texts. The words on the page-archive *begin*, *bring together* and *conserve* the indelible typographic *inscription,* which the author uses

[11] Ibid. 1-3, *passim*.

[12] With reference to the three meanings of the word 'impression', Derrida states: "1. The first impression is *scriptural* or *typographic* that of an inscription … which leaves a mark at the surface or in the thickness of the substrate. 2.This orients us toward the second valence of the word "impression"…. "Archive" is only a *notion*, an impression associated with a word and for which, together with Freud, we do not have a concept. 3. 'Freudian impression' also has a third meaning, unless it is the first: the impression *left* by Sigmund Freud, beginning with the imprint left in him, from his birth and his covenant, from his circumcision, through all the manifest or secret history of psychoanalysis, of the institution and of the works …. In any given discipline, one can no longer, one should no longer be able to, thus one no longer has the right or the means to claim to speak of this without having been marked in advance, in one way or another, by this Freudian impression". Ibid., 26-30. In particular, Derrida is referring to Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* (1929).

to create her fictitious universe, weaving obscure, transgressive plots. These carry out a careful meditation on the I, both individual and universal, where men and women witness and take part in the deconstruction of the boundaries of gender and sex and in the fusion between the subject and its surrounding reality. If these interpenetrate, then the relationship between truth and reality is dichotomous: what is real is symbolic. It is not the truth but a representation of it; it is the signifier, which entertains an arbitrary relation with the signified; it is Maya's veil, which conceals the true nature of things. Kane's message demolishes the rigid polarities of gender, as well as the injunctions which found the individual's existence and dictate the boundaries of normal/abnormal, sanity/insanity, and nature/culture.

In her theatre, there are five actors/actresses: Love, Violence, Madness, Depression, Death (Suicide).[13] The written text archives them, *brings together* and *conserves* the traces with which their typographical impression is irrevocably imbued. Through the printed word, the writing counters the material resistance of the page, *breaking into* the inscription of a form *impressed* in the text-archive and in its binding memory.[14]

According to Derrida, the archive is imperceptible, there is no conception of it, only an *impression*. In Kane's dramas, inasmuch as the archive is personal, the existential pain of the author can convey only an *impression* of its nature to the reader and to the audience. The indefinability of the concept of archive is therefore consistent with the ephemeral indecipherability of personal unhappiness and personal death (as prefigured in Kane's last play). According to Heidegger, no one can really take upon themselves the death of another; death is always essentially our death.[15] All this impresses its *imprint* not only

[13] My graduation thesis, *Il teatro di Sarah Kane. Le forme dissacranti dell'Amore* (Napoli: Graus & Boniello, forthcoming) focuses on Kane's theatrical production, comparing its themes – love, violence, madness, depression, death (suicide) – to actors playing a role. My research aimed at demonstrating the main role assigned by the playwright to Love, an omnipresent figure, which, by means of a series of transgressive techniques, loses its traditional status and acquires a "desecrating form".

[14] See Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing", in *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 211, 214.

[15] See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquaire & Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).

through the graphic signs of the word on the page or of the performance on stage, but also in future memory. The *corpus* of Kane's work is turned into a monument to the figure of its author, engraved into which her own *corpus* may be seen – her intermittent, though persistent, presence among the entangled and obscure threads of her theatre, inter-polating and con-founding reality and fiction.

The *alter ego* and the *document vécu*

> Bertolt Brecht urged comedians to transpose their roles into the third person and into the past tense .... Autobiographers are comedians as well.
> (Philippe Lejeune, *Je est un autre*)

> Autobiography, then, is not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts.
> (Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-facement")

If the written text is the archive, defining the modes of speech and safeguarding the fictitious universe, the author's individual and existential dimension permeates the microcosm to which she gives birth. Kane's five plays are crowded with a series of *alter egos*, the heirs of her personality and mouthpieces for her existential suffering. In *Blasted*, twenty-one year old Cate leads her companion Ian to suspect her of being a lesbian. She declines Ian's various offers of love and sex: she shuts out the other sex and rejects the male signifier from her own symbolic universe – Jacques Lacan would discuss this in terms of "forclusion".[16] As Kane was homosexual, Cate may be seen as the first of her *alter egos*. In *Cleansed* (1998), Grace suggests again the autobiographical subject of lesbianism, and at the end of the play, undergoes a sex change operation. Two other characters, Carl and Rod, are a male homosexual couple.

The subject of lesbianism is also proposed by the speaking voice in *4.48 Psychosis* through the repeated references to the love for another woman, who is absent in her lover's life.

[16] For the notion of "forclusion", see Jean Laplanche, J. – B. Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967), 163-164; and Jacques Lacan, "Le séminaire sur la lettre volée", in *Écrits* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966).

I miss a woman who was never born
I kiss a woman across the years that say we shall never meet
...
She is the couching place were I never shall lie

Thus, Kane's plays become an autobiographical "archive of trauma" because they acknowledge the author's painful and unforgettable homosexuality, dominated by the "emotional memory" of highly specific, affective and personal details.[17]

Kane hanged herself, and in her plays there are two characters who choose the same mode of suicide: Phaedra, in *Phaedra's Love* (1996), and Robin, in *Cleansed*. In particular, through Phaedra, we get an unconscious premonition of what, all too soon, would afflict the playwright herself: suicide by hanging in 1999, three years after the play's first performance.

The creation of these various *alter egos*, and the consequent reference to characters in the third person, has led to a sort of 'splitting' or "dédoublement". As Philippe Lejeune writes,

> There is a figure of speech in relation to a proper meaning, which is the use of the 'non-person' [the third person] to speak of neither the utterer nor the receiver of the discourse. However this figure should not be thought of as an indirect way of speaking of oneself, which should be opposed to the 'direct' character of the first person. It is another way of performing, under the form of a splitting, that which the first person carries out under the form of a confusion: the ineluctable duality of the grammatical 'person'. When one is speaking of oneself, to say 'I' is more habitual (hence more 'natural') than to say 'he', but it is not more simple.[18]

[17] See Ann Cvetkovich, "In the Archives of Lesbian Feelings: Documentary and Popular Culture", *Camera Obscura* 49 (1 June 2002), 110. Investigating recent documentary films and videos, the author shows how they constitute an archive, and demonstrates the importance of the archive in the lesbian popular imaginary. She defines "archives of trauma" those commemorating the Holocaust, slavery, war or homosexuality. Cvetkovich states, "gay and lesbian archives address the traumatic loss of history that has accompanied sexual life and the formation of sexual publics, and they assert the role of memory and affect in compensating for institutional neglect". For the intersections of Derrida's notion of the archive and gay and lesbian archives, see Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002). Toni Morrison, in the context of remembering slavery, talks about "emotional memory", in "The Site of Memory", in Russell Ferguson et al., eds., *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 299-305.

The author's "I" comes together with a third person with whom it is inevitably and paradoxically linked – the *alter ego*.[19] In the generation of multiple *alter egos*, Kane does not give life to idols or icons, mimetic yet separate figures of the author as other than herself; instead, she establishes a figure that is 'one' with the author. The reader and the audience find themselves entrapped in the inviolable "whirligig", which makes the distinction between fiction and autobiography insoluble.[20]

If the texts of Kane's first four plays are examples of autobiography in the third person, her last work is the only case of autobiography in the first person. In the monologue of *4.48 Psychosis*, the curtain rises on a scene where depressive melancholy makes its appearance on stage: it is the sign of an existential illness, even if caused by the unrealisable longing for an absent woman. To the catalogue of depressive symptoms, sporadic, fragmentary hints of the protagonist's suicidal intent are added. It is where theatre and life merge into an indistinct amalgam since it was not long after finishing the play that Kane hanged herself, tired of living a life of depression and, above all, of being continuously waiting for a woman who would never return her love.

In *4.48 Psychosis*, the first person autobiography offers both reader and audience an example of *document vécu*, a true story told directly by the one who lived it. As Lejeune writes,

[18] Philippe Lejeune, *Je est un autre* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1980), 34; my translation. For studies on autobiography, see also Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975), and Franco Battistini, *Lo specchio di Dedalo* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1990).

[19] In the theatrical work, this figure gives body to the author's ante-death portrait, because, as Derrida points out,"... all work is also the work of mourning. All work in general works at *mourning*". Derrida, *The Work of Mourning* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 142.

[20] Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-Facement", in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 70.

> The word 'lived' … is a shining word that takes on different meanings ... It signifies primarily that the story is true, that is to say it is not a fiction, something made up. The reader will not therefore need to adopt the attitude of feigning credulity, the playful behaviour that is linked to fiction, and which allows the reader to distance himself at will. Here, credulity has to be total, since the text is [self-]referential … 'Lived' means then that this true story will reach us through the channel of those who have lived it … It consists of a tale told by one of the persons directly implicated in the situation or in the events. It is the situation implicated by the autobiographical contract. [21]

With *4.48 Psychosis*, Kane definitively signs her "autobiographical contract". If she has persistently inhabited her plays disguised in the attire of her *alter egos*, she now comes out into the open, re-taking possession of her identity, expressing an existential and amorous sickness in naked and painful words. The text-archive *brings together* and *conserves* a material whose fictional appearance is betrayed by the decisive contamination of life experienced for real.

Foretelling the drama

> No matter how much you resist it, you have mass and volume only when covered with cinders, as one covers one's head with ashes in a sign of mourning.
>
> (Jacques Derrida, *Cinders*)

> The autobiographer believes he can take back the years that time has erased. Instead, he causes his death, composing his own future obituary ...
>
> (Franco Battistini, *Lo specchio di Dedalo*)

In "Autobiography as De-Facement", Paul de Man reads William Wordsworth's *Prelude* as "an exemplary text." The *Prelude* begins as an essay on epitaphs, then it becomes itself an epitaph, that is the author's own monumental autobiography.[22] Its intention is to recover and give voice to the author's name, but in the very moment it moves forwards to

[21] Lejeune, *Je est un autre*, 206, *passim*; my translation.
[22] De Man, "Autobiography as Defacement", 72.

this act of restoration, it discovers it is erasing the name it sought to preserve. According to de Man, the trope of autobiography *par excellence* is that of prosopopœia, "the fiction of the voice-from-beyond-the-grave". Prosopopœia is the apostrophe addressed to an absent, deceased or voiceless entity (the author's own name); it implies an answer on the part of the one who is absent, thereby conferring the power of speech to that person.[23]

The language of prosopopœia and tropes is the solar language of knowledge that renders the unknown accessible to the mind and senses. The language of the tropes is like a body, which veils the soul in the same way as clothes veil the body. It is an evil language that, in the very moment it retrieves, also negates, relegating the retrieved object to silence. It is like the poisoned dress Deianira, the unaware, receives from Nessus in order to revive the love of her husband Hercules, causing instead his violent death. Language is not the thing itself but its picture; therefore it is silent, mute, as pictures are. In the very moment of painting an object, in the attempt to give it a voice, language relegates the object to a state of dumbness.

On the basis of such an argument, autobiography – like the archive – begins with the intention of becoming and conserving the author's own epitaph or monumental *inscription*. In fact, instead of restoring the author's name and giving her a voice that triumphs over death, autobiography erases it, "de-faces" it, reducing it to ashes, in the mute "pictorial representation" of the work itself. This is the situation in the monologue of *4.48 Psychosis*, the most autobiographical of Kane's plays, where one reason of the protagonist's suicide is unrequited love.

> This *vital* need for which I would die
> To be loved
> I'm dying for one who doesn't care
> I'm dying for one who doesn't know
> You're *breaking* me [24]

In the English text, we cannot identify the loved one's gender, but as the

[23] Ibid., 76.
[24] My italics.

references are usually to a woman, we imagine that the author is referring to a person of her own sex. From a formal point of view, both phrases "to be loved" and "you're breaking me" are, unlike the others, indented to the right of the page: this is to signify not only the fragmentariness often found in the text, but the need to stress these phrases with respect to the rest of the page. On the one hand, the importance of the vital need to be loved is emphasized (love, therefore, makes the life of the one who loves dependent on that love); on the other, the idea of the void or *breaking*, and therefore of annulment, is produced in the speaker's life due to the unrequited nature of her amorous desires.

Through this void, the protagonist pre-figures her own suicide. According to Freud, suicide is the declaration of hate towards a 'lost' loved object – in this case, 'absent' because it doesn't respond to the lover's demands. In order to cope with the void originating from the loved one's absence in her life, the lover incorporates the latter into the interiority of her thoughts. Absent in her exterior life, the loved one becomes present in her interior I, identifying with the lover, becoming united with her. Not reciprocating this love, the beloved becomes the object of hate: she must be eliminated. Still, as she is now identified with the one who loves her, the murder of the beloved becomes suicide. In killing herself, the protagonist kills the one she loves, the one who is always absent.[25]

Just before her suicide, Kane impressed on the page the image of a hatch – re-iterating the phrase "hatch opens/stark light" in various parts of the play – which emits the same light that spreads out from the conclusion of *4.48 Psychosis*.

> Hatch opens
> Stark light
> And nothing
> Nothing
> See nothing

[25] See Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), in James Strachey, ed., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XIV (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953-74), 237-258.

The light seems to be an ambiguous reference to the glow visible at the time of birth as well as the radiance of the moment of death. It is as if death were a hoped for rebirth to another life within the compass of the loved one, a compass of absence. Ideally, if the autobiographical I, in reuniting with her love object, suggests the idea of rebirth to another life, then the *impression* made on the page by the graphic reiteration of the word 'nothing' leads to the idea of the obliteration of her own individuality – something her last play forecasts. The autobiographical message is *inscribed* in the text-archive of the play, the work becomes a "revelation" achieving the tautological identity of *logos* and images and announcing the author's departure. As Jean-Luc Nancy states, "The 'revelation' is the identity of that which may be revealed as well as of that which is revealed .... The revelation is in the absence, and it is not he who is departing who reveals, but she with whom he has entrusted the task of going and announcing his departure".[26] The author is at the point of death, but tries to achieve a "resurrection" through her work, although the resurrection is, for Nancy, "an ascension that vanishes while it is rising".[27]

The autobiographical play seems to convey the intention to restore the author's own name, past and individuality, leaving an *imprint* of itself through the legacy of the text-archive, yet paradoxically it carves upon the pages an idea of erasure or "de-facement". It is the idea of self-annihilation *impressed typographically* and implicit in the autobiographical premonition of a dramatic epilogue, signified by the final interchanges of *4.48 Psychosis*. These seal the brief dramatic and existential journey of Sarah Kane with the phrase 'the end'. The

[26] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Noli me tangere. Essai sur la levée du corps* (Paris: Bayard Éditions, 2003), 10, 78-79; my translation. Starting with the story from the Gospel according to John in which the resurrected Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene and warns her not to touch him, the philosopher searches out, among others, the teleological meanings of their meeting without contact. In the quotation, it is Mary Magdalene who announces Christ's departure; we refer, rather, to Kane's last work and its mission to forecast the death of the author.

[27] Ibid., 72. Nancy observes, "La résurrection n'est pas un retour à la vie. Elle est la gloire du sein de la mort: une gloire obscure dont l'illumination se confond avec la ténèbre du tombeau". Ibid. 32.

autobiographical archive, together with its signatory, is turned into a cinder – at the same time, it retains and erases. As Derrida points out,

> ... There the cinder is: that which preserves in order no longer to preserve, dooming the remnant to dissolution .... And nothing prevents us from thinking that this may also be the nickname of the so-called signatory .... An incineration celebrates ... the desperately disseminal affirmation but also just the opposite, the categorical "no" to the laborious work of mourning, a "no" of fire. [28]

[28] Derrida, *Cinders*, 35-55.

Sonia Torres

Memory and Displacement: identitary discourses in (between) Chile and Canada

Representation, in contemporary times, is coached in two apparently paradoxical tropes: memory and displacement. In his collection of essays translated into Portuguese entitled *Seduzidos pela memória* (seduced by memory), Andreas Huyssen discusses the increasing privilege given to discourses of memory – in particular, collective and political traumatic memory – and how these discourses have generated a body of cultural works that narrate what he calls the "present pasts" of postmodernity, as opposed to the "present futures" of modernity.[1]

The present discourses of memory are due, in great measure, to the political events of the twentieth century, which, in their turn, were responsible for a series of diasporas — the paradigm is the Holocaust, but decolonization and exile, as a consequence of dictatorships in the South Cone, can also be included in this category. "The contemporary focus on memory and temporality contrasts entirely with other innovative works dealing with categories such as maps, geographies, borders, commercial routes, migrations, displacements and diasporas".[2] If, as Huyssen argues, the *political* location of the

[1] Andreas Huyssen, *Seduzidos pela memóri*, trans. Sergio Alcides (Rio de Janeiro: Aeroplano/MAM, 2000). All references cited are from this edition, and all translations are mine.

[2] Ibid., 9.

practices of memory is still national, and not post-national or global,[3] and if, on the other hand, these practices are often developed in places that are distinct from their original places of occurrences they narrate, time and space become intertwined in increasingly complex manners, creating what he refers to as the "transnational movement of the discourses of memory".[4] This movement is especially evident in the literature produced by migrants or political exiles, from the 1980s onwards.

New discursive networks are being forged, and are especially evident in the literature produced by migrants or political exiles, from the 1980s onwards and, to be sure, the socio-political circumstances shared by these writers was decisive to both local and diasporic Latin American literary productions. In Canada – and more specifically Quebec – in the last twenty or thirty years, the immigrant profile has changed. As in other countries in the Americas, the first migratory waves were European; but, from the 70s onwards, Canada became the host nation to a great number of Francophone post-colonial immigrants, arriving from the Caribbean, Asia and Africa. This brought about changes in the Quebecois social panorama. Before the 1960s, the imaginary community of Quebec was founded on a homogeneous, French-speaking, Catholic society – a legacy that had trickled down from the nineteenth century elite, which did not necessarily correspond to reality and allowed for the occultation of the divisions and conflicts of a society quickly on its way to industrialization. With the arrival of these new immigrants from non-European countries, the heterogeneous character of Quebecois culture became gradually more visible. And, although there had been previous literary works focusing on the immigrant, the new element introduced in the 1980s was the acknowledgment, on the part of the critics, of the cultural plurality of Quebecois writing; or, as Pierre Nepveu explains, there is a new awareness of the multiple centers of identitary reference in the literary scene.[5]

[3] Ibid., 17; Huyssen's italics.

[4] Ibid., 13.

[5] Cf. P. Nepveu et al., eds., *L'écologie du réel: mort et naissance de la littérature québécoise contemporaine* (Montréal: Boréal, 1988).

In the mid 1970s, as a consequence of the migratory waves unleashed by the military coups in Latin America, Canada became the host nation to a large number of Spanish-speaking immigrants, above all from Chile. Similarly to what had occurred in the United States, the steady stream of Latin Americans coming in during the last quarter of the twentieth century has been responsible for a body of literary works produced by Hispanic Americans on Canadian territory. Although what is referred to as the *Latino* community in the U.S. is larger than the entire Canadian population, an increasing number of Hispanic writers is now part of both Francophone and Anglophone literatures in Canada, either directly or through translations into French and English.

This characterizes the difference Graciela Montaldo has observed between the nineteenth century frame of thought constituted by a territorial imagination, and responsible for the construction of a "real territory" that expands and defines the limits of the nation through maps, and the "virtual spaces" of the nation, constructed in the interstices by the more recent generation of exiles.[6] If, as Amin Maalouf wrote, "The host-country is neither ... a blank page nor a page that has already been written, but is a page that is being written", then it is, at the same time, the repository of a great portion of the recent political history of Other homelands, as well as of the memory of the immigrant or exile.[7]

This brings me to the central focus of this article – 9/11. However, I will be speaking of a previous September 11, the one that has been engraved forever in the history of Chile. On September 11, 1973, the armed forces, headed by general Augusto Pinochet, perpetrated the coup that struck down the country's institutionalized democracy bringing about a global dispersion of Chilean exiles and the appearance of a Chilean literature of the diaspora. This generation included several young authors, recently launched into a literary career, who were separated from their homeland and families. It is not surprising, then, that many of their works thematize the dictatorships

[6] cf. Graciela Montaldo, *Ficciones culturales y fábulas de identidad en América Latina* (Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo, 1999).

[7] Amin Maalouf, *Les identités meurtrières* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1998).

in Latin America, exile, interrupted literary careers, truncated national identities, and forced adaptation to new places.

On arriving in Canada, many Chilean authors organized themselves into reading groups and literary magazines. Many young writers who had been affiliated to vanguard movements, like the Escuela de Santiago, immigrated to Ottawa, and were quick to form a center of Chilean literary production and to establish the first Latin American-Canadian publishing house, the Cordillera, co-founded by Leandro Urbina,[8] whose novel *Collect Call* I will be discussing.[9]

Leandro Urbina belongs to a generation whose collective experience suffered a sudden rupture with Pinochet's military *junta* (1972-1989). Born in Santiago, in 1948, he went into exile in 1974. In Canada since 1977, he has become a university professor, translator, film director and journalist. Besides *Cobro revertido*, translated into English as *Collect Call* – recipient of the Premio Nacional del Livro y de la Literatura (Chile, 1993) and one of the finalists in the *Prémio*

[8] Among the co-founders of Cordillera are Jorge Etcheverry e Naín Nómez. Cordillera published the bilingual anthology *Literatura chilena en Canadá/Chilean Literature in Canada* (1982). Toronto, which had a more disperse publishing activity, gradually became the center of this new literature. In 1987, Peruvian journalist and critic Alex Zisman organized a mega-festival, the "Encuentro Norte-Sur", at the York University, whose main objective was to bring together Anglo, French, and Hispanic Canadian writers. At about the same time, an association of writers, musicians, fine artists, movie-makers, and performance artists – the Agrupación de Artistas Latinoamericanos – began to participate in a series of festivals. Some years later, Mario Valdés and Margarita Feliciano, among others, inaugurated the Semana del Idioma Español, active since 1991 and currently the major Hispanic event in Canada. I am especially indebted to my colleague Hugh Hazelton for the above information, as well as for the brief panorama of Hispanic letters in Canada presented in this paper. See his lecture "Una literatura nueva: la latinocanadense", presented at Concordia University, Feb., 2004. Available online at http://artsandscience.concordia.ca/cmll/spanish/antonio/Conferencias_03-04.html.

[9] Leandro Urbina, *Collect Call*, trans. Beverly J. DeLong-Tonelli (Ottawa: Split Quotation, 1999) All citations have been taken from this edition, with page numbers indicated parenthetically. Original title in Spanish: *Cobro revertido* (Santiago: Planeta, 1992).

Planeta (Argentina), Urbina also published a collection of short stories, titled *Las malas juntas*.[10]

The experience narrated in *Collect Call* is an inventory of the protagonist's life. The launching-pad for the sequence of recollections, from his childhood to his exile in Montreal, is a phone call, informing the protagonist that his mother is dead: she has passed away, "with his name on her lips" (19). The action, which corresponds to the present territory and whose narration corresponds to twenty-four hours, revolves around the protagonist's decision to attend his mother's funeral – despite the risk he will have to take, given his previous involvement in the Student Movement, and his uncle's warning about "the situation [not being] well in Santiago" (19).

The narrative assumes a form that can only be termed delirious, in which memory and present space are inextricable – represented by the oscillation in narrative viewpoint, between the first person (past) and third person (present), reporting us to Iain Chambers' definition of the foreigner: "Being from another place, from 'there' and not from 'here', and being, therefore, simultaneously 'inside' and 'outside' ... is to live in the intersections of histories and memories".[11]

The "inside" and "outside" Chambers writes about can be related, in its turn, to the internal and external exile of expatriates. In her analysis of Manuel Puig's *Maldición eterna a quien lea estas páginas*, Guillermina Rosencrantz refers to the "wandering through the hidden places of memory" as a dialogic experience that allows for the reconstruction of exile identities, one internal, the other external. She defines the production of new imaginary spaces as a form of creative liberty. Faced with the loss of intimacy with the 'real' spaces of the past, as well as with the lack of intimacy with the new, heterotopic spaces, there is a "de-articulation of the identitary points of reference", leading to a rupture in the identitary process linking the body to the territory, and the territory to the body.[12] In this way,

[10] (Madrid: Editorial AKAL, 2000).

[11] Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (New York & London: Routledge, 1994), 6.

[12] cf. Guillermina Rosencrantz, *El cuerpo indómito: espacios del exilio en la literatura de Manuel Puig* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Simurg, 1999), 54.

individuals condemned to heterotopia are forced to construct their feeling of belonging within the space of memory and imagination, and no longer in terms of their intimacy with territorial space.

The juxtaposition of present/past is represented, in Urbina's novel, by the protagonist's circle of Chilean friends, who also 'suffer' from memory, and who decide to assist him in the preparations for his trip back to their homeland. This consists, basically, of chipping in to buy him a new suit at a thrift shop, becoming involved in endless discussions about a variety of topics, and indulging in a drunken binge. The protagonist's arrival at a bar, where he meets his friends, marks the 'real' level of the narrative; however, during the group's endless debates his mind frequently wanders into the past, into obsessive memories of his mother, and then back again to the present. Each member of the group is dissected and stereotyped by the Sociologist, as he is called by his friends, putting him in the position of the 'foreigner', the 'outsider', described by Chambers. Tito and Toño Guzman are "big mustached fat asses", "with their truck driver looks all dressed up in fancy academic tweed jackets"; Moisés García is the "oh so neatly trimmed old gentleman who looks like a postal clerk"; Sarita is "the skinny lady who's obviously a primary school teacher"; Antonio Gamboa and son are "neatly combed public accountants with coke-bottle spectacles; and, as to Frías, he is described as a "cadaverous fellow, a philosopy [sic] professor". (44)

The protagonist's distant and analytic attitude towards the group suggests a strategy of displacement on the part of the author, in that its members allow the writer to "rummage through the image reserves of the past",[13] through his alter-ego the Sociologist. If, on the one hand, Frías declares that "[w]e are the collective memory. You all...are the water that quenches my nostalgia" (55), on the other, the ironic distance seems to be a strategy used by the protagonist to avoid succumbing to nostalgia. It is the same character, Frías, who observes that "[i]n exile we live incestuously" (21), confirming the Sociologist's analysis of his extended family, whose members share

[13] I am borrowing (and displacing) the phrase from Linda Hutcheon's "The Politics of Parody", in *The Politics of Postmodernity* (London & New York: Routledge, 1989), 93.

his sense of alienation and uncertainty about the future. They are all, in his words,

> Exiles, refugees, disintegrated, dislodged, displaced, lost in space, happy, sorrowful, pathetic. His tribe, his people, for better or worse, proud, arrogant and tearful, his quasi-family from the beginning, forever more. (44)

The observations about the incestuous relations of the extended family in exile bring to mind a similar observation made by the protagonist of another novel about exile experience – *Memory mambo,* by U.S. Cuban Achy Obejas:

> ...I'm not that old, just twenty-four, and sometimes often wonder just how distinct my memories are. Sometimes I'm convinced they're somebody else's recollections I've absorbed. ... Sometimes I wonder if we're not together too much, day in and day out, working and eating side by side, sleeping in the same rooms, fusing dreams. Sometimes I wonder if we know where we each end and the others begin.[14]

In her discussion of literary texts produced by deterritorialized subjects, Emily Hicks calls attention to the "conscious decision to embrace deterritorialization and to resist the temptation of nostalgia in favor of a new hybrid culture".[15] The tension between past/present in the text suggests an agonistic attempt, on the part of the protagonist, to create a distance between himself and his friends' shared nostalgia. At the same time, the incest or (con)fusion of the *personal* histories of each member of the extended family in exile forms a *collective* history of deterritorialization. Little wonder that, from the moment the Sociologist receives the long-distance call from Chile, all the other exiles in *Collect Call* start living vicariously, through him, their own return.

[14] Achy Obejas, *Memory Mambo* (Pittsburgh & San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1996), 9.

[15] Emily Hicks, *Border Writing: the Multidimensional Text* (Minneapolis & Oxford: University of Minneapolis Press, 1991), 116.

By constructing a hybrid text, containing diverse forms of representation and different textual strategies that juxtapose personal recollections and public issues, Urbina combines the imaginative element with the narration of recent collective history. Marcelo Cohen argues that the expatriates' most pressing need is to reorganize a space all their own. This need impels [them] to construct a "scenario of ... experience, understood as a product of that which is experienced, but also as that which one dreams, imagines and feels".[16] In this sense, *Collect Call* is an exercise in the process of recreating memory that consists in the intercrossing of a complex set of historical and social facts that, concomitantly, thrive on a Carnival of dreams, memories, reflections.

The protagonist's recollections are centered, primordially, around four feminine figures: his mother, María Serrano; his former Chilean girlfriend, Magdalena; his dead ex-wife, Anglo-Canadian Megan; and his current lover, Marcia, a Quebecois. These women, with the exception of Marcia, represent different moments in his past; and all four are analogous to some passages in Chilean and Canadian history. It is through the narration of his relationship with each of these women that the more political and social themes are presented. His recollections of his mother (who supported the 1973 military *coup d'etat*) are replete with accusations and resentment, since he holds her responsible for the disappearance of Magdalena during the political insurgency. In this way, the death of both is forever linked, in his mind, to Chilean national disjunction. At the same time, Megan and Marcia are directly associated with the disjunction between past and present, representing Anglophone and Francophone Canada, respectively, as well as his fears of losing his Chilean identity, since, when they appear in his many dreams (which are frequently nightmares), these moments are punctuated by loss-related fantasies, specifically to loss of his "Chileanness". As in his nightmare of Megan burying him alive in the sands of a beach in Chile or, when he contemplates marrying Marcia and becoming a member of the Vauquelin family, because "if Quebec is going to become

[16] cf. interview with Cohen in Guillermo Saavedra, *La curiosidad impertinente. Entrevistas con narradores argentinos* (Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo, 1993), 85-87.

independent it needs citizens to love and cherish it, isn't that right?" (187)

As per the above quote, the contextualization of contemporary Canadian history is noteworthy: the narrative contains many explicit references to the separatist movement, led by René Levesque, and is a constant theme of debate among the Chilean exiles. Urbina's novel informs us about how Chilean-Canadian opinions about the French-Canadian referendum were divided, for many were afraid they would be deported, and preferred to remain neutral. Frías reflects, philosophically, that "we are naive, we don't see beyond the projection of our own desire for uniqueness" (54), pointing out the fact that many Chileans perceived the Quebecois separatist desire as analogous to Latin American struggles to free themselves from the 'other' Anglos, the Yankees.

In her essay "Mutações e (i)migrações no espaço quebequense", Maria Bernadette Porto discusses the plural character of impossibilities experienced by the migrant; among these, there is the impossibility of becoming Quebecois, of translating the Other's language, or one's own desires and feelings.[17] In this way, the identification of exiles with an Other cultural minority, represented here by Quebecois culture, is just one more impossibility, among many, since deterritorialization always already situates them in the in-between spaces, condemning them to perpetual exile.

The novel ends with a street Carnival. The Sociologist is searching for Marcia, but encounters, instead, a woman of about forty (coincidentally, the same age Magdalena would have been if she were alive), "a vague replica of Carmen Miranda" who, "despite the garishness of her outfit ... danced with a pleasing grace and enthusiasm", and spoke French with "quite a strange accent" (189-190). The protagonist becomes involved in a brawl with his dance partner's jealous husband, and ends up getting stabbed by a member of the group she is with. The Sociologist falls to the ground, feeling "the surge and the roar of a wave" (191). "Without the consolation of a heroic death imagined a thousand times over like a romantic fantasy, he dedicates his last wave of memories to Magdalena.

[17] In M. B. Porto, ed., *Fronteiras, passagens e paisagens na literatura canadense* (Niterói: EDUFF/ABECAN, 2000), *passim.*

> That final wave of his fingers as they knock at the gate of a proletarian heaven, that final shout which would always be remembered by his fellow combatants and would be repeated forever on the lovely lips of the girls of his homeland. So much epic dreaming, so many tales of heroism come to naught, and then so much trivial bitterness, so much floundering and trying to stay afloat, only to end up dying here, in Parc LaFontaine, accompanied by mediocre out-of-tune calypso music, down among the world's sweaty feet, in Montreal, like a squashed bug, Megan. It would be too funny for words. (193)

The main irony of the final scene in the novel is the fact that the protagonist is unable to perceive that the figure dressed in the Carmen Miranda costume and her entourage are Chileans. The ironies that permeate Urbina's text are responsible, to a great extent, for the hallucinatory tone of the novel, which evolves into a crescendo, confirming Amy Kaminsky's words, that "exile is a particular form of presence-in-absence".[18] She goes on to argue that the physical location of exile is perceived as a non-country, and not as an other country. In this sense, then, "the place of exile is defined by what is missing, not by what it contains":[19]

> There were times when he felt disoriented and didn't know where he was or what he was doing in this city, and he would hear people talking and they seemed to be speaking Spanish and he thought sometimes that it might just be a matter of turning a corner and he'd find himself in front of his house in Santiago and open the door, go to his room and lied down at last to sleep in his own bed, to rest with no worries and wake up when his mother called him for dinner... (186)

In a world that has fallen under the sign of globalization, whose main consequence has been the dilution of national borders that poses the

[18] cf. Amy Kaminsky, *Reading the Body Politics: Feminist Criticism and Latin American Women Writers* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 29.

[19] Kaminsky, *Reading the Body Politics*, 30.

threat of neutralizing discourses of memory, the question Urbina's text seems to be asking the whole time is 'How does one go about narrating the present if there is a past to re-collect?', at the same time that it echoes Huyssen's words: "the task of reassuring ourselves about the past is no less of a risk than that of reassuring ourselves about the future".[20] Urbina's novel addresses this risk, in that it incorporates the complexities and paradoxes of contemporary discourses of memory: if it is, on the one hand, *displacement* which produces contemporary literature of memory, it is important not to lose sight of the *political location* of memory.

[20] Huyssen, *Seduzidos pela memória*, 36.

Jane Wilkinson

Spinners, Spiders, 'Floating Islands': Joan Metelerkamp's poetic genealogies

taken like a dream
up from warm seas, figment wrested from the deep –
…
my find; my piece-work – pick up the pen –
like needlework – pick up the threads that bind them.
(Joan Metelerkamp)

My paper begins with a reading of Velásquez's "Las hilanderas", a self-reflexive painting that embeds and interrogates other artworks and forms of art. Set in "the spinning and winding workshop and sales room in the Santa Isabel tapestry factory in Madrid", it foregrounds the material conditions of craftsmanship, but also stages a genealogy for its spinners by representing the myth of Minerva and Arachne. [1]

Velásquez's painting provides a useful introduction to Joan Metelerkamp's construction of poetic genealogies in *Floating Islands* (2001).[2] Although the Minerva-Arachne story is not specifically referred to in this volume, it figures in an earlier composition, "Self / Critic", published in the South African poet's 1995 collection, *Stone No More*. In

[1] "Obrador de hilado y devanado y pieza para ventas en la fábrica de tapices de Santa Isabel, de Madrid". Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez and Julián Gállego, *Velázquez* (Madrid: Museo del Prado, 1990), 360.

[2] Joan Metelerkamp, *Floating Islands* (Knysna: Mokoro, 2001). Page references are included in parentheses.

this poem, which anticipates some of the images and themes developed in the later work, the Athena-Arachne contest is displaced by another opposition: the contrast between Athena, the critic or "mistress of Authority", "marking with the patriarchal pen", and Arachne's refiguration as Aphrodite, "rising out of [her] shell,... new-skinned, armourless" to take up Athena's challenge.[3] Metelerkamp's Aphrodite recalls Botticelli's "Birth of Venus" and the "Birth of Aphrodite" from the Ludovisi Throne (which figures on the cover and frontispiece of *Stone No More*). At the same time she continues to evoke the artistry of Arachne:

> I shall
> venture in, unsolicited, insouciant, shameless in my home
> made shawl, home spun words, appliquéd with paisleys, diamonds, satin
> stitched with floribunda roses, such warp and weft of words, such drapes
> of greens, vermilions, falling round my naked form like hair, like flax
> like gold, protecting me like women's arms, waiting, on the shore, re-
> ceiving me, wrapping me in finest textures of their craft, patterns
> of women's work, from sea to sea, from here to then, from knot to knot,
> no gleaming sword ripping through, no ink black spots struck across my words,
> nor even the distorted reflection in your shield, will destroy.[4]

Floating Islands works in a similar fashion. Like "Las hilanderas", which includes details from Titian's "Europa" and two Michaelangelo nudes, Metelerkamp's 2001 collection contains transcriptions of Dorothy Wordsworth's "Floating Island" (c. 1820) and Ruth Miller's "The Floating Island" (c. 1956), as well as fragments of other texts,

[3] But if Arachne is reborn as Aphrodite, Athena is also the "self same Medusa" whose "Word, lead, stone" the speaker bears within herself and whose judgement forms the "opaque polished-stone/ looking glass" in which the reflection/contestation of critic/self takes place. "Self / Critic" is divided into two parts: "1. Birth of Venus", "2 Medusa". Joan Metelerkamp, *Stone No More* (Durban: Gecko Books, 1995), 5.

[4] Ibid., 4.

allusions to visual artworks and references to the domestic arts of baking, knitting, weaving, patching and embroidery.[5] As she reflects on the composition and interpretations of the "Floating Island" poems, the author recalls the archives in which they were included and the counter-archives in which they could today be placed. Building her own poems out of her exploration of her precursors, she interrogates the making of women's poetry, confronting the metaphorically 'homeless' condition of women artists with other, more material conditions of dispossession and displacement in the South Africa of "August-December 1993".

Diego Velásques, "Las hilanderas", c. 1644-48, Madrid, Museo del Prado.

Re-presenting art

Velásquez's "Las hilanderas" shows five bare-footed winders and spinners, of varying ages, occupying the forefront of the scene. They

[5] Dorothy Wordsworth, "Floating Island", first published in William Wordsworth, *Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years* (1842) (the source given in Amanda's biographical note is *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*); Ruth Miller, "The Floating Island", in *Ruth Miller: Poems. Prose. Plays*, ed. Lionel Abrahams (Cape Town: The Carrefour Press, 1990), 70-71.

are at work, surrounded by the tools and raw materials of their trade. Behind them is a brightly illuminated upper room, separated from the spinners by two steps. At the back of the room is a tapestry. Initially, it appears to depict Minerva punishing Arachne, but closer scrutiny suggests that 'Minerva' and 'Arachne' are actors, performing in front of a reproduction of one of the scenes Arachne had woven. Emerging behind them are faint, impressionistic traces of either Titian's 1562 "Europa", one of the paintings on classical mythology commissioned by Philip II of Spain, or Rubens's copy, "The Rape of Europa", completed in 1629 for Philip IV. The putti on the upper left of the tapestry, the swirling red cloth and the bull's head and eye on the right, the landscape in the background echo key elements in both paintings.

Three richly dressed women form a semi-circle in front of the tapestry. The one on the left, further away from the tapestry and closer to the spinners, is holding a viola da gamba and is looking intently at Arachne. The others are conversing; but one of the two seems to be looking out of the painting at its viewers.

Two of the spinners in the room below may be intended to represent Minerva and Arachne before they engage in their weaving contest. While the older spinner could be Minerva, disguised as an old woman when she visits Arachne's workshop, the thread the younger spinner is winding into a ball seems to prefigure the spider's web Arachne's weaving will be reduced to after her punishment. [6] Further vistas open through the spinners' mirroring of the posture of two Michelangelo nudes on the ceiling of the Sistine chapel, while Velásquez's staging of Minerva and Arachne in the upper room recalls the centuries-old iconography of Ovid's story. Working against the centrifugal effect of Velásquez's quotations, the repetition of formal elements such as the angle of legs and arms and the swirling of red drapery unifies the whole.

As well as invoking previous works of art, *Las hilanderas* portrays the condition of contemporary craftswomen, attested to by the contrast between the spinners' bare feet and simple attire and the rich

[6] For the identification of the older spinner with Minerva in disguise, see Dominguez Ortiz, Pérez Sánchez and Gállego, *Velázquez*, 366-7.

garments of the noble women. The emphasis on the material conditions of craftsmanship is another aspect of the painting's engagement with artistic creativity: it is the spinners who make artwork like the tapestry possible. The scene is also manifestly spectacular. The red curtain, which one of the spinners is drawing apart, unveils not only the inner stage of the upper room, but the representation of the spinners themselves. The upper room is separated into three areas: the aristocratic female 'public', the action/acting of Minerva striking Arachne and the reproduction of part of Arachne's tapestry. Is the tapestry a tapestry or a back cloth for performance? Is it possible to filter the painting through neo-Platonic representations of the Idea as opposed to its manual execution?[7] Why the difference in scale and 'realistic' detail between the craftswomen and the figures in the upper room? The painting's vertiginously complex theatrical structure is enhanced by other separations: between the upper room and the area of the spinners, and between their working and acting area and the extra-textual location of the painter and the viewers of his painting. The 'real' public is signalled, within the painting, by the "gaze out of the canvas" of one of the noblewomen.[8]

Velásquez's spaces inside and outside the canvas help understand the complex interweaving of intra-, inter- and extra-textual realities in Metelerkamp's collection, where the mirroring of her own experiences and genealogies by her characters and their literary precursors could perhaps be seen as 'glances' outside the poetic canvas.[9] Similarly, another theatrical scene of composition may be found in the opening poem of *Floating Islands*. The first line is a direction to "Throw wide the window, let loose the winter sun" ("Poetical Works", 7), an 'opening' gesture anticipated by the entry of

[7] Ibid., 366.

[8] "[A] consistent feature of Velaquez's works": Svetlana Alpers, "Interpretation without Representation, or, the Viewing of *Las Meninas*", *Representations* 1 (February 1983), 32.

[9] See in particular the reference to the suicide of Amanda and Karen's grandmother in "Road to the Kalahari", 48, recalling "At the centre you sit" and "Joan" in *Stone No More*, addressed to Metelerkamp's grandmother, Joan Rose-Innes Findlay, who took her life five years before the birth of her namesake. *Floating Islands* (written "for my mother") was followed in 2003 by *Requiem*, written after the suicide of Metelerkamp's mother.

Metelerkamp's alter ego, Amanda, into her office, preparing the stage for action by sweeping away all unnecessary objects and setting down her 'props'. The opening is repeated at the beginning of the second stanza, when the covers of one of her notebooks are folded back to reveal its contents. Secreted between its sheets are the scripts she is endeavouring to reconstitute and reanimate – poetic equivalents of Velásquez's Titian and Titian's Ovid. And the volume in which Metelerkamp's work is housed (beginning with the poem that houses Amanda's notebooks and the works that they in turn are housing) has a mixed, polyphonic nature. Its status hovers between poetic drama, collection of poems, dramatic monologues, letters and telephone conversations, "novel" in verse and "notes for a paper": raw material elaborated through a dense and variegated dialogue with multiple creators and performers in a variety of registers, from the academic to the domestic, even if, as in Velásquez's painting, the lowly and quotidian will come to occupy the front of Amanda's stage. [10]

"Floating Islands"

Although allusions to spinning, weaving and other 'female' arts are present in *Floating Islands*, it is Amanda's endeavour to "sound" the "floating islands" of her precursors that dominates the metaphorics of Metelerkamp's volume. She tends however to see the islands themselves as threads or scraps, "slipped strands" or stitches – "stray straws,/ traces like leaves looped in chain stitch, daisy stitch,/ filaments fired with quotidian contingency" ("Lost Fragments", 33) – that she must pick up and knit or weave into the new web she is helping to compose.

From the beginning of the volume, the expression "floating islands" is presented as a pre-existent entity, a quotation evoking or invoking the texts Amanda has chosen to engage with. As "exergue" or "cit[ation] before beginning", the title is a way of "set[ting] the stage",

[10] Although Amanda later describes novels as "too linear, too long, too direct" (71), there is a tension between the art of "bits and small pieces" Dorothy Wordsworth perfected, but was unsatisfied with, and Amanda's unsatisfied desire for "something heavier, something linear" ("Enough", 90). For "notes for a paper" see "Her own lines", 16.

"accumulating capital in advance and… preparing the surplus value of an archive". [11] By choosing a title which quotes the titles of poems by Dorothy Wordsworth and Ruth Miller, Metelerkamp casts the earlier poets as "foremothers" whose voices "sound/ past each other/ out to [their successor]" ("Her own lines", 14) – or successors, for Amanda is not the only 'author' of the poems in *Floating Islands*. [12]

"Poetical Works", the title of the opening poem, is another citation before beginning. Amanda's poem and her notebooks may be seen as an antagonistic supplement to Wordsworth's *Poetical Works*, the "dense", "mottled reams" in which Dorothy's poem was archived or "buried" by her brother (7), "her song/ drowned out by/ William's demanding voice" ("Her own lines", 15), and by the male canon and conceptions of authorship this first location forced her to be part of. By shifting the poems from their previous fixity and confinement to a new, temporary, unstable location – handwritten "notebooks" –, Amanda enables them to surface, to come out into the open, relate to different contexts and "fertilize new ground", like the "lost fragments" that remain after Dorothy's floating island has disappeared beneath the waters. Through her endeavour to "rope" the poems in and "bring them closer" (14), Amanda is creating a tradition in which her precursor texts may be re-visioned, becoming a "mother's lore" for her own talent to relate to, a "conduit" along which her own "own lines" may find a means of emergence (16). [13]

From the beginning, then, the floating island poems are "caught" in a connection and "conducted" to the present, to a new creative endeavour. Amanda is repeating and expanding Miller's performance. For the channel of transmission is provided by the "fine line" Miller

[11] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression*, transl. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 7.

[12] "Foremother" is the term Adrienne Rich uses for Emily Dickinson: "Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson", in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence. Selected Prose 1966-78* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), 167.

[13] Amanda's roping in and bringing closer recalls the "gathering" or "consignation" which Derrida associates with archontic power, *Archive*, 3. For "mother's lore" see Metelerkamp's study of Ruth Miller as a possible "literary mother" for South African women poets: "Ruth Miller: Father's Law or Mother's Lore?", *Current Writing* 4 (1992), 57-71

"twined" (15) relocating Dorothy's "Floating Island" in Southern Africa and using "Dorothy's tune" as an outlet for her emotions, her "own lines, her life/ line, the poem" (16). Moreover, although she is constantly searching for legitimacy, Amanda is not alone to grapple with Authority. *Floating Islands* consists of multiple voicings and writings. Although Amanda's voice is dominant, the volume reproduces exchanges between Amanda and her mother Maggie; Maggie and Amanda's sister Karen (a South African artist exiled in Bristol); Amanda and her lover Nadeem; between both sisters and their respective mothers-in-law. And behind the voices of Amanda's family is the literary, artistic and mythical community Amanda and Karen interpellate and portray.

Metelerkamp's floating islands are icons not only of connection, part of a creative web or "archipelago" ("And listen", 25), but also of separation, severed from mainland, roots, sea- or river-bed base. Amanda's transcriptions of the poems in "Her Own Lines" are preceded by biographical notes on the authors, interspersed with anxiously self-reflexive questioning of what she is doing, who or what she is addressing, why. Amanda's search for connection includes a febrile but also very selective attempt to trace other floating island texts. Within her ongoing genealogical research, she makes no reference either to Swift's Laputa or to Wordsworth's use of the floating island as a metaphor for his life at Cambridge – "Rotted as by a charm, my life became/ A floating island, an amphibious thing,/ Unsound, of spongy texture".[14] Moreover, the poems and their authors are set within contexts of material and metaphorical rupture and loss: experiences of death, separation, illness, "lines cut, bonds severed" (16).

Amanda returns to Dorothy's writing in later compositions. In "And Listen" (24-5), she reflects on the way Dorothy has been "cut off" from the free expression of her emotions both by self-censorship and by the patronising repression of editors and critics like Helen Darbishire, "corseted with quite polite/ formality".[15] While Amanda

[14] *Prelude* (1805 text) III, 339-344.

[15] Darbishire is the author of the introduction to *The Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. Mary Moorman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

seeks to keep her "scraps of perception" warm, Darbishire is intent on keeping Dorothy "cool,/ at bay,/… at arms length,/ keeping it quiet/ keeping it all together" (recalling Athena's relationship with Arachne-Aphrodite in "Self / Critic"):

poor D.W. cut off –
the surface of the paper crossed across
un-dug depths –

lines of black
across lines crossed-out
lest lack,

like some lump
in the throat
throb its way to surface.

In "Lost fragments", Amanda endeavours to pick up some of the "slipped strands of the story,/ deep lacuna of past and future/ floating surface scraps". She interrogates Dorothy about her duteous censorship of feeling – "the underground song" buried beneath the "cold stone" of her kitchen floor, but "seeping, weeping" through the walls of her cool room – and her decision to allow her poetic vocation to pass away like the little island itself. Comparing the last two stanzas of Dorothy's poem with the first, Amanda emphasizes the hidden emotions that undermine the "surface solidity – tight –/ complacent, every syllable/ placed, sound, rhyming right/ to nature's order" displayed by the poem's opening lines:

"Harmonious powers with Nature work
On sky, earth, river, lake and sea;
Sunshine and cloud, whirlwind and breeze,
All in one duteous task agree."

The "lost fragments" of the floating island Dorothy had presented in the second stanza as "loosed from its hold" become a metaphor for the "deep vibrations of [Dorothy's] subjugate need,/ [her] inchoate

desire *loosed from hold*" ("Lost fragments", 34, emphasis mine). Neither "Duty" nor "Control" can keep the buried bits from "seeping through the porous surface", "thrust[ing] their way up,/ a gift for some other surface".

The words and concepts used for Dorothy's island – "loosed", "throb", "buried", "fragments", disappearance and loss – are projected onto her life and writing and onto those of Amanda herself, seeking, through her dialogue with her precursor, her own way of "coming to writing" in the South Africa of the 1990s. The sub-text of Dorothy's loneliness leads into the solitude and homelessness, the sense of being "adrift I/ do not belong where is my mother/ land" (35), of being on the edge of an abyss of not belonging which Amanda sees as the condition of the poet, but which is complicated in South Africa by its contiguity to apartheid legacies of displacement and dispossession and their problematic reversal in the economic and cultural politics of the present. Allusions to the destruction of a multi-racial community of Indians and Africans in the Cato Manor area near Durban through forced removals in the 1950s, followed by further occupation ("All those displaced// people shacking up in formerly displaced/ people's places") and renewed conflict in the 90s, form one of the less obvious but essential strands of the *Floating Islands* text.[16] As, too, do Amanda's interrogations of her position as white writer and academic in post-apartheid South Africa.

Re-imagining the self

In the first of the three epigraphs with which Amanda opens "Need in love", she reassembles fragments from an interview with Karen Press, another South African poet:

[16] For the story of Cato Manor, see E. Jeffrey Popke, "Violence and Memory in the Reconstruction of South Africa's Cato Manor", *Growth & Change* 31 (Spring 2000), 2. After the removals of the 1950s, Cato Manor remained vacant until the 1980s, when it began to be occupied by refugees fleeing violence in kwaZulu-Natal. Plans for redevelopment in the 1990s were obstructed by former residents. Despite the tension, Popke sees democratic planning as "a means of 'working through' the legacies of displacement and dispossession that are so much a part of South Africa's present." Explicit references to Cato Manor appear in *Floating Islands* in "Connection" (11) and "Hold on" (38).

> Need in love, needing a kind of home that the universe doesn't offer you… not being in the middle of a land that holds you. That's what writing is about, that being on the edge and writing out into that space you could fall into…

In other, unquoted parts of her interview, Press explains that the "edge" is also an edge of understanding, an edge the poet pushes "bit by bit further, into a darkness, to things you don't understand". The poet, unlike the sociologist, can explore "all that mysterious human pain that goes beyond just being 'an oppressed member of your class'", asking "How does being forcibly removed from your home, how does extreme hunger affect your capacity to love, your need for emotional food."[17]

Dorothy's need for love and emotional food provides a starting point for a reflection on feminine poetics. Amanda presents her need through brief quotations from the journals and reconstructions of moments in Dorothy's life, echoed – differently – in memories of her own, her sister's and her mother's. Measured against the model provided by Wordsworth, for whom consciousness of the loss of a primordial unity is the enabling factor for poetry, or against Coleridge's theory of the imagination, Dorothy's "lack" is apparently sterile. Unlike Wordsworth's loss, her lack seems to diminish rather than increase her sense of self. Awareness of loss and division signals the entry into the symbolic order, into language, law, difference and desire; into the very possibility of imagining a self, but for Dorothy, who has no love-life to "build/ a dream on for her imagination" (43), there is "not enough/ imagined, to give her something back,/ not enough self, included, not enough re-creation" (44). The contrast is made still more evident by Amanda's extremely selective quoting, both of Wordsworth and, especially, of Coleridge. Only the "re-creative" purpose of the secondary imagination is alluded to, not its mode of operation, its "dissolv[ing], diffus[ing], dissipat[ing]", which is at least partly applicable to Dorothy's writing

[17] Robert Berold, "Interview with Karen Press", *New Coin*, 29 (June 1993). http://www.ru.ac.za/institutes/isea/NewCoin/interviews.htm

and which has been related to the re-imagining of the self by South African women. [18]

"Is it language itself, then,/ or only love we fumble for, what we mean", Amanda asks, relating the object of the search – "what we mean… what I mean… what it means" – to Coleridge's primary imagination: "'the eternal act of/ creation' the 'infinite I Am'".[19] Yet this is not the only form of imagination and identification available. Leading on directly from the colon attached to the "infinite I Am", the following stanza of Amanda's poem is framed by the plural (dissolving, diffusing, dissipating) identifications of its opening line – "I am this I am that" – and the "home-/grown I am, here, I am falling" with which it draws to a close, without however closing (44). Amanda's lower-case, Woolfian "I am this I am that" replaces Coleridge's godlike, originating "infinite I Am", proposing a very different vision of imagination and selfhood, recalling rather the "William this, William that" of Dorothy's journal (41). [20] Amanda's "calling/ with a patter of plain words falling/ into pattern… configured on the template/ of common detail of common life", provides "mana not for magic but for home-/grown I am, here". The "synthetic and *magical* power" to which Coleridge "exclusively appropriated the name of imagination", as he declares in the *Biographia Literaria*, is set aside in favour of the "quotidian contingency" (33) of Dorothy's writing, flanked however by the self

[18] In her essay on Miller, Metelerkamp recalls Ingrid de Kok's observation, expressed "[i]n language which echoes Coleridge's as much as it does post-structuralist feminist discourse … that 'women in South Africa are particularly placed to disassemble, to reassemble and interpret, to re-imagine, the self' ", "Ruth Miller", 69.

[19] It is worth integrating Amanda's very brief quotations with the context from which they are taken and to which they refer: "The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of *the eternal act of creation* in *the infinite I AM*. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will… still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to *re-create*". S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Engell and W. Jackson Bate, vol. I (London: Routledge, 1983) 304. The italics indicate the parts quoted by Amanda.

[20] The expression "I am that I am that" is used both in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Waves*.

consciousness and presence – "I am, here" – that Dorothy appears to lack. [21] Amanda's reductive representation of Coleridge's theory of the imagination is thus a way of foregrounding the opposition between the egotistical sublime that she associates with Wordsworth and Coleridge (and that Karen associates with Yeats) and a vision of poetry closer to Keats's negative capability. Implicitly, she is rehabilitating Dorothy as "resist[ing] – even directly oppos[ing] – William's notions of subjectivity, writing, and art".[22] As Adrienne Rich and Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi observe in their discussion of Nancy Chodorow's work on the "so-called 'weak ego boundaries' of women", weak ego boundaries may be a "source of power" both for women and for artists generally.[23]

Amanda's preference for the home-grown recalls the "home made", "home spun" domesticity of Aphrodite/Arachne's art in "Self / Critic", but also, in *Floating Islands*, Karen's resolution to forget the "flight of/ holy ghosts" she would like to create, to "get on with these// very specific green/ dotted doves, and forget about/ Art". Another egoistical sublime is being set aside as Karen opts for art or craft rather than the Art she associates with Yeats's "saints" and "Byzantine wonders". Resolving to "take the mundane, daily, turn// the quotidian, daily, make/ of it longing, appeased", her "motes of gold" are "caught in the door way/ as they fall from the sun" ("Icarus", 30-31). Similarly, in her 1992 essay, Metelerkamp had insisted on the need for women poets "to widen the gap between the Word and our words, revelling in quotidian poetic language's

[21] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, II, 16, emphasis mine.

[22] Jill Ehnnen, "Writing against, Writing through: Subjectivity, Vocation, and Authorship in the Work of Dorothy Wordsworth", *South Atlantic Review*, 64, 1 (Winter, 1999), 82. "Why has Dorothy Wordsworth's self so often been read as either repressed or inadequate, her writing defined as the failure to achieve narrative representation of a distinct subjectivity? Is this the only, or even the most appropriate, way to read her *Journals*?" asks Anne K. Mellor, "Writing the Self/ Self Writing: William Wordsworth's *Prelude*/ Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journals*" in *Romanticism and Gender* (London: Routledge, 1993), 144, 145. See also Susan J. Wolfson, "Individual in Community. Dorothy Wordsworth in Conversation with William", in *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 139.

[23] Cit. in Margaret Homans, "Keats Reading Women, Women Reading Keats", *Studies in Romanticism* 29.3 (Fall 1990), 343.

difference from the Word, taking seriously our own witches: our female, libidinous, anti-patriarchal, imperfect selves".[24]

Another enjambment – "... falling// back against you// (Nadeem)// reach me reach for me/ hold me..." (44) – connects Amanda's construction of a feminine theory of the poetic imagination to an erotic love scene, a "female, libidinous" example of the "self included" she had found missing in Dorothy's writing.[25] Giving and receiving physical love is Amanda's "way toward myself and way beyond". Abandoning Wordsworth and Coleridge – but also, partly, Dorothy – the path she follows is that of Keats: not only the "selfless" self of the chameleon poet in opposition to the egotistical sublime, but the erotic receptivity of his "Ode to Psyche": the "soft delight" of his "'sanctuary', his hard faith, wild-eyed insight:/ poems", his "way 'To let the warm love in!'" (45).

"Colonized ground"

Amanda's next major engagement with Dorothy is set within a specifically South African cultural and political context, her stance that of postcolonial critic and teacher as well as poet. The very title of the poem, "Head over heart", suggests a new perspective, recalling the Athena-Medusa vs. Arachne-Aphrodite oppositions of "Self / Critic". As if to indicate the complexity of cross-cultural fertilisation, the floating island fragments give way to Wordsworth's daffodils, displaced by colonial education to become an icon of the cultural politics of empire and a target for postcolonial resistance.

Wordsworth's daffodils are de-universalized through their qualification as "European" in the quotation of lines by Kelwyn Sole with which the poem opens. The daffodils' author is dead, his gaze, no longer a source for creative recollection, imagination, poiesis, has

[24] Metelerkamp, "Ruth Miller", 67.

[25] Enjambments recur frequently in Metelerkamp's writing. In the present poem they seem to indicate the web of meaning interconnecting the different stanzas. Conversely, Margaret Homans presents an enjambment in Dorothy's "Floating Island" as an example of disseverance: "As the island is dissevered from the shore, so is the verb 'Might see' dissevered from its subject, 'all', which is left behind in the previous verse. The stanza itself is cast loose", *Women Writers and Poetic Identity. Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Brontë and Emily Dickinson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 84.

been degraded into the "leering" of a "hard skull". In Amanda's transcription, Sole's obituary is embedded between two bracketed author names:

> "... (Wordsworth) is dead / his hard skull leering
> at European daffodils" (Kelwyn Sole)

While "(Kelwyn Sole)" is a signature, an acknowledgement of authorial presence, "(Wordsworth)" is a sign of absence or erasure added by Amanda. Indeed, Sole's poem does not read "he" – as the epigraph suggests – but "*Wordsworth* is dead" (emphasis mine).[26] Furthermore, instead of quoting from Wordsworth's "I wandered lonely as a cloud", Amanda's second epigraph presents the daffodil passage from Dorothy's diary, reinstalling the presence of his sister that William had eliminated. The only trace of his 'own' daffodils appears (without their author) at the end of the poem in the "Latin and daffodils" learnt by heart by the colonial schoolgirl in the "white plaster of boarding school": dead languages, "knowledge accrued", alienated and alienating vehicles mirrored in the image of car windows "rolled up against the dust".

"Shadowed" by Dorothy's daily activities – "baking pies,/ breaking bread, folding linen,/ reading Chaucer, quoting Shakespeare" – and her "shadow[ing]" of William's poems, Amanda reconsiders the fate of the floating island and its fragments. Dorothy's vision of fertility in the future seems unlikely when the seeds are "sown on colonised ground", becoming "seeds of restlessness, displacement". The imperial drive to possession – "we/ thought the whole world could be ours we/ thought we could belong to the world" – produces only alienation and homelessness: "now we know we belong not/ at all".

Yet the very displacement of the seeds from Dorothy's Grasmere to Miller's South Africa, opens a possibility of renewal. A vision of local women – "wives and mamas" – using voices from the past to peg out a territory at once poetic and domestic leads into an intensely

[26] Kelwyn Sole, "Pharing Gorge (The Place of Execution)", in *Projections in the Past Tense* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1992), 59.

lyrical auspices for a poetic eucharist. The invitation to "take, break your bread, feast, here" (56) recovers Dorothy's bread-breaking (55) in an act of "yeast[ing]" remembrance and communion. The severance or "cutting loose from" of the floating island is transformed into a "cutting loose *for* the shore", that anticipates Amanda's "beach[ing]" as she comes to writing at the end of the book.

Before this may happen other issues must be confronted. A very different note is struck in the second part of "Head over heart", which raises questions of relevance and legitimacy, opening with a quotation from an article by Michael Chapman, a South African academic and critic, and extracts from Sole's "Mementoes for a Birthday". [27] Chapman's strictures to his students – "For whom are you writing? For what purpose? What has your writing to do with restructuring identities in this country?" (56) – recalls Amanda's earlier questioning of her own intentions in her annotations to the floating island poems, but also her difficulty in situating herself within the cultural politics of the present, governed by schematic divisions into a culture of "oppressors" and "oppressed" and the apparently inevitable atrophy of "what was white writing" ("Dialogue", 71). [28] The legitimacy Amanda longs for she will have to construct for and by herself: "take it/ what no one will give me/ the right to write/ what I need to/ write, write it".[29] Writing requires an act of will, the resolution to claim the right to "prize this country/ open" and "lean over the glass/ of its dark waters", confronting the mirror image she has neither "dared to seek" nor, like the subjects of Sole's poem, been able to identify.

[27] Sole, *Projections*, 126.

[28] Metelerkamp cites from Chapman's "The Critic in a State of Emergency: Towards a Theory of Reconstruction [after February 2]", published in *On Shifting Sands* (Aarhus: Dangaroo Press, 1992).

[29] Amanda's final "write it" recalls Elizabeth Bishop's injunction to herself to "*Write*" disaster at the end of "One Art", a poem referred to in the matriarchive she proposes for Miller.

Matriarchives

1. "Betrayal", authority and writing

The need for women poets to claim "the right to write", evading the "claims/ of Literature/ its Authority", is further developed in "Betrayal", the poem in which Amanda explicitly confronts the possibility of constructing a feminine archive, opening her reflections with Emily Dickinson's assertion of the inescapable solitude of human achievement:

> Each – its difficult ideal
> Must achieve – itself –
> Through the solitary prowess
> Of a silent life (83)

The "question of Authority", indicated by Metelerkamp in her 1992 essay as "one of the central tensions" in Miller's poems, re-emerges inevitably for women poets, whether, like Dickinson, they pursue their "difficult ideal" individually, or, like Amanda, they seek to engage "a conversation with a dead woman/ about her poems". [30]

Addressed initially to "Emily", Amanda's un-Authorized "conversation across graves" is made still more transgressive by its trust in poems or a poet – like Adrienne Rich – "who knows what she is, what she might become – / how it burns, at the white heat,/ 'with a gift for burning'". [31] Amanda is speaking "to myself, my mother,/ of course, yes, her mother and I am talking to my tutor/ to the dead poets (she couldn't hear) like Ruth Miller". Her conversation – "about poems/ about death/ about life lived in half-shadow, half-grip/ of the shadow of self-/ distrust, mistrust, disbelief, willing suspension/ misgiving" – gathers into itself fragments or strands from two poems by Miller: "Cycle", the author's elegy for her son, and "Spider", the "shroud" woven for the death of the male spider artist whose perfect,

[30] Metelerkamp, "Ruth Miller", 57.

[31] The quotation, from "Song", is among the "more or less oblique references to Adrienne Rich's poems" Metelerkamp mentions in her "Acknowledgements".

"tensile arc" the woman weaver/survivor is unable to emulate, even if it is through her "witless strands", her earth-bound art of words, that the death of the spider and his art is mourned.[32] Reverberating between the lines is also a self-reflexive echo of "Joan", the *Stone No More* poem in which Metelerkamp most explicitly engages her grandmother's inheritance, a legacy of both loss and desire (32-3). Appearing almost as a sequel to "Spider", integrating the solitary, humble craft of Miller's female weaver with a collective tradition of women's creativity, "Joan" gives expression to Metelerkamp's longing to make a "fabric of words" that women may use to weave "a wonderful shroud for our loss". Passed "from one to another", the women's gentle stitching could become a "symbol of peace", able to "cover the wound keeping the life blood in." No such possibility emerges from the complex web of quotations that interlaces Miller's and Amanda's words, horizontally and vertically, in "Betrayal". Although the lines of poetry and the threads of spider webs and weaving are fused into a single fabric or 'arachnological' text, producing multiple possibilities of reading and rereading, relating and interrelating, the final narrative is of loss:

> "living which is endless dying"
> lines unravelling like
> "witless strands", "poor old corpse of words",
> sad spider-wise spider-woman swallowing her own
> "delicate tissue" weaving her own
> "fails where it is fronded" shroud for her own
> dead word.[33]

2. Arts of losing

The second part of "Betrayal" opens with quotations from Miller's letters to Guy Butler and her literary agent: the guardians of the

[32] Miller, *Poems. Prose. Plays*, 89-93; 40-4. See Metelerkamp, "Ruth Miller", 58-65, for a detailed analysis of both poems.

[33] I coin "arachnological" from Kate M. Miller, "Arachnologies: The Woman, the Text and the Critic", in Kate M. Miller, ed., *The Poetics of Gender* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1986), an essay Metelerkamp refers to in "Ruth Miller", 64.

archive that shape and 'contain' her creativity and its perpetuation in the "cold-blooded and betraying" "home" of print. In a letter dated 26.5.58, Miller speaks of her unproductive relationship to the Authority of the literary tradition:

> Yes I do read Yeats, and Keats, and Lawrence, and Auden. And every other poet, old and new, I feel any rapport with, or feel I can learn from. But my poetic illiteracy is as intransigent as granite. I know what is wrong – often only after I am told by Butler! But I do eventually know. But I fear the great ones don't teach me – they only underline my own failings.

Is there no alternative tradition to which poets like Miller could find affiliation? A "mother's lore" to replace the "father's law" of Miller's archons?

> But where are the women and what would they have shown you,
> no Dickinson nor H.D. nor Rukeyser nor Stevie Smith
> nor Bishop with her art of losing,
> poor explorer returned, resigned, poor Crusoe in England (85)

In Metelerkamp's discussion of "Spider" in her 1992 essay, she sees its "central image" as "one of unrequited mourning".[34] The women's writings she presents in "Betrayal" as a possible alternative to Butler's male canon seem to confirm the image. Bishop's poems "One art" ("her art of losing") and "Crusoe in England", the only ones referred to explicitly in Amanda's list, are examples of what Susan McCabe calls a "poetics of loss", "stitched together" – as in "One Art" – "through a lineage of female loss". Yet, while the "struggle with losing [is] a process that is always with us, so that every loss comes to be all losses, retrogressive and progressive", the struggle may be therapeutic. Loss may transform into poetic gain, following a very different path from that of Wordsworth. Recognition of powerlessness makes it possible to "play with the conditions of loss: the blurring and splitting of presence and absence, being and non-

[34] Ibid., 65.

being." The repetition of loss – whether through the *fort-da* game played by Freud's grandson, or through its representation in poetry – means moving from a passive to an active position and even, as Susan McCabe suggests for "One Art", to a deliberate "rejection of the desire to win" – a position, in the present context, that cannot but recall recent interpretations of Dorothy Wordsworth's resistance to the authority of her brother. [35]

The addition of Sylvia Plath to Amanda's archive provides a link to a deeply personal genealogy of loss by suicide, already hinted at in the inclusion of her mother's mother in the list of her interlocutors. Yet, while another quotation from Miller suggests that the "*conversation across graves*" can only lead to a stony "kingdom of shared graves", Amanda wills her reflections in a different direction. Like Iphigenia "pleading for her life", she too desires Orphic power to move and give voice to stones, bringing them to speak "of flesh, soft earth" (85), reverberating the Shakespearean, life-restoring title of Metelerkamp's 1995 collection, *Stone no more*. A further quotation from Miller ("Long Journey") suggests a possibility not of death but of survival, of reaching, at last, "awareness/ Of destinations" (86).

Yet, when she returns to Miller and her endeavour to write a novel, and to the art of "fragments/ .../ bits and small pieces" perfected by Dorothy but still not "to her satisfaction", Amanda feels increasingly incompetent. Although she has been repeating the patient labour of her precursor, "piec[ing] bit/ by bit, day by day, together" (15), she is still unable to "make it/ enough", unable "to make it/ live, make it matter", unable "to take the matter/ these bits and pieces/ patch them together" ("Enough", 90). It is only after her "immers[ion]" in the autobiography of Janet Frame, another literary "mother", that Amanda "at last sits down to write".

Piece-work and sounding: genealogies of the self

Amanda's definition of her labour as "*piece-work*" (7) recalls Michel Foucault's description of genealogy: "fabricated in piecemeal fashion

[35] Susan McCabe, *Elizabeth Bishop: Her Poetics of Loss* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 34, 27.

from alien forms" and "liberating a profusion of lost events". Taken together, Foucault's and Amanda's "piecemeal" forms help construct women in opposition to male poets. Can a woman be a poet if, as Yeats maintains, the poet "is never the bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast; he has been reborn as an idea, something intended, complete"?[36] In "Icarus", Karen uses a vague memory of this passage to explain her difficulty in creating (29). The creativity of women artists is incomplete, intermittent, caught in the "hiatus of household routines... –/ breakfast clatter – internal clutter –"; yet, she asks in a later poem, may not "the mangle of breakfast emotion/ serve obtuse truth, shaped for the world, world's proof?" ("Mother", 69). Both Karen's ceramics and Amanda's archiving resemble the "unstable assemblage of faults, fissures and heterogeneous layers that threaten the fragile inheritor from within or from underneath" of Foucault's genealogists, "fragment[ing] what was thought unified, ...show[ing] the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself".[37] But to Foucault and Derrida's geological images, Amanda adds a metaphorics more suited to women's art.

Beside the more obviously feminine gestures of twining, stitching, knitting and quilting are the activities of sounding or fishing Amanda attributes to women subjects and the adoption of a watery, fluid, unstony lexicon. Beyond rendering audible what has been silenced, Amanda's sounding is to be intended in the nautical sense of ascertaining the depth and nature of the sea-bed. Her "line" is plunged deep into the waters in which Dorothy's song has been "drowned out" and her island subsided. Not only are the floating island poems taken up "from warm seas" and "wrested from the deep", but they seem to be "breathing through a blow-hole", in a "Leviathan-like surfacing" ("Poetical Works", 7). Whales, too, are floating islands, moving "out and in – then floating away". Like Dorothy's island, the whale sighted

[36] William Butler Yeats, "A General Introduction For My Work", in *Essays and Introductions*, vol. II (London: Macmillan, 1961), 509.

[37] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", in Donald F. Bouchard, ed., *Language, Counter-memory, Practice. Selected Essays and Interviews*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), 142, 145.

by Amanda's mother, Maggie, is "not here to stay" ("Ephemera", 8). Only after she has "beached at last" – the term used of whales that come ashore – is Amanda able finally to write.

Amanda's beaching appears in a poem attributed for the first time to "All" the characters or authors of Metelerkamp's *Floating Islands* ("Christmas", 91). What she writes, " 'Tea with Janet Frame" (92-94), is embedded within a collective composition, but it also itself presents an interweaving of subjectivities and identities. [38] The "I" of the poem – shifting between addresser and addressee – is both Amanda and Frame, but also Amanda (and perhaps Karen) as adult and as "adolescent self". "You" and "I" and "I" and "she" are different aspects, positionings and temporalities of a diffuse, fluid subjectivity, a version of Frame's inclusion of "myself looking outward and myself looking within from without, developing the 'view' that others might have" within her memory of her self.[39] An "I"/"You" relationship that dissolves the opposition between critic and writer foregrounded in "And Listen"'s representation of Darbishire's censorious editing of Dorothy's writing, and in "Self / Critic"'s self-reflexive picturing of the Athena/Arachne – or Aphrodite – relationship.

Similarly, the lack of attribution of the final poem, "At last", suggests a further form of collective creativity. The "dark desire" that takes shape within it, hovering above an unidentified "me", is associated in previous poems with both Amanda and Karen. Like the "dark man, the stranger" Karen dreams of (53), or Amanda's "dark god" (44), it is a figure of Eros. In *Stone No More*, the dark god already figures as lack, desire, the entry into the symbolic. It is a dream lover, a god of love, a portrait of the artist ("Portrait", 42-61). Echoing Rich's reflections on the representation of women's creative power as possession by a daemon lover, Metelerkamp identifies it in "Joan" as "my free spirit": [40]

[38] The title's opening inverted commas only close at the end of the poem, with a chiasmic repetition and expansion of the title in the final line: "Janet Frame and me having tea' ".

[39] Janet Frame, *An Autobiography* (London: The Women's Press, 1990), 116.

[40] Rich, "Vesuvius at Home", 170. The "stranger" also appears in Ruth Miller's "Blue-

the dark god
my own psyche
shall bear…
letting love here shoot
green tendrils through the
familiar ground the

imperfect terrain
that is.

mantled Mary", a poem that is surely alluded to in the grey-mantled Madonnas Karen works on after abandoning her doves ("Demeter's Dementia", 60; "Mother", 70; "Psyche's Task", 72). Karen's engagement with the "impossible original dyad -/ mother and child" (70), forms an important strand in the "Floating Island" web.

REVIEW ESSAYS

Katherine E. Russo

"New Traditionalism" and Difficult Positionings in Indigenous Australian and New Zealand Maori Literature

Eva Rusk Knudsen, *The Circle and the Spiral: A Study of Australian Aboriginal & New Zealand Maori Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 374.
Reviewed by Katherine E. Russo

In *The Circle and the Spiral: A study of Australian Aboriginal & New Zealand Maori Literature*,[1] Eva Rusk Knudsen outlines the fields of indigenous writing in Australia and New Zealand in the period between the mid-1980s and the early 1990s. Following Mudrooroo's famous call for a return "back to the very roots of Aboriginal culture" and his suggestion that through the "Dreaming" a new Indigenous Australian literature could be developed, Knudsen claims that this period deserves particular attention because "indigenous writing in both countries left behind a strong narrative preference for social realism in favour of traversing old territories in new spiritual ways" (*C&S*, xiv).[2]

[1] Hereafter indicated as *C&S*.

[2] In an often quoted interview with Liz Thomson, Mudrooroo stated that many Indigenous writers were merely concerned with showing "what they done to us" and expressed his belief in the need for Indigenous Australian writers to embrace an alternative form of writing to social realism. He suggested that through the "Dreaming … the field of creation", a new Indigenous Australian literature could be developed. Mudrooroo, "Mudrooroo Narogin: Writer", in Liz Thompson, ed., *Aboriginal Voices: Contemporary Artists, Writers and Performers* (Sydney: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 58-59.

The declared aim of Knudsen's research is to trace, maintain and preserve difference in order to surpass what she identifies as the impasse of postcolonial theory: the homogenising consequences of the universal opposition of colonised/coloniser. The author's demand for local encounters is carried out in her intention to search for the "ontological grounds of Aboriginal and Maori traditions and specific ways of moving through and behaving in cultural landscapes and social contexts"(*C&S,* xiv). Therefore, the choice of concentrating on literary texts is justified as a consequence of this conscious attempt to evade those modes of analysis that characterise 'colonial discourse' in unitary and universalised modes and thereby perpetuate it.

Knudsen strongly advocates for the cultural reproduction of tradition as a site of resistance and identifies in Indigenous literature a same-but-different pattern where ritual repetition is incremented by the introduction of new elements. Within her application of this critical insight, Keri Hulme's *the bone people* (1984), Patricia Grace's *Potiki* (1986), Mudrooroo's *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* (1991) and Sam Watson's *The Kadaitcha Sung* (1990) become sites of a 'creative' movement of transformation – a continual becoming and homecoming – that stems within writing as a camouflaged subtext of a language, culture and spirituality in exile. This movement is described by the author as a creative return to what she identifies as the essential cores of Indigenous Australian and Maori cultures: the 'circle' and the 'spiral'.

Knudsen's indefatigable exegesis of the scenes and passages which refer to sacred/secret material and her quest for the underlying oral patterns of these novels are certainly very valuable and useful for scholars of these two literatures. However, they are also quite dangerous in that they create a 'canon' which privileges the texts which revisit or re-enact tradition in the mode prescribed by this critical evaluation. The inevitable exclusion attached to this enterprise of 'canonisation' becomes evident in the third chapter entitled "Exile and Return". The function of this chapter is to create a comparative foil to the subsequent discussion through an analysis of the novels that employ social realism such as Alan Duff's *Once Were Warriors* (1990), Archie Weller's *The Day of the Dog* (1981), Sally Morgan's *My Place* (1987) and Mudrooroo's *Wild Cat Falling* (1965), *Long*

Live Sandawara (1979) and *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription For enduring the End of the World* (1983). These novels are identified as the narration of the life of a "disturbingly high percentage of both high Aboriginal and Maori people [who] are mixed-blood fringe-dwellers who live in landscapes of unbelonging .... Feelings of anger and frustration are very much the dominant atmosphere of most novels written in the mode of social realism" (*C&S*, 73). According to Knudsen, the mode of social realism and the broken language of these novels mirror their urban settings, which are described as desolate and spiritually forlorn wastelands. The anger and frustration of the urban fringe-dwellers of these novels, Knudsen explains, can only be resolved in the novels that adopt oral patterns and underlying sacred/secret structures of signification and perform a return to the Indigenous Australian Dreaming Land or Maori *wharenui*. Knudsen advocates a specific 'New traditionalism' and a cyclical return to the core or essence of tradition, which admits in its process the possibility of transformation into new mediums, spaces and times. Knudsen contends that a new Indigenous literary aesthetic may be seen as appearing within the fringe itself where "new open spaces are in sight with a view to ancient legacies; these are first glimpsed, then approached and eventually re-appropriated and re-inscribed in a cultural continuum of artistic practice. This is where new beginnings are found in old beginnings" (*C&S,* 22). Thus, Knudsen seems to find a key to the dismantlement of the stereotypical depiction of Indigenous peoples as bearers of traditions locked in the past. However, she seems to forget that geography/space rather than time is the key to Indigenous issues of sovereignty and spirituality. Thus, speaking positions need to be historicized but also 'located'. The emphasis needs to be on the forgotten forced co-habitation and proximity of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in urban and non-urban landscapes alike. Representations of Indigenous peoples/literatures distanced in the traditional location of the outback need to be abandoned not in favour of 'new' traditional peoples/literatures but in favour of a real freedom in self-representation played out in the contiguous space of Indigenous/non-Indigenous encounter. By advocating one essential core of culture, located in the Dreaming and in the *wharenui*, Knudsen falls into the

Australian hegemonic genealogy of binary oppositions used to describe Indigenous peoples such as traditional/modern, outback/urban, spiritual/temporal, Oral Indigenous language/Broken English language, and denies the possibility of choosing between diverse experiential affiliations to tradition and ways of inhabiting space. In searching for a specific core and the cyclical return to it, the possibility of multiple affiliations remains unexplored.

Knudsen's combination of Indigenous and European theorisations of orality and Indigenous spirituality responds to her desire to leave an ear or eye open to what the texts are telling. Her close analysis seeks to maintain a fundamental openness to engage with the texts she is reading and her analysis is at its best in the careful study of the unique oral narrative techniques displayed by the novels she considers. Furthermore, in order to attempt a hermeneutical enterprise that eschews a problematic process of mere self-recognition, Knudsen attempts to adopt some oral tools in her own writing such as a circular structure and what she terms an 'indigenized' reading. In her application of the latter, Knudsen is exploring the possibilities offered by Mudrooroo's employment of Michael Riffaterre's theory of the hidden metatext or matrix. In *Writing from the Fringe* (1990), Mudrooroo explained that Indigenous Australian writers often echo the traditional secret/sacred prescriptions of their ancestors inscribing a camouflaged or hidden metatext in their writing, which doesn't open itself up to the understanding of the un-initiated reader. Moreover, Mudrooroo theorized that this hidden metatext of Indigenality or maban reality could be uncovered by a retroactive reading which would disclose its essence to the aware or initiated reader. Following Mudrooroo's footsteps, Knudsen searches for "the black words on the white page ... in the indigenous subtexts of contemporary Aboriginal and Maori literature" (*C&S*, 30). However, I feel that in attempting to trace this essence "waiting to be disclosed", Knudsen falls into the trap of re-enacting the scopic/colonising function of the researcher, whose desire is to disclose and know in order to possess. This theorisation of 'aware reading' could also be the reason for her identification of a single Indigenous pattern of engagement with tradition. Knudsen seems to fall into the problematic theorisation of one single way of reading

the text, which is quite obviously elitist but also a reduction of the writers's display of multiple identifications and writings.[3]

Indigenous Australian and Maori writers have variously appropriated the art of storytelling in relation to the purpose they wished to accomplish and to the audience they wished to address. The reader's expectation and desire for one recognizable oral form and the illusion of clearly identifiable oral strands needs to be put in question. In fact, the recurrent celebration of Indigenous Australian writing as way of conveying orality has often been the work of Western academics and critics who celebrate this return (and the possibility of their investigations) irrespective of the Indigenous writers's call for the necessity of 'visible' speaking positions. Most of all the celebration of Indigenous writing as a vessel for an otherwise lost and unknowable oral knowledge doesn't take into consideration the Indigenous writers' recent call for a deeply engaged questioning of the role of Western editors and writers in both the passage from voice to book and in writing itself.[4] That is, the necessary discontinuity between text and criticism created by the presence of ourselves as others is disregarded. As Homi Bhabha notes, "the *problematic of recognition*, which refuses that essential discontinuity, refuses to account for the knowing subject or the object known ... criticism as a practice of reading becomes ....'a form of intuitionism of moral values' and the text as a practice of writing becomes an essentially spiritual reality, a logos".[5]

Echoing Ross Chambers's affirmation that "there is no stopping *texts*; in their readability lies their potential for oppositional

[3] For instance, Mudrooroo's exploration of his affiliative relation to Indigenous Australian tradition is diversely displayed in his various works. His multiple identifications have been productively maintained in the recently published collection of essays edited by Annalisa Oboe, ed., *Mongrel Signatures: Reflections on the Work of Mudrooroo* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003).

[4] Among others see Anita Heiss, *Dhuuluu-yala: To Talk Straight. Publishing Indigenous Literature* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2003).

[5] Homi Bhabha, "Representation and the Colonial Text: A Critical Exploration of Some Forms of Mimeticism", in Frank Gloversmith, ed., *The Theory of Reading* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1984), 101.

resilience",[6] Knudsen's justifies her speaking position as an analyser of the published texts that writers have left free to circulate and that are, therefore, open to communication. However, one should not forget that the process of writing/reading can be the site of a contact zone still regulated by power relations and which necessitates the unveiling and questioning of the invisible 'white' researcher as proposed by scholars of whiteness studies such as Aileen Moreton Robinson. As Jerry Phillips notes, Jean Paul Sartre in "What is Literature" writes "the work of art is an act of confidence in the freedom of men" but in a society that knows racial oppression as an integral aspect of class domination, the exchange economy of literature outlined by Sartre – the mutual recognition of freedom by the writer and the reader – is made an impossibility. The literary text in the setting of 'tradition' in the symbolic field of whiteness has always presupposed the 'unfreedom' of certain (potential) readers; indeed, in the 'morality' of its style (the community announced by its formal rhetoric) the text often acknowledges that particular subjects – the individual members of an oppressed group – will never form part of its imagined audience.[7] On the other hand, a clear establishment of speaking positions can lead to an experience of the text that is a mutual relation. Writers can express and enable the reader to recognize their intention only insofar as the expression conforms to a language that is created through an interconnection and interdependence of their languages and cultures. If that 'partial' interconnection and 'relative' difference is denied we fall into an objectification of each other's utterance. As Marcia Langton theorised, enunciation is unavoidably related to a differential access to speaking positions and 'reciprocity' is the imperative at stake in the struggle for the Indigenous subject against the non-Indigenous subjects who have failed to allow Aboriginal people to articulate their own models of what they perceive 'Europeans' to be. This doesn't

[6] Ross Chambers, *Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1990), 3.

[7] Jerry Phillips, "Literature in the Country of 'Whiteness'. From T.S. Eliot to *The Tempest*", in Mike Hill, ed., *Whiteness. A Critical Reader* (New York: New York University Press), 329-345.

mean that our reading should be influenced by an essential cultural bias, but that our reading is inevitably influenced by the particular conditions of speech communication in which we communicate. This implies the necessity of a shift in the analysis of the function of reader/critic from detached to reciprocal. I believe that this recognition of the reciprocal nature of the act of writing/reading might enable the writer to articulate his/her difference and at the same time not efface the difference of the 'white' reader. Along these lines, in readings such as Knudsen's lies the potential of encounter, dialogue and exchange based on clearly located and accountable speaking positions which enable us to think about our reciprocal identities as, to quote Marcia Langton, "a field of intersubjectivity in that it is remade over and over again in a process of dialogue, of imagination, of representation and interpretation".[8]

[8] Marcia Langton, *Well I Heard It on the Radio and I Saw It on the Television...* (North Sydney: Australian Film Commission, 1993), 33.

REVIEWS

Anna Maria Cimitile, *Emergenze. Il fantasma della schiavitù da Coleridge a D'Aguiar* (Napoli: Liguori, 2005), 173 pp.

Reviewed by Marta Cariello

The time around 1798, when *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* was first published, was a moment of open concern and strong feelings over the issue of slavery within a certain circle of intellectuals in England. Seventeen years prior to the first publication of the poem, the legal case of the slave ship Zong had broken out, unveiling the institutionalized horror of throwing slaves overboard slave ships, to die in a blacker and blacker Atlantic. Tobago-born Canadian poet M. NourbeSe Philip tells the story of the Zong in a powerfully dry manner: "In 1781 the slave ship, Zong, captained by one Luke Collingwood set sail from the coast of West Africa for Jamaica. As is the custom its 'cargo' was fully insured. Instead of the customary six to nine weeks, this fateful trip will take some four months on account of navigational errors on the part of the captain, resulting in some of the Zong's "cargo" being lost and the remainder being destroyed by order of the captain. / The Zong's cargo comprised 470 slaves." (Fascicle 1, summer 2005, www.fascicle.com) These words introduce M. NourbeSe Philip's poetical work on the Zong case, in which she uses the entire 500-word text of the legal decision involving the ship owners and the insurers. The case dealt with legal responsibilities regarding the insurance on the ship's 'cargo' and was in no way concerned with the massacre of 131 human beings thrown overboard. In her poem, M. NourbeSe Philip whitens and/or blackens out words from the legal text, fragments and mutilates it, mirroring the horror of slave trade. "As poet/writer/creator I become censor and magician, simultaneously censoring the activity of the reported text, and conjuring something new from the absence of the Africans as humans that is at the heart of the text." (Ibidem)

The reference to Philip's work of poetry on the Zong case serves here to introduce Anna Maria Cimitile's *Emergenze*, a critical analysis of the ghost of slavery in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, and of the thematization of slavery as ghostly presence in the late-twentieth century works of David Dabydeen, Fred D'Aguiar and others. In *Emergenze*, Cimitile looks into the same type of absence as those emphasized by M. NourbeSe Philip through her act of 'whitening out' words; the African slave that was deleted from the surface language of Modernity surfaces indeed inside its ripples.

Cimitile unveils her findings inside the ripples of poetic language, building the context in which the *Rime* was written, the conscious and outspoken anti-slavery literature that filled that very context, and the

(sometimes ambiguous) role abolitionism played in the construction of the illuminist narratives of egalitarianism and progress. Slavery reveals its ghostly presence in the *Rime* against the background of the explicit literature which was being produced on the theme at the time (Coleridge himself had pronounced and later published a speech entitled 'Lecture on the Slave Trade' in 1795). From this framework, Cimitile lays down a track crossing all the way to the end of the twentieth century, to search inside two texts which, instead, consciously reveal the presence of the ghosts of slavery, thematizing the hauntedness of literature through the acknowledged presence of ghosts. Again, the Zong case is central to the narration in these two texts; Dabydeen's work is a twenty-five section poem titled *Turner* (1994), inspired by J.M.W. Turner's famous painting, *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying: Typhoon Coming on* (better known as *The Slave Ship*; first exposition 1840), while Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997) is a novel directly inspired by the Zong case, narrating the moment in which the slaves were thrown overboard and killed and the beginning of the trial back in England.

In *Turner*, the slave whose leg is half visible underwater in the 1840 painting regains its whole body and turns into a person – the slave has been living underwater, watching the Middle Passage from down below, in a place somewhere between life and death. *Feeding the Ghosts*, too, tells of slavery through death: Mintah, the 132nd person thrown overboard survives, climbs back on the ship, hides there, and finally testifies at the trial. Again, this human being is somewhere (or nowhere) between life and death; slavery is a place where death, as Cimitile writes, is signified by human commerce, and this negotiated death is found, by no chance, in the liminal space of the sea. Underneath the water, again inside its ripples, is also the space of the ghostly.

Modernity is haunted by its secrets, the unspoken and unacknowledged faces of colonial violence and cultural imperialism. In the introduction to *Emergenze*, engaging Paul Gilroy's fundamental theorization of the reciprocal relationship between modernity and the Middle Passage, Cimitile points out that the literature of modernity is creaked in places that deny secrets. In a psychoanalytic perspective, secrets are what cause the presence of ghosts. And, moreover, those who carry a secret are haunted by the void that the secret itself leaves inside. Modernity does not speak the words that would reveal its secrets; slavery is one such secret, perhaps the most weighing and hollering from inside the whitened-out spaces of the West's self-representation. Cimitile reminds us that these are the very same secrets that haunt Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: an unspoken past that takes the shape of an ever-returning ghost. For, as Cimitile points out, the ghost haunts precisely because of the impossible question it poses, it asks for a justice that is unattainable.

In Dabydeen and D'Aguiar, the ghost is thematized, the hauntedness of literature is spoken through the character of the ghost itself. In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, instead, there is no direct reference to slavery, it is not spoken of, there is no thematization; only a general sense of nightmare and unearthliness inhabits it and, most of all, a sense of absence: absence of explanation for what happens, absence of will for the Mariner's actions (subtraction of will is, of course, the first action of enslavement).

Cimitile reads this very absence, where, as in music a pause is not an empty space but one filled with the (silent) rhythm of the whole piece, the ghostly resides, collating the continuity of the subtext written within poetry. Perhaps all literature carries this subtext – its very rhythm, unstopping throughout though more quiet at times – a line of words haunting the text itself; always a ghost within. This appears, too, the overarching theory of Anna Maria Cimitile's profound work on the texts analyzed: that literature is haunted by nature. Today, postcolonial literature speaks the secrets of modernity, voices the ghostly nature of texts through the narration of colonial trauma, violence, dislocation. Slavery and the Middle Passage emerge – in the sense of "appearing with urgency" (Cimitile, *Emergenze*, p. 17) – in the close reading which Anna Maria Cimitile carries out, in words which are at once precise and poetic, as the unfillable voids left by the secrets of modernity.

These secrets, today, carry a terrifying echo, in the space between Africa and Europe; this time a new and horrendously similar middle passage has been born: the Mediterranean with its paths of death for the new slavery of this new century.

Daniela de Filippis, C. Maria Laudando, eds., *Le origini e le forme del romanzo inglese. Teorie a confronto* (Napoli: Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale", 2005), 254 pp.

Reviewed by Bianca Del Villano

Two famous eighteenth century paintings, M. Q. de Latour's pastel portrait of *The Marquise de Pompadour* (1775) and J.H. Fragonard's *A Young Girl Reading* (1776), are the cover-images of *Le origini del romanzo inglese. Teorie a confronto*. The first presents Madame de Pompadour consulting the Encyclopaedia; the second focuses on an anonymous young woman immersed in reading a small book, presumably a novel. The images represent two kinds of female involvement in the economic and cultural climate of their century, in which women always played an important role, as authors, readers, or the objects of male discourses.

Daniela de Filippis and C. Maria Laudando's choice of these illustrations provides an immediate paratextual indication of the main focus of their volume based on a conference held at the University of Naples "L'Orientale" in October 2003. A cursory glance at the table of contents shows how the thread that links most of the contributions is precisely the discussion of the different degrees and modalities of women's involvement in the creation and consolidation of the novel as a literary genre. For instance, Laura Di Michele, Bruna Mancini and John J. Richetti point out the importance of female writers (in particular, Eliza Haywood) for the subsequent development of the novel, while Giuliana Granata writes about the difficulties and problems faced by women who aimed at becoming writers.

The volume also deals with other important questions, involving literature, culture and history at many levels: de Filippis discusses developments in the theory of the novel, Di Michele and Annamaria Lamarra the cultural and literary genealogy of the genre, Pierpaolo Abbatiello the significance and consequence of the novel's fictional dimension as a means of domesticating or controlling reality; relationships with alternative forms of the novel are analysed by Agostino Lombardo (Sterne and Swift's 'anti-novel') and Di Michele and Laudando (Hogarth's 'visual novel'), while Rosamaria Loretelli explores the development of a new way of reading.

Le origini e le forme del romanzo inglese reflects on the positions of past and present criticism in relation to the construction and deconstruction of the literary canon. As anticipated above, particular emphasis is given to a renewed interest in the role of women, but as de Filippis makes clear in her introductory essay the feminist/feminine critical approach in this volume is flanked by other critical perspectives, stressing a plurality of viewpoints. Her article offers an interesting overview of critical trends since the 1950s, providing a theoretical frame in which different and sometimes opposing critical stances intersect. This idea is resumed and further developed in Laudando's conclusion, which far from 'closing' the debate underlines the novel's hybridity and 'openness' to different kinds of analysis and comparative study. Indeed, Laudando's title "Al crocevia di fertili negoziazioni" suggests how the novel can be seen as a crossroads pointing in many directions and as an open genre in which other kinds of narrations also converge; indeed, the novel confronts the demands of the eighteenth century, serving both to maintain the hegemonic bourgeois discourse of the time and to reflect its contradictions.

The controversial nature of the novel and its influence on the formation and definition of modernity make it a fascinating object of investigation for critics as well as writers. Di Michele presents a wide-ranging analysis of such crucial aspects as the romance/novel opposition and the relationship between female and male writers and power and eros. In particular, she

underlines how writing as a profession was deeply affected and controlled by the patriarchal cultural system. Female writers were subordinated to men, and their works subjected to the censorship of their male colleagues. In John J. Richetti's analysis of the emergence of a new canon in eighteenth century English novel in relation to feminist criticism, the means of cultural production and the question of value, he too considers the unequal opportunities for women and men in contemporary society, underlining how the total access to the cultural channels of the time enjoyed by male writers also determined a different quality of writing. From this perspective, he considers Daniel Defoe's *Roxana* (1724) 'superior' to Eliza Haywood's *Love in Excess* (1719), as the former is openly related to the economic context, while the latter is centred on love and passion rather than contemporary ideas and problems. Though Richetti was one of the first critics to highlight the importance of 'alternative' popular literature and to initiate a critical trend interested in non-canonical authors, his article suggests a reinforcement of the canon. While female production is an important starting point for the development of the novel, in this way it comes to be just a substratum for the works of writers like Defoe. One could also ask why the gender relations described in *Love in Excess* are less representative of the eighteenth century than the bourgeois capitalistic thought expressed in *Roxana*.

These arguments are counterbalanced by the many critics – Sarah Prescott and Tiffany Potter, for instance, who have underlined how Haywood reinvents the sentimental narration of the time through female characters who do not necessarily comply with the virtuous maiden/prostitute dichotomy, and through a critique of socio-economic pressure on women. This latter point is emphasised in relation to *The Mercenary Lover* in the essays by Di Michele and Mancini, both of whom point out how love affairs and the battle of the sexes cannot be separated from their socio-cultural contexts and are highly revealing of the condition of women at the time.

If these two essays suggest how hard a life women had as writers, Loretelli and Abbatiello's contributions speak of women as readers (and of readers in general). Loretelli studies changes in the psychology of reading in the eighteenth century, when reading becomes a private activity – Fragonard's painting is an example of the extreme concentration of the reader, whose attention is captured completely by the book's content. This 'immersion' is due to the sympathy and identification between character and reader, which Loretelli considers one of the main traits of the novel. Abbatiello links the feeling of sympathy to the power of fictionality. The novel inaugurates a virtual dimension imitating and recreating a reality in which the reader can experience life emotionally, without running any risks. His reference to *The Female Quixote* (1752) is particularly interesting: while

the novel encourages readerly involvement and identification, Charlotte Lennox warns her readers against considering *romances* as real events.

Identification may be considered as the capacity to 'learn a lesson' on the part of the reader, insofar as the novel aims at (in)forming people. Lamarra attributes the prominence of this didactic purpose to the antecedents of the genre, Puritan spiritual autobiographies. Within the novel there is a tension between a historicist necessity to analyse reality and a demand for transcendental values. However, a fusion between these needs is made possible by a realistic modality of narration and insistence on the fictional character's metaphorical growth. While in Puritan autobiographies growth exclusively concerned spirituality, in the novel it becomes more pragmatic as a result of economic and cultural change. Indeed, the achievement of spiritual maturity on the part of the character is calvinistically accompanied by the achievement of a florid economic position. There can be no 'goodness' without 'goods', a binary coupling that Lamarra analyses in relation to *Robinson Crusoe*.

Le origini e le forme del romanzo inglese confirms the potentialities of the novel, creating a space for confrontation and communication that recalls the atmosphere of the conference on which the volume is based.

It seems fitting to conclude this overview with the names of Agostino Lombardo and Fernando Ferrara, to whom the volume is dedicated. The late Agostino Lombardo was present at the conference with a talk on Swift and Sterne's anti-novels, here printed as "Romanzo e antiromanzo". His elegant, complex language transports the reader into the pages of *The Life and Opinions of Tristam Shandy* (1760-67) and *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). By focusing on Sterne and Swift's self-reflexive 'intrusions' into their own texts, he explores the structure of the novel as conceived by the writers of the time. The volume closes with *Appunti* by another unforgettable model for scholars and students of the Italian Academia. Ferrara's handwritten notes, given to de Filippis in the 1970s, are an intriguing example of textual analysis as well as an extraordinary trace of his strong, hovering presence. His last words, "And so on", are evidence that his notes are a form of work in progress, suggesting there could always be something else to say or look for, something else "to be continued..."

Geneviève Fabre, Klaus Benesch, eds., *African Diasporas in the New and Old Worlds: Consciousness and Imagination* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004), xxi + 358 pp.

Reviewed by Angelo Ferrillo

This collection of essays originates from an international conference at the

Université Denis Diderot in Paris organized as a contribution to the ongoing debate about the works of Paul Gilroy and linked to a twin conference on diaspora held at New York University and the Schomburg Library in September 2000. The volume investigates the multi-fold concept of African diaspora from a historical, sociological, political, ideological and cultural perspective. It articulates all the possible implications for special fields of study from history and anthropology to art history and intellectual history, from literature to visual narratives, discussing the significance of the African diaspora from a historical viewpoint but also looking at it as an ideology or even an object of representation.

The first section of the book ("Thinking Diaspora") examines the multiple and often controversial meanings the term has received over the last few decades. In "The Uses of 'Diaspora'" Brent Hayes Edwards traces the "intellectual history" of the word diaspora from the growing academic interest in the pan-African movement in the 1950s, to the much debated application of Paul Gilroy's 'black Atlantic' to the discourse of diaspora. Despite acknowledging Gilroy's remarkable contribution to academic theorization of the diaspora, Edwards points to some of the ambiguities of *The Black Atlantic*, which on the one hand looks at 'diaspora' as a heuristic or provisional term of analysis, against any type of cultural essentialism, but on the other makes wide use of a terminology revealing great fascination for the Atlantic frame and the notion of origins.

Conversely, Edwards suggests an interventionist use of the term "which allow[s] us to think beyond such limiting geographic frames, and without reliance on an obsession with origins". The need for a notion of diaspora as a means to articulate difference and/or disarticulate unity makes the scholar rethink the word *décalage* used by Léopold Senghor in the essay "Négro-Américains et Négro-Africains". The re-establishment of a prior unevenness or diversity becomes, according to Edwards, a possible way to reconsider diversity within unity, to give voice to that which resists translation, to traces or residues, to everything that remains disjointed and can never be definitive. In this sense diaspora needs to be approached through *décalage*, that is, through gaps, haunting presences and discontinuities which in the end allow various diasporic articulations.

Gilroy's ambivalent and controversial theorization on diaspora is further analysed in David Palumbo-Liu's essay "*Against Race*: Yes, But At What Cost?". The author focuses on Gilroy's latest publication, *Against Race*, in which he invites us all to think against any nationalist and racialogical thinking as produced by the idea that both identity and culture are stable, fixed, immutable. Palumbo-Liu also indicates points of tension in Gilroy's work. While utilizing the discourse of diaspora as a useful instrument to

think against any racializing reasoning, beyond geography and any myth of origin, Gilroy simultaneously seems to set up a historical narrative privileging a particular origin (black vernacular formations) and a particular culture "made by black hands".

In the third and last essay of this section Michel Feith reinscribes Henry Louis Gates's *The Signifying Monkey* within the diasporic dimension through the trickster figures of the Monkey and his African antetype Esu-Elegbara considered as symbols of diasporic identity. Mediating between spaces and representing the unity of past, present and future, Esu and the Monkey are syncretic figures of the diaspora, illustrating a "baffling mixture of unity and diversity, 'roots' and 'routes', faithfulness and transgressions". For these reasons, Gates's work needs to be reassessed, Feith concludes. Based as it is on trickster figures, his vision of diaspora implies an anti-essentialist perspective of the kind described in Gilroy's works, despite some nostalgia for centering and wholeness.

The complex, multifaceted, and sometimes contradictory dimensions of African diasporas are further analysed in the second section of the book in relation to a variety of sites. Sylvia Prey's essay examines the role played by African-American Christians in transatlantic evangelical movements, creating new, black forms of Protestantism and Christian structures in Nova Scotia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Jamaica and other West Indian islands. She explains how black theology, with its emphasis on universality and the experiential nature of Christianity, promoted a network of communication among different religious communities all over the Atlantic thus encouraging the movement of people and contributing to the building up of black consciousness besides representing a key phase in the struggle against slavery.

Conversely, in "The Wings of Ethiopia", Winston James investigates the contribution of anglophone re-diasporization of the Caribbean to pan-Africanist projects, ranging from the work of nineteenth-century pioneers such as John Brown Russwurm, Edward Wilmot Blyden and Robert Campbell to that of relevant twentieth-century personalities such as Henry Sylvester Williams, Marcus Garvey and George Padmore. Through their journalistic, cultural and political militancy these people have all proved the remarkable involvement of English-speaking Caribbeans in the struggle on the African continent, culminating in its decolonization and liberation.

With Sujaya Dhanvantari's essay we move to another 'site', Saint-Domingue. The article discusses the appropriation and cultural reproduction of the French anthem during the Haitian Revolution as a symbol of resistance, helping the slaves to develop a sense of rootedness and communal consciousness on an eighteenth-century postcolonial site of political

contestation. This cultural reproduction proves that there is no monolithic notion of community, since the diaspora experience does not coincide with the notion of nation-ness or with geographical boundaries.

The third section of the book includes essays on the literary writings of the diaspora. Peterson discusses the flourishing of the African American novel in the 1892-1903 period with particular emphasis on the unearthing and remaking of the painful and disrupted past as a way to supply a tradition which could help African Americans live the present and build a 'New Negro' for the future. Klaus Benesch, instead, demonstrates how William Demby's novel *The Catacombs*, which originated from the author's experience as an expatriate black intellectual, brings together existentialism and a sense of diaspora through the writing of a "transatlantic, border-crossing narrative that freely shuttles back and forth in time as well as in space". The novel also offers a positive view of the expatriate condition which transcends the definition of diaspora as homelessness.

New implications for diasporic experience, both in terms of space and time, are examined also by Kathie Birat in relation to Caryl Phillips's *The Nature of Blood.* In Birat's words Phillips manages to think about 'home' beyond the Caribbean by displacing the African diaspora onto the Jewish diaspora as if he wanted to avoid any reference to a specific world. Furthermore, Phillips does not look at the interconnection between individual and group as a way to suture the African American history of displacement and fragmentation but as a means of rethinking possible new relations among histories previously conceived as separate. Birat's conclusion suggests that the survival of diasporic populations depends on their inscribing themselves between the individual and the collective, memory and desire, consciousness and imagination.

We come back to the African American diasporic experience with Moglen's analyses of Hughes's "Cubes", a poem which associates the experiences of modernism and black vernacular production by representing capitalism and imperialism as the key factors "responsible both for the emergence of avant-garde aesthetic practices and for the enforced migrations and oppressions of the African diaspora".

The fourth and last section of the collection is dedicated to visual art and performance. Kirschke traces Du Bois's contribution to pan-Africanist projects through his editorship of the journal *The Crisis*. Emphasis is laid in particular on the images used to stimulate his readers' interest in African events and culture and, above all, to establish a connection between historical Africa and African Americans through the representation of pieces of African art and photographs of ordinary people and royalty, but also through romantic renderings of Africa or even Egyptian-inspired pieces. The

fascination exerted by Egyptomania and Ethiopianism on the visual artists of the Harlem Renaissance is further analysed in Schmesser's essay. These aesthetic manifestations were used to promote and assert the idea of an original art movement and a common heritage among all the people of African descent. The search for this descent is traced once again in the last essay of the book in which the description of the rituals of Carnival in Portobelo, Panama, documents the survival of Congo-based traditions while making the history of a town populated by maroon communities resonate through its *carnaval* celebrations.

The postscript of the volume, before the final annotated bibliography of life-writings by black diasporic authors, is taken up by "The Middle Passage", a visual narrative by Tom Feelings, whose memory the book is dedicated to. The personal account directly recalls the front cover picture of this collection extracted from his illustrated book for children of the same title. As the artist himself reminds us: "if this painful experience... can constantly be told in such a way that those chains of the past, those shackles that physically bound us together against our wills, could in the re-telling be spiritual links that willingly bind us together now and into the future, then slavery's Middle Passage can, ironically, become a positive connecting line to all of us, whether living inside or outside of the continent of Africa".

Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place. Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005), viii + 213 pp.

Reviewed by Fiorenzo Iuliano

Making and at the same time unmaking the archive of queer experiences and queer histories: this seems to me the element that unifies the essays collected in this recent book by Judith Halberstam. As the author points out in the first chapter, by way of introduction, what is at stake is a new perspective from which queer history and the queer histories can be viewed and charted, a perspective that delineates a new positioning in the course of events and a new sense of belonging to postmodernity. Queer stories and transgender bodies, the pivotal themes of these essays, are not so much meant to represent a simple sex-gender instance in the heterogeneous spectrum of sexual identities and behaviours, as to offer a new way to live the postmodern scenario, and to trace a sense of space and of temporality not marked by the biopolitical norms of heteronormative sexuality:

> The archive is not simply a repository; it is also a theory of cultural relevance, a construction of collective memory, and a complex record of queer activity. In order for the archive to function it requires users, interpreters, and cultural historians to wade through the material and piece together the jigsaw puzzle of queer history in the making. (169-170)

Halberstam dedicates three essays to the history of the famous transgender teenager Brandon Teena, as it is narrated in the movie *Boys Don't Cry*; this is her first step toward the construction of a new constellation of the queer archive. Brandon Teena's story opens up a reflection about the often underestimated question of queer lives in non-urban realities; starting from rural Nebraska, Halberstam gives an account of those lives "out of time and place", epitomized by queer sexuality and the transgender body, and gradually, in a discontinuous, non-organic and non-teleological way, she provides a new understanding of the archive of queer experiences and identities. The notion of "queer archive", thus, broadens its meaning to incorporate the lives of those people whose sexual choices and identities become the first filter through which their own lives can become readable, even if in a strange, paradoxical, even eccentric way.

Halberstam often reminds the reader of her involvement in queer and dyke subcultures, so reducing to the minimum the risks of an external, detached and quasi-scientific perspective on the issues she addresses. This question is worth stressing also because it points to a new methodological and epistemic approach to the themes discussed; a queer critical strategy must be sustained by an oblique, multi-directional, non assertive view, like that provided by a direct involvement and self-positioning of the scholar:

> The academic might be the archivist, a coarchivist, a full-fledged participant in the subcultural scene that the scholar writes about. But only rarely does the queer theorist stand wholly apart from the subculture, examining it with an expert eye. (163)

Halberstam goes on to focus her attention on queer subcultures, and especially on the phenomenon of "drag kings", an original and rare example of cross-dressing performance, discussing the questions implied in the notion of 'female masculinity'; another chapter is devoted to visual art and the role played by the transgender body in the politics and aesthetics of representation in the postmodern era. The issues at stake are also considered in relation to their impact upon straight popular culture: this is the case, for instance, of the relationship between drag kings' performances and the parodic portrayal of masculinity in mainstream cinema (Halberstam refers to

commercial movies like *Austin Powers* and *The Full Monty*), or the parallel traced between "dyke" musical bands and the strategies of self-representation and marketing adopted by better known, commercial pop music groups.

The essays collected in this book, however heterogeneous and, to some extent, discontinuous in the themes and the case-studies addressed, provide a new interesting attempt to map the postmodernity we inhabit: the queer perspective and its fragmented and willingly incoherent character clearly represent in the words of Judith Halberstam a critical and poetical stance from which the contemporary world can be interrogated, interpreted, and finally reconfigured.

John McLeod, *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), iii + 213 pp.

Reviewed by Enrica Picarelli

The general acknowledgement that London is not only England's capital, but a 'world city' also implies its status as a multi-ethnic metropolis. It is indeed a fact that London is a big magnet for people from all over the world and this is the assumption that lies at the heart of John McLeod's book *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis* recently published by Routledge.

McLeod brings together a number of texts, mostly novels and poetry collections by the likes of Sam Selvon, Doris Lessing, Grace Nichols, V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie, which offer contrasting and often painful visions of London from the point of view of those many immigrants who contribute to making it a 'world city'. A 'subterranean' London indeed, much burdened with racism and prejudices, fractured along the lines of gender and ethnicity.

What makes *Postcolonial London* a valuable book is its effort in proposing a new image of the metropolis through an analysis of socially committed narratives that actively counteract its official image as that of a homogeneous and self-containing urban space.

Making use of Michel de Certeau's distinction between 'place' and 'space' McLeod underlines the politicization of the urban space of London that, through accurate planning and regulation, subjects the city to what he defines as a 'panoptically authoritative' discourse of power at the hands of the official, white culture. M. de Certeau's distinction of 'space' and 'place' rests upon the notion of *movement as speech act* which is enacted in the

context of the contemporary metropolis by those who are marginalized and forced within limited spaces of dwelling/narrating. Opposing a diachronic 'space' made of conflicting and heterogeneous subjectivities to the synchronic and stable 'place' of the traditional 'Concept-city' of Western planning, de Certeau brings to life the politics of resistance which day by day contests the authority of the white metropolis.

It is inside such ordered and *bounded* 'places', characterized by a well-defined architecture planned to exclude rather than include, that immigrants have carved out 'spaces' for themselves, which have soon spilled over the racialized boundaries of their neighbourhoods to swallow up the city and ultimately turn it into a hybridized metropolis. McLeod declares that it is mostly through a process of "spatial creolization" that the immigrants fight the sense of alienation experienced in London, transposing the cultural practices of their lands of origin into the unwelcoming weather and social reality of England. As a well fitting example of the migrants' attempts to counteract England's politics of marginalization, McLeod chooses Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) where the festive atmosphere of a Caribbean fête makes inter-racial reciprocation possible through dancing and partying to calypso music.

The fête is an example of those diachronic processes of cultural interaction enacted daily by thousands of 'outsiders' that, McLeod contends, inevitably unsettle the totalizing canon of an all-white England as theorized by politicians like Enoch Powell whose racist thought constitutes, in fact, the *leitmotif* against which *Postcolonial London* unfolds itself.

The acquisition of a space in the editorial market on the part of the postcolonial intellectuals to express their feelings about the city has had the effect of rendering visible a condition of transculturality otherwise conveniently silenced. This is evident in the disrupting narratives analyzed in this book which represent London as a place of complexity and contradictions, which clashes with the official and totalizing discourse of Englishness as a unitary concept. The everyday reality of the metropolis shaped by the presence of ethnically diverse people has thus to be re-considered in terms of heterogeneity and interaction.

Drawing upon studies in human and urban geography, sociology, history and literature, the author casts light on the very fluid boundaries of a London which has depended on water to prosper and survive – as evidenced in Chapter 5 through the interpretation of water metaphors in Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara* (1997) and David Dabydeen's *The Intended* (1991). The Thames has always been conceived as London's most powerful symbol as well as the origin of England's imperialist overseas pursuits, and today it is regarded as the pulsating heart of British (post)colonial reality. In *Postcolonial London*, it becomes the icon of the 'messiness' – that is the

diversification – of the metropolis – hence fluidity as a metaphor of change which originates from the often improvised 'transformative potential of migration' and bears the mark of the colonized's resistance to racialization and subjugation.

The migrants' resistance, silenced and made invisible by a superior authority, has repeatedly taken the liberating form of writing, as aptly testified by the works collected in *Postcolonial London*. Covering the history of London from the 1950's onwards, the book focuses on the often unspoken experiences of painful settlement and alienation of thousands of first and second generation immigrants who embark upon a journey from illusion to disillusionment: the mythical land of their colonial dreams becoming a dreadful and, more often than not, violent place. The shock and displacement experienced in the imperial motherland prompt a range of different reactions in the characters of the novels analysed which actively work to dismantle hierarchical notions of English superiority. In the face of these efforts, John McLeod hails their 'transformative potential' and defines them as optimistic and utopian efforts to bring change to the city through the creation of 'new power-knowledge relations'.

The novels and poems collected here are in fact all born out of a recognition of 'race' as a discriminating and inhibiting factor that has to be abolished in order for English society to accept the heterogeneous nature of its identity. Either through the recourse to violence, as analyzed in Chapter 4 with regards to the incendiatory riots of 1981 and 1985 or through dance and music, as in the fiction of Sam Selvon, Ian MacInnes and Hanif Kureishi, these narratives embody the persistent yet subterranean presence of original 'aestheticizations of space'. The same can be said of the 'supportive' poetry of Linton Kwesi Johnson, the hallucinatory writing of Janet Frame and the inter-generational enquiries of Bernardine Evaristo's novels, which blend the imaginary and the real into the innovative vision of Evaristo's "rainbow" London.

Stressing the *moving* aspect of a metropolis otherwise deemed static, and its ability to resurrect from its ashes – the ruin metaphor in Lessing's *In Pursuit of the English* (1993) and Riley's *Waiting in the Twilight* (1987) set in the post Second World War period – McLeod prizes the novelty of representation of all the works analyzed and their ability to depict the city as a space of transition towards the affirmation of a transcultural ethics of Englishness.

Journeying through the many Londons of this book, the impression is that its official, synchronic white 'map' is as much a fictional product as that of the color-biased 'delinquent narratives' found in postcolonial authors. To advocate a more realistic vision of London, John McLeod seems to argue, is

paradoxically to make room for the imagination. To make the dream of a multicultural England possible means, in fact, to admit the presence of contradictory and restructuring narratives into its discourses of power, hopeful visions that are today still regarded as utopian and unattainable.

Finally, what the authors included in *Postcolonial London* and John McLeod positively aim at is to contribute, through literature, to ease the path of contemporary England towards multiethnicity: to make the 'ex-centric, open-ended' ethics of *Britishness* prevail over the imperialist notion of *Englishness*, founded upon an Anglo-centric and painfully racist mentality, unfortunately still dominant today.

BOOKS RECEIVED

Catherine Belsey, *Culture and the Real: Theorizing Cultural Criticism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 192 pp.

Sujata Bhatt, *Il colore della solitudine*, ed. and transl. Paola Splendore (Roma: Donzelli, 2005), 203 pp.

Yves Bonnefoy, *Shakespeare and the French Poet*, ed. John Naughton (Chicago and London: Chicago UP, 2004), 304 pp.

Andreas Gaile, ed., *Fabulating Beauty. Perspectives on the Fiction of Peter Carey* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005), xxv + 438 pp.

David C.L. Lim, *The Infinite Longing for Home. Desire and the Nation in Selected Writings of Ben Okri and K. S. Maniam* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005), xxiii + 226 pp.

Martin Ryle and Jenny Bourne Taylor, eds., *George Gissing: Voices of the Unclassed* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), x + 163 pp.

Lindy Stiebel and Liz Gunner, eds., *Still Beating the Drum. Critical Perspectives on Lewis Nkosi* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005), xxxv + 375 pp.

SUMMARIES

Claudia Buonaiuto

Archival Sounds. Caryl Phillips's Atlantic Story

This article looks at a new sense of archive i Caryl Phillps's *The Atlantic Sound*. From the perspective of an afro-diasporic being, the statues, castles, buildings, and cities, all the monuments which bear memories of the past in Europe and elsewhere, do not testify to the history of the Africa diaspora. He thus writes the stories of diasporic individuals to speak their unspeakable memories. As he travels over his enlarged Atlantic home, from Africa to the Americas and to Great Britain, which can be imagined as the cartography of the airy and watery travels and movements of African diasporic subjects, he constitutes an archive. In this new archive, imagined and actual his/stories of the diaspora rearticulate the meaning of time and space and give new sound to the past.

Bianca Del Villano

Re-membering and Forgetting in *Memento*

Memento, a movie by Christopher Nolan, is one of the most cryptic films of the last few years. Peculiar in its structure and plot, this postmodern revision of the 1940s detective stories is centred on the story of Leonard Shelby who, after losing his short-term memory and his wife during a burglar attack, decides to find and kill the man who destroyed his life. To reach his aim, however, he has to keep notes about what happened in the past after the incident and what he has to do to avenge his wife's murder. Thus, to keep the fragments of his life together, he has to work as a detective and as an archivist, finding proofs and keeping notes, which could help him in his purpose. This article investigates the mechanisms of his mind, seen as a sort of archive, with the theoretical support of Derrida's "archive fever" and of Freud's theory of memory.

Manuela Esposito

The Archive of Natural Elements: Woolf, Irigaray and Zambrano

The starting point for this article consists in the poetical notion of a 'natural archive' related to the chance of a feminine memory characterized by heterogeneity and fluidity. My proposed path of textual analysis concerns Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, *L'oubli de l'air* by Luce Irigaray, and *De la Aurora* by Maria Zambrano. These works stress the importance of natural elements in female writing. Woolf attempts to archive the fluidity of the water, exploring the tie between the childhood, the mother, and the myth of Demetra-Kore. Irigary aims at restoring the traces of air in the memory of the archive, emphasizing the issue of sexual difference. Through the philosophy of the Aurora, Zambrano brings back to light the realities excluded by Western thought, providing a new feminine knowledge. The focus of the essay is on the absence of nature and femininity in the Western male politics of the archive.

Laura Fantone

Death of a Discipline. Other imaginary maps

The end of a century is always a time when the literary archive is rearranged in order to make room for new texts and authors. In this century, the archive of literature is necessarily reorganized through a partial inclusion of post-colonial literatures. Such a shift has been discussed differently by many writers and critics who declared the 'death of a discipline' such as literature, still divided according to fields, among them comparative literature and its other, 'the postcolonial'. I analyze here the work of the writer Mahasweta Devi, specifically referring to her short story *Pterodactyl*, as indicative of a form of writing shaped by coexisting temporalities and languages. Similarly, Gayatri Spivak's recent book *Death of a Discipline* discusses the role of literature in the context of global cultural production. Spivak's critical writings evoke death, as does Devi's pterodactyl, as a necessary move to allow memory across the disciplinary archive.

Angelo Ferrillo

'*Con*-signing' the Past: South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission

This essay focuses on the poetics of inclusion/exclusion grounding the politics of archiving and the notion of *con*-signation, as expressed by Derrida in his book *Mal d'Archive*, in relation to the activities and proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Antije Krog's *Country of my Skull*. The article discusses the TRC's making of History and Krog's answer to its master narrative through her report of histories, thus analysing the controversial and conflictual relationship between collective memory, politically and socially oriented, and individual memory which resists this assimilation.

Serena Guarracino

Voicing the Archive. Sexual/national politics in early music

The essay reads the early music revival as a moment of Derridean archive fever through the ambiguous echoes of the countertenor voice. The efforts of scholars and musicians to recuperate the origin of English early music embodies a national discourse that tries to provide English culture with a musical tradition represented by pre-classical production from Tudor and Jacobean times up to Handel. At the same time, though, the quest for this 'original sound' has promoted musical techniques like falsetto, whose extensive use by outstanding performers like Alfred Deller has made it a trademark of the revival. Thus the countertenor voice, as a man singing in female register, or a woman's voice coming from a man's body, undermines the national male trait of English music at the same time as it constitutes its bodily archive, in a double movement always 'anarchiving' itself.

Fiorenzo Iuliano

Tacit Cruelties: archive of the body and violence of pleasures

The essay moves from *Corpus* by Jean Luc Nancy and the chapter "Phantasmatic Identifications" in *Bodies That Matter* by Judith Butler, and tries to compare the constitution of the normative (hetero)sexed body, outlined by Butler, with the constitution and the normative power of the archive, questioning the issues of repudiation and abjection, characteristic of both (bodily and archivistic) constructions. It also provides an example of the multiple and conflicting moves that produce the logic and the rhetoric of the body and/as the archive through the reading of a short-short story by the American writer Stephen Greco, whose fascination with sadomasochistic gay sex is paradigmatic in defining the contrasting ways through which the actuality of violence is, on the one hand, embodied in and by the archive, and, on the other hand, questioned and interrupted by its (parodic) quotation and reiteration, enacted in the representation of sadomasochistic sex.

Tiziana Rosapane

"Just a Word on a Page and There Is the Drama". Sarah Kane's autobiographical archive

On 20 February 1999, the English playwright Sarah Kane kills herself at the age of 28 because of a serious state of depression. The characters in her five plays are the author's *alter egos* who tell her existential and sentimental condition and foretell its dramatic epilogue. This article will discuss the autobiographical element in Kane's work, using the concept of the archive, and analysing her last play, *4.48 Psychosis*. Kane's theatre is an 'autobiographical archive' which, through typographic impressions, brings together and keeps the traces of the fictitious universe, while it collapses with the author's life. Autobiography – like the archive – begins with the intention of becoming the author's own epitaph or monumental inscription, but instead of restoring her name, her past, and individuality, it erases them, "de-faces them", and reduces them to ashes through the idea of self-annihilation signified by the final interchanges of *4.48 Psychosis*.

Paola Sallei

Unpacking the Library of Modernity

Libraries are typical disciplinary sites in the Foucaultian sense of the word. They help to legitimate the order of knowledge and, consequently, the order of society. The first modern library – the Vatican Library – was founded in the fifteenth century by Nicholas V, the first Renaissance Pope, who also issued the first encyclical, which encouraged the European colonial domination over the rest of the world. Since then both metropolitan and colonial libraries have played an important role in the establishment and maintenance of imperialism. More recently, such postcolonial intellectuals as Jacques Derrida, Edward Said, V. Y. Mudimbe and Homi Bhabha have radically criticised the idea of colonial library. They have "unpacked the library of Modernity" (to borrow Walter Benjamin's famous expression) and started to establish counter-libraries and counter-archives.

Laura Sarnelli

"Undoing the Colonial Archive". Isaac Julien's *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin White Mask*

The paper offers an analysis of the drama-documentary film *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin White Mask* by Isaac Julien and Mark Nash through the exploration of the deconstruction of the historical archive from a 'non-dominant' perspective. The film brings to the fore the complex relation of politics, ethics and aesthetics through an interdisciplinary, intertextual and deconstructionist approach that displays a hybridisation, a creolisation of language, theory and visual art practice. Julien resorts to a visual aesthetics which intertwines different artistic conventions and practices, such as documentary, montage, dramatic reconstruction, theory, fiction, poetry, music, in order to create 'spaces of translation' where theory, history, bodies can take on new reconfigurations. *Frantz Fanon* represents a fragmentary aesthetics of memory which offers, through overlapping discontinuous temporal stages, a past that can be re-read, re-inscribed, re-archived 'other-wise.'

Sonia Torres

Memory and Displacement:
identitary Discourses in (between) Argentina, Chile and Canada

A great number of Latin American writers have produced fictional works dealing with dictatorship and (internal and external) exile. This paper proposes to examine literary and political identitary discourses in the work of Chilean Canadian author José Leandro Urbina. Urbina's narrative experience organizes a space of writing and reflection that interpellates politics through memory. The narrating subject's historical and geographical ex-centricity calls into question contemporary homogenizing processes of economic globalization, affirming the productivity of speaking from inbetweenness or the third space, and the emergence of memory as one of the main cultural and political concerns in contemporary times, represented by the shift from the "present futures" of modernity to the "past presents" of postmodernity (A. Huyssen).

Marina Vitale

Palimpsests of History and Memory

The notion of palimpsest as a metaphor for the workings of poetical imagination was elaborated by Hilda Doolittle (H.D.) in the 1920's under the double influence of psychoanalysis and archaeology. It expressed her idea of the multilayered nature of memory and her need to make sense of the present by excavating half-erased traces of the past, discovering counter-memories and opening up counter-archives. It signified the discursive nature of any re-membering, thus anticipating contemporary views of history-writing as a form of storytelling. The article also touches upon the work of post-modern and post-colonial thinkers and writers – such as Hélène Cixous and Assia Djebar – whose aim is to rescue counter-memories and allow the voices of defeated and subaltern historical subjects to emerge from the palimpsest of dominant historical interpretations.

Jane Wilkinson

Spinners, Spiders, 'Floating Islands':
Joan Metelerkamp's poetic genealogies

Velásquez's "Las hilanderas" embeds and interrogates other artworks and forms of art. Foregrounding the material conditions of craftsmanship, it stages a genealogy for its spinners by representing the myth of Arachne. Its self-reflexivity is a useful introduction to Joan Metelerkamp's *Floating Islands* (2001), which embeds homonymous texts by Dorothy Wordsworth and Ruth Miller and fragments from other works. As she reflects on the poems' composition, archiving and interpretation, Metelerkamp creates possible counter-archives. Building her poems out of her exploration of her precursors, she analyses the making of women's poetry, setting her interrogation within the context of colonial and post-colonial cultural politics and confronting the 'homeless' condition of women artists with other, more material conditions of homelessness in the South Africa of "August-December 1993".

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Manuela Esposito graduated in Foreign Languages and Literatures at the University of Naples 'L'Orientale' with a dissertation on the natural elements in the writing of Virginia Woolf, Luce Irigaray and Maria Zambrano. She has written a paper on Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi* and is now working on the relation between the sea and the desert in feminine writing.

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Serena Guarracino recently finished her PhD in 'Anglophone Literatures and Cultures' at the University of Naples "L'Orientale", with a dissertation on *Having Voice. Opera Migration in English-speaking Cultures*. Her research interests span from gender, postcolonial, and cultural studies to classical music and new musicology.

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Tiziana Rosapane graduated at the University of Naples "L'Orientale" with a thesis on Sarah Kane's theatre, which has been accepted for publication as a book entitled *Il teatro di Sarah Kane. Le forme dissacranti dell'Amore*. (Napoli: Graus & Boniello, forthcoming). She is interested in pursuing work in contemporary female theatre with an emphasis on sexual difference.

Paola Sallei holds a PhD in 'Anglophone Literatures and Cultures' (University of Naples, "L'Orientale") with a dissertation on *The Post-colonial Library*. Her studies focus on the Elizabethan period and post-colonial studies.

Laura Sarnelli is completing her PhD in 'Anglophone Literatures and Cultures' at the University of Naples "L'Orientale." Her main interests are queer theory, gender studies, diaspora and post-colonial studies, and Caribbean Canadian literature. She has recently published articles on diasporic women writers Dionne Brand and Shani Mootoo, and is currently working on her doctoral dissertation *Queer Genealogies. Diasporic Spaces in Caribbean Women Writers.*

Sonia Torres is Associate Professor at Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF), Brazil, where she coordinates the Literatures in English undergraduate program and teaches Comparative Literature in the graduate program. She holds a PhD in Comparative Literature from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) and was a Rockefeller Fellow at the University of Iowa in 2002. She is the author of *Nosotros in USA* (2001), editor of the interdisciplinary American studies reader *Raízes e rumos* (2001). She is co-editor of *Transit Circle*, the Brazilian journal of American Studies.

Marina Vitale is professor of English Literature at the University of Naples "L'Orientale". She has published on working class writing in the 1930s (*Le voci di Calibano*, 1988; *L'altra Inghilterra*, 1993), literacy and the radical press in the early nineteenth century, women and writing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and Shakespearean revisitations. She is currently translating various essays and poems by Hilda Doolittle to be published in Italy.

Jane Wilkinson is professor of English Literature at the University of Naples "L'Orientale". She has published on African literature, transculturations of Shakespeare and the Bible, exile, prison poetry, South African women's poetry and postcolonial representations of the city. Her most recent volume is *The Cripples at the Gate: Orson Welles's Voodoo Macbeth* (2004).

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Examples:
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