

LOVE: AN APPROACH TO TEXTS

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Abstract

This dissertation responds to the question, “What would it be like, what would it mean, to approach texts lovingly?” in terms of the work of 20th-century theorists, writers, and thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Brian Massumi, Jean-Luc Marion, E. E. Cummings, Rainer Maria Rilke, Teresa Brennan, and W. J. T. Mitchell. In order to demonstrate the appropriateness and place of love in the philosophical canon, the dissertation combines a consideration of affect with these writers’ work. Beginning with an exemplary reading of Cy Twombly’s painting *The Ceiling*, the then dissertation adapts Mitchell’s question “What do pictures want” to an approach to texts, as defined with reference to Barthes. An introduction and literature review trace the places love in texts by Plato, Freud, Lacan, Cixous, and a host of writers who fall under the rubric of ‘affect theorists’. Because an approach to *texts* is the dissertation’s focus, a chapter is spent discussing the possibilities for deconstruction to be part of such an approach. Derrida’s work is constellated with that of Cixous, Irigaray, Marion, and Brennan in order to emphasise the integrity of sensory and affective information to such an approach. The writing of Rilke and Cummings provides examples of an authorial approach to texts that can inform a readerly one, and serves to further expand the canon of texts that suggest the possibility of this approach. The final chapter is a second exemplary reading of the story of Moses and the burning bush. Deliberately aiming to stretch the expectations of scholarly work, I combine the anecdotal, the affective, and the textual as modes of engaging with and ways of knowing about love.

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Reader, forbear my little book.

Publications during the PhD

Books

Sweetbriar (chapbook), dancing girl press, forthcoming 2013

Her book, Milkweed Editions, 2013

Invited contributions to anthologies

Four poems in *Dear World and Everyone In It*, Bloodaxe Books (UK), 2013

Ten poems in *24: 12 Writers/12 Artists*, Staple Press (UK), 2013

"Apartment 203" and "Arrondissement" in *Winter Fiction*, Milkweed, 2012

"Grey century" in *Two Weeks*, Linebreak, 2011

"Poem for Your Brother" in *The Wind Blows, The Ice Breaks*, Nodin Press, 2010

"The Prairie Town," in *Fiction on a Stick*, Milkweed Editions, 2008

Poetry in literary magazines

2013

"She believes she is traveling" forthcoming, *UCity Review*

"When I say fathers... [Interlude 7]", *Atlas Review*

"Variations", *B O D Y*

"The lightest word they used was animal", *Beloit Poetry Journal*

"Open letter to Dimitriy Savchenko" and "Century with insomnia", *Burnside Review*

"Cloth manifesto", *Women's Studies Quarterly*

"An England", *Newfound*

"A history of blue", *Oxford Poetry*

"It was true the windows had been painted shut", *Sundog Lit*

"Hemispheric shift" and "Prypyat night song", *Gigantic Sequins*

2012

"Dear future girl" and "An archaeology [4]", 491

"To wear their own clothes at all times" and "Elemental concerns", *ILK*

"Carrier (Standing woman carrying wolf)", *Bateau Press*

"Pink", *DIAGRAM* 12.5

Three poems, *The Pinch*

"_____ vs. England", *Colorado Review*

Three poems, *Indent*

"Lessons and Carols", "An archaeology [1]" in *Precipitate*

Excerpts from *Scale Model of the World (Inexhaustive)*, special section, *Free Verse*

"Island century", "Dream sequence for the century, with sonata", *Cerise Press*

"Quilt with birds" and "Standing", *Midway Journal*

Four poems, *diode* 5.2

2011

"Scaffold body", "House troubles", *Konundrum Engine Literary Review*

"Future tense", *The Rumpus*

"Rapture", *Quarterly West*

2010

Three poems, *dislocate*

Five poems, *This Joy+Ride*

"Elegy", "Kingfishers", *Staple* 72

2009

"First principles", "2/", *Cerise Press*

"Fulling", "When in the hour", *Prairie Schoone*

"Excavation", *Verse Daily*

Fiction

"A Report on *Three Flemish Men Building a Dam in the Traditional Way*", *Birkensnake*, 2013

"Procedure for Certification of Death", *Two Serious Ladies*, 2013

"List of Survivors", *Bluestem*, 2012

"A Matter of Public Record", *DLA*GRAM, 2012

"The Prairie Town", *The Rake*, December 2007

Non-fiction (articles and essays)

"Naturalisations" (in Dutch translation) *nY*, 2013

Eight essays on Virginia Woolf, fragmentation and writing process in *Necessary Fiction*, June 2013

"Algarve: An Abecedarium", *The Collagist*, September 2011

Non-fiction (reviews)

"*The Alphabet Not Unlike the World*—Katrina Vandenberg", in *Cerise Press*, 2013

"*Cell Traffic*, by Heid Erdrich" in *American Poetry Journal*, 2012

"*Static Cling*, by Cathleen Allyn Conway" in *Sabotage Reviews*, 2012

"*limite désir*, by Meghan McNealy" in *Sabotage Reviews*, 2012

"*#romance*, by Jess Green" in *Sabotage Reviews*, 2012

"*How Many Camels Is Too Many?*, by Colette Sensier" in *Sabotage Reviews*, 2012

"*The Little Office of the Immaculate Conception*, by Martha Silano" in *Cerise Press*, 2012

"*Bluets*, by Maggie Nelson" in *Cerise Press*, 2012

"The Last Book I Loved" on *The Rumpus*, 2011

"Stardust: Sharon Bryan's *Sharp Stars*" in *American Poetry Journal*, 2011

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An opening foray:
reading Twombly's *The Ceiling*

A. 'How to initiate intimacy with objects':

Cy Twombly, *The Ceiling*, 2007-2009 (Musée du Louvre, Paris)

Seven out of the thirty historians I talked to admitted to crying in front of paintings, but several thousand saw my questionnaire and didn't answer at all. The response rate among academics, as a sociologist would say, was unusually low. The overwhelming majority don't cry, never have, and don't wish they could. How can I explain that fact, unless I say that many people who become academics fail to feel anything very strongly? [...] Absence of strong emotion becomes the norm, and I think many academics end up living their lives pretty much without it.¹

To be "in the literal sense of the word—sym-pathetic; not necessarily to approve, but to feel along with it as a thing that is like no other".²

As a prelude to this dissertation, and its ideas about the possibility of constructing a loving approach to texts—as well as as a concrete demonstration of what I meant when I wrote in the abstract that I aim in part to push at the boundaries of what academic work is and how it is constituted—I want to offer an example of my own. Because this section engages with a painting, its coherence vis-à-vis an approach to texts may not be immediately clear. However, the approach described in this dissertation has as one source the intimations of an approach (based on desire) in W. J. T. Mitchell's work. He writes that "[all] the tropes of vitality and desire we apply to visual works of art are transferred and transferrable to the domain of textuality", although of course "not without translation or modification".³ Mitchell's own considerations of texts within a monograph on images offers parity: although Mitchell acknowledges that literary and visual images (as he calls them) are different,⁴ they are related to one another by their enactment of and capacity for desire. In part it is this desire that creates the relation between texts and images—a relation of tension, in which pictures "want equal rights with language, not to be turned into language".⁵ The dissertation takes its understanding of text from the work of Roland Barthes; he, too, does not limit considerations of text to one 'kind' of text, arguing that we "cannot by right restrict the text to what is written (to literature)".⁶ To do so would focus on product over process—the text as an ongoing or continual making calls for a focus

1 Elkins, James. *Pictures and Tears* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 103.

2 Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth Century Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 63, quoted in W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 82.

3 Mitchell, W.J.T. *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 55.

4 The literary image "does not have to be faced directly, but is distanced by the secondary mediation of language" (31).

5 Mitchell, 47.

6 Barthes, Roland. "Theory of the Text" in *Untying the Text*, Robert Young, ed. (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1981), 41.

on the latter. Barthes' text is expansive enough to accommodate 'texts' which appear as objects,⁷ like Cy Twombly's *The Ceiling*. If the text is, as Barthes says, "what is written",⁸ then it is fair to say that this painting, considered especially in the context of Twombly's interest in writing as a form of mark-making (and vice-versa) can be considered a text for the purposes of this dissertation. Furthermore, others of Barthes' descriptions of 'text' are aptly applied to Twombly's work: that it is "a fragment of language";⁹ that it is "massive, rather than numerative".¹⁰

The question of intimacy with objects is a difficult and unusual one. The tendency exists, as will be demonstrated in parts of the literature review and in Chapter 1, for 'soft' subjects to adopt the methodologies of their 'hard' counterparts in order to represent themselves in the light which is generally considered favourable (for funding bodies, of course, but also in academic institutions generally).¹¹ Intimacy with objects puts the interlocutor or interrogator (the subject) into a place of some equality with the object they interrogate, forcing consideration not only of the desires of the subject, but of the form "those desires take as they are projected back at us [by the object], making demands upon us, seducing us to feel and act in specific ways".¹² To initiate intimacy with an object in a scholarly context is to trouble the structuring boundaries between the other, especially the objectified other, and the self which have informed Western thought for centuries, and which manifest themselves in concerns for 'objectivity', as well as in the repression of data which cannot be confirmed empirically—information gleaned from our senses, feelings, and emotions. The repression of the felt *in favour of* the known or proven means that in an environment that exclusively privileges 'objectivity' (or the uncrossed division between the subject and the object), intimacy cannot be a way of producing knowledge. But that such a repression exists and informs some scholarship does not rule out feeling as an approach to wisdom; it just designates it to some extent a fringe tactic.¹³ Where modes of objectivity engender iconoclasm—the critical 'smashing' of the object in order to overturn its power—an approach to the object that acknowledges its effects on the self requires a simultaneous nod to the object as an other capable of affecting us, and the inappropriateness of 'smashing' such an

7 Not to mention discussion earlier in this dissertation about the etymological and homophonic relations between text/textile/material/stuff. See Chapter 2.

8 Barthes, 1981, 32.

9 Ibid, 35.

10 Ibid, 40. To say *The Ceiling* is 'massive, rather than numerative' is to say that it is non-count, that it is 'much' rather than 'many'. In other words, its structure is not noticeably partite. Of course, massive also carries connotations of huge size, impressiveness.

11 Chapter 1, Section B, which deals with the treatment of creative writing in the Research Excellence Framework.

12 Mitchell, 25.

13 That is to say, neither scholarship via subjective involvement—via one's emotions, let's say—nor via access to some idealised and probably inaccessible 'objectivity' are more 'real' or 'authentic' producers of knowledge than one another. They are simply additional or companionable possible modes of making thought. A saw does not take away from the skill of a carpenter who is good with a lathe; it provides another approach.

(equal or responsive) other. Mitchell submits the possibility of a creative model which would not 'smash' the other, but break its *silence*, asking it (or providing a space for it) to "speak and resonate [...] transforming its hollowness into an echo chamber for human thought". To initiate intimacy with an object, then, is in part to acknowledge its effects; in part to understand that knowledge *can* originate with things that cannot be understood rationally or iterated methodically; and to sense the resonance, i.e. the possibility for meaning, of the object or of one's relationship to the object.

By the same token, to approach an object (or any text) without aiming to fix it, to refuse a claim of knowing it absolutely in favour of acknowledgement that it can only ever be known partially, is in the terms of this dissertation to come toward the object lovingly.¹⁴ Insofar as love can be understood as respect for the otherness of the other,¹⁵ then a non-rational, non-totalising knowledge of the other-object is such an approach, however it is gone about. The question remains about how to initiate intimacy with objects (or texts)—about the circumstances in which it could happen. Mitchell writes that the "life of images is not a private or individual matter",¹⁶ and though he is speaking to the fact that images take part in an explicitly visual and therefore public or shared life, his statement also gestures to the possibility of the life of images contradicting a fundamental tenet of an empirical, method-based way of studying them, in favour of an approach which considers their effects and desires. That tenet is the idea of the affectively isolated, single subject on which a whole history of scholarship—including study of images—depends.

Teresa Brennan's work points out the possibility of receiving information, knowledge, and even wisdom through channels other than empirical, rational, or methodical ones. It also develops the theory that emotions and affect are not contained by the individual, circulating under the skin but intransmissible; instead, the transmission of affect is a bodily and embodied process that contradicts the emotionally bounded subject of Western philosophy. Such a subject, Brennan argues, is an "aberration",¹⁷ a construction that has been convenient for a philosophy and social structure that seeks "knowledge as a means to control [...] aligned with discipline imposed from without, or objectification",¹⁸ but not 'natural' or necessary. Recognising the transmission of affect means recognising what one projects onto the other. It provides the possibility to transform and "reorder

14 See the discussion of Lévinas' conceptions of love in Chapter 4, to which this sentence refers.

15 Per Derrida; see Chapter 3.

16 Mitchell, 93.

17 Brennan, Teresa. *The Transmission of Affect*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004), 25.

18 Brennan, 106.

aggression”.¹⁹ But this recognition “requires being in the world [...] subjecting oneself to eddies or even torrents of affect, while somehow maintaining equilibrium”.²⁰ Recognising that affect flows between subjects (or objects and subjects) means recognising that those subjects are not bounded as we might believe. If the subject is in fact not bounded, then all of the senses and all of the different kinds of sensory information can be used to construct understanding.

Brennan shows how the constitution of the subject is not an entirely self-contained and autogenic process by recourse, for example, to the interaction of hormones and pheromones. Even the sense of smell (by which pheromones enter the body) is penetrative, physically crossing the boundaries of the individual body and creating sensations which in turn create knowledge about the environment and others in it. The self understood as penetrable and affectively related to its surroundings (including the human and non-human others around it) forces a reconsideration both of the other as object (and one's perception as 'objective') and of the role of “sensing and feeling”²¹ in the creation of knowledge.

For example, consider what Brennan calls the 'foundational fantasy'. For Brennan, this fantasy is what predicates the bounded, Western individual and “explains how it is that we come to think of ourselves as separate from others”;²² it is formed in the binary pairs of *I am good/You are bad* and *You are good/I am bad*.²³ The foundational fantasy, which relies on bounded and separate individual subjects, does not allow for the possibility of the object's affect or its effect on the subject. It clings to a situation in which power goes one direction. But such clinging “will limit thinking unless it is actively resisted. It also limits practice”.²⁴ A fundamental disconnect from the other, even the non-human other, rules out certain kinds of practice and certain ways of gathering knowledge or creating wisdom, thus creating a knowledge base which is inherently partial—biased, and not 'objective', if objective can be taken to mean being “fair, honest and methodical” about “the whole range where subjective experience affects objective facts”.²⁵ In other words, if the subject is bounded and affectively disconnected from its surroundings, then “studying what one has experienced oneself and valuing it” (Brennan's definition of subjectivity) is ruled out; the objective is understood as “in some

19 Brennan, 135.

20 Brennan, 134.

21 Brennan, 19.

22 Brennan, 14.

23 Brennan, 13.

24 Brennan, 14.

25 Midgley, Mary. *Science and Poetry*. (New York and London: Routledge Classics, 2006), 172-173.

way free from affect”.²⁶

Brennan proposes alternate ways of being with others in order to acknowledge the non-containment of the subject and the transmission of affect; she calls these discernment or living attention, and contrasts them to the projection of the foundational fantasy by which the separation between subjects is accomplished. Both love and reason are aspects of this attention and “the embodiment of its connective ability”.²⁷ Living attention, or being with the other without projecting onto the other the qualities we do not desire in ourselves, allows for discernment. To discern, rather than to project, is to react to situations according to “information from the body’s divers systems [...] gleaned precisely by feeling or sensing”.²⁸ An “active yet receptive” state,²⁹ discernment cannot be based on the boundaries assumed to be present in the ‘healthy’ subject, because some of those boundaries “are formed by unconscious projection” which “directs affects outward without consciously (as a rule) acknowledging that it is doing so”.³⁰ By contrast, discernment consciously examines affect and does not rely on separating the self from the other via the projection of negative affect.

Asking what pictures *want* rather than what they mean or do goes against the “usual way of sorting out” our cultural ‘double consciousness’ about images as ‘living’ things. In a move that exemplifies Brennan’s definition of projection, we “attribute one side of it (generally the naïve, magical, superstitious side) to someone else, and claim the hardheaded, critical, and skeptical positions as [our] own”.³¹ Rather than severing us from “affective connections with the surrounding environment and others in it”,³² attention of the kind to which Brennan and Mitchell allude returns the scholar to a connection with the circuits and currents that come to her from outside herself, and allows her to ask what these could mean, and what kind of knowledge could come from interacting with them.

To sound the icons rather than smash them is to step, momentarily, outside of the critical norm and to “permit entry into a new idea”.³³ Thinking with our feelings—but not allowing ourselves to be dominated by them; that is, allowing them to take part in the discourse we create and which creates us—allows us to admit that our thoughts are inflected, informed, and even created by our feelings

26 Ibid.

27 Brennan, 41.

28 Brennan, 23.

29 Brennan, 135.

30 Brennan, 11.

31 Mitchell, 7.

32 Mitchell, 19.

33 Ibid.

and sensings. It allows for a more complete and more honest 'world-making'. It also acknowledges that the objects of our study affect us—that our 'objectivity' is flavoured with traces of ourselves. Brennan's concept of discernment follows closely along these lines. In arguing for the importance of a theory of the transmission of affect, Brennan is not arguing for the replacement of 'thought' with 'feeling' (where those terms stand falsely opposite one another), or for some theory of the personal in its selfish, ego-bound form. She is arguing for an understanding of ourselves and others which takes into account both the way we see and the reasons we see how we see, an understanding based in "comparison, detachment and living attention".³⁴

Before I begin addressing Twombly's *Ceiling* directly, I want to bring in one more strand to this braid: Jean Luc Marion's discussion of the *I* of philosophy. He wrote that the "*I* of philosophers [...] is supposed to be universal, a disengaged spectator [...] a spokesman for each and everyone because he thinks exclusively what anyone can by right know in the place of anyone else [...] : that which concerns no one personally".³⁵ It is against this unembodied, transcendental *I* that Marion writes (adopting the first-person pronoun, saying "one must speak of love in the same way as one must love—in the first person").³⁶ To write about love, to think about love is to think about "that which affects each of us as such".³⁷ To write, therefore, about an object—a visual text—which I love, to initiate intimacy with it, I use the *I*: the fallible, individual, without the whole canon of 'disembodied spectators', and, as Marion does, "at my own risk and peril".³⁸

Intimacy with objects allows the writer to put aside the 'necessity' of an apparently unemotional 'objectivity' and to acknowledge the subjective relationship which informs our study—and which appears as simply as the feeling of liking or disliking the 'object' of study. Initiating intimacy with objects is a question of vulnerability, of conceding the possibility that such relationships can affect us as much as they do the objects in question. In such a concession we are vulnerable both to the effects/affect of the objects, and to the judgment of others in our community who might not see the value of such an approach. Nevertheless, this is the approach taken by James Elkins in *Pictures and Tears*.³⁹

³⁴ Brennan, 122.

³⁵ Marion, Jean-Luc. *The Erotic Phenomenon* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 9.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Marion, 2007:10.

³⁹ It is also the approach taken by Mitchell when he argues that we would do well to begin our studies of paintings with the question of pictures' own desires; and the approach advocated by Irigaray's call for a more 'musical, touchful, artistic' way of being with the other, which, this dissertation presumes, is to include the textual other.

How does one go about crying in front of a painting? Why would one want to, and what would such a response *mean*? Is it possible to read a painting via the experience of crying in front of it, such that the painting and the tears become coextensive, somehow implicated in one another? Can the 'text' of the painting accommodate such a response, or even call for it? Can the text of the history of scholarly writing, criticism, theory, and art history accommodate such a response?

To cry in front of a painting: there is no method one can follow in order for this to take place.⁴⁰ It either happens or it does not; one cannot follow the examples of the 'literature' and assume a similar result will occur. To cry in front of a painting, then, is a private and even irreplicable kind of scholarship. It requires foregoing the part of oneself which, in response to training or social norms or milieu, might register the sentimental and dismiss it as such. It requires a kind of surprise which Elkins associates with the time *before* one has the history of an object to 'contaminate' one's emotional experience of it.⁴¹ But the association of tears and a 'pure,' pre-knowledge state is limiting. It assumes that tears have something to teach us that can only take place before the 'corruption' of knowledge. Instead of separating tears and knowledge into two realms of unrelated or competing 'authenticity', perhaps what tears have to offer is something which can *also* be read, and so forms part of, even as it might provide challenges to, the idea of knowledge. Perhaps crying in front of paintings indicates something about that knowledge (or about what is knowledge) that does not have to do with classifying one thing as more 'pure' than another, but with a relationship between kinds of knowing and ways of knowing.

Elkins is clear that his aim is not "to separate tears from history" but to show that "every response is partial, and any emotion is mixed with its companion thoughts".⁴² Crying in front of a painting, however spontaneous or personal it may seem, is the product of all that brings one to that point—including awareness of history, theory, and one's own disciplinary tendency to look dry-eyed at the objects of study. Crying in front of a painting elides none of these qualities necessarily—except dry-eyedness. To cry in front of a painting is to allow one's response to take the form of something other than an essay, a set of sketches, a critique; that is, something other than the syntaxes of mark-making (writing and drawing) that comprise our history of knowledge. Crying as a critical response—that is, crying as the response a critic or scholar makes to a painting—is one way to incorporate the body

40 This is not to say that there is no literature on how to *talk about* the experience of crying in front of paintings. Elkins' book is an obvious place to begin; the work done in this prelude obviously engages with this.

41 Elkins makes this association because, in his findings and personal experience, the more an art historian knows, the less likely he or she is to have cried in front of a painting.

42 Elkins, 93.

into the work of thinking. Crying produces a work that is ephemeral and to some extent inexplicable and unapproachable: seeming completely personal, but still related to other, supposedly less personal, productions of work.

C.1: Forensics: an examination of public crying

forensics: Origin mid 17th cent.: from Latin *forensis* ‘*in open court, public,*’ from *forum* (from Latin, literally ‘what is out of doors,’ originally denoting an enclosure surrounding a house; related to *fores* ‘*outside door*’)

On May 14th, 2010, at about six o'clock in the evening, I was in Paris. Specifically, I was in the Louvre with a companion who had never been there. Toward this museum I have the unfortunate attitude of someone who, having spent a good deal of time in a place, no longer sees the strangeness and beauty of it. I had spent many days in Paris when I lived in France (and had returned several times since then), and my preference ran to smaller museums—fewer people, less ornament, less ostentation. So I went to the Louvre reluctantly and at the behest of my companion. My feelings about this visit are important to this account because they indicate that I was in no particular state of heightened anticipation. If anything, I was prepared to be a little bored. My focus was elsewhere, not on the museum. I did have one reason I wanted to go to the Louvre, however, and this was my condition for going at all: I wanted to see a new painting by Cy Twombly that I heard had been installed. I had no real idea about this painting. I hadn't read anything about it. At this point, I can't even recall how I knew that it existed. But I did, and as I have a special affection for Twombly's work, I wanted to go and see it.

My affection for Twombly's work had always in the past been limited to an aesthetic appreciation: I admired his techniques and his ways of creating meaning with marks; I liked his works that dealt with history and natural history. My attitude toward him was that of an enthusiastic student toward her teacher, not that of an acolyte. Again, although I wanted to see his painting, I had no *especial* desire to visit it. This was not a pilgrimage. If my companion had not already wanted to go to the Louvre, I would not have made a visit just to see this painting.

We walked through sections of European paintings from the Renaissance (obligatory stop by the *Mona Lisa* and the Botticellis) and then, following small plaques on the wall, made our way through rooms of Roman metalwork. The floors were cool, pale marble. The woodwork was dark. In the rooms, the cases of gold and lead objects glowed. I walked into an antechamber containing two such

cases and stood facing the room I'd come from to look at them. They were small and dark and the room, despite being lit with museum lights and the light from the window, felt relatively dark, too. I turned to walk into the next room.

Elkins lays out what he imagines to be the ideal conditions under which one might cry while looking at a painting: to go to a museum alone; to avoid trying to see everything, focusing instead on a room or two; to minimise distraction and to try to be alone in the rooms; to take your time; to pay full attention; to “do your own thinking”, by which he seems to mean to avoid others' interpretations, especially those of ‘experts’; to watch out for others who are “really looking” and to speak with them about their experiences; and to be faithful—to spend time with paintings repeatedly. In short, although he has never cried in front of a painting, he imagines that part of what prompts such a response is a living attention to the object—a being-with that opens the viewer up to receive affect, although he doesn't put it in those terms. Elkins imagines that by being with the painting on one's own (and its own) terms, by ignoring others' readings of it, and by spending time alone with it, it might be possible to cry in front of—or because of—it. The idea of being ‘alone’ with the painting—alone, without the burden of history or of knowledge, of others' interpretations—relegates crying in front of paintings again to the realm of the ‘pure’ experience, removed from the taint of the known. In my experience, crying was *not* divorced from knowing; it was simply an extension beyond the (verbal) language I had at the time and into another kind of expression, which I am now hard-pressed to explain. I *knew*; I just couldn't talk about it *yet*.

Elkins writes of Rothko's biographer having felt the “need to sit, and even to sleep, in front of Rothko's paintings, even though he was not tired”.⁴³ In front of the heaviness and glow of Rothko's canvases, that human body reacted *bodily*. As in a relation with another human being, the feeling of the paintings has an effect on the viewer, particularly on the viewer who is for some reason especially sensitive to that painting at that time. My reaction had to do with the size of *The Ceiling*; something about how big it was impelled me to cry. I was overwhelmed with it, by it, and by the feeling that the room itself, by grace of the painting, was full of *love*. I felt something like what was described by Mary Muller, an art historian who *has* cried in front of a painting: she experienced “a sudden total identification [...] the recognition of something similar, the experience of being part of it, and maybe even a feeling of grace, a moment of unforgettable happiness”.⁴⁴

43 Elkins, 172.

44 Elkins, 179.

The feeling of the ceiling is, as far as I could tell then or can now, what caused the crying. I had a sense of it being huge, unbearably large, but in a good way—the way certain holy buildings feel large but welcoming or containing. I felt welcomed by the size of the painting. The immensity of *The Ceiling* is part of the problem of describing my experience. It is indeed, as the text is in Barthes' words, "massive, rather than numerative".⁴⁵ What about this massiveness called for an immediate affective reaction, rather than an immediate rational one? Why did I start crying there, standing in the doorway to a room that was suddenly blue and white and gold? What in the painting asked for or provoked that response instead of another kind of awe, accompanied by a more methodical, iterable reaction?

In factual terms, the work, *The Ceiling*, can be measured and its details can be noted and filed away in the correct art-historical filing cabinet (waiting to be called up in newspaper articles or research or gallery didactics), so why is it so difficult to record the feeling of the painting? Why did I cry in front of this painting and not in front of any other, even paintings I've loved, or even others of Cy Twombly's works, ones I've admired? Although these questions demand answers, I'm not sure that I can provide them. What comes to mind in reply is simply the *size* of the painting: how large, how high, and how it filled the whole room—and how that size seemed to impart a kind of generosity to the work. It filled the room without stifling it. In fact, it seemed to fill me in such a way as to welcome me rather than require my silence or obedience. In short, and in a way I have not otherwise experienced, *The Ceiling* called me to be in a relation with it which included both my body and my intellect, not one or the other. It was a path leading off of the one I had assumed I had to take (because it was the 'pure' or 'authentic' way of making academic work)—the path of apparently dry-eyed, primarily rational scholarship. Like the jar in Tennessee of Wallace Stevens' poem, the painting made the room surround it. It beckoned to me and to my ways of thinking. It was a burning bush standing there speaking, and sobbing in the doorway was the first response I could offer.

C.2: The contribution of tears

The question is not only why did I cry, but what can my experience of crying in front of this painting impart to my approach of it? How can I speak or write of this experience in such a way as to honour that response? How can my tears become something besides the single experience of them—that is, can they become part of the theory I make? Is there a place for them in my scholarship? If I choose to

45 Barthes, Roland. *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill & Wang, 1981), 40.

ignore the fact of crying in front of *The Ceiling* in favour of some more 'dry-eyed' approach, how can I acknowledge that such an approach is partial, askew, biased—albeit in the academically comfortable mode of the 'objective'? Does crying in front of a painting and then writing about it—about the painting, but also about the crying—make me a 'bad' academic? When he takes his students to see an exhibition that has been 'manipulated' (lighting, music) to evoke feelings in the viewers instead of presenting the paintings in an emotionally sterile field, one response (derisive) is that the curators “want you to love the paintings, not just appreciate them”.⁴⁶ Even Elkins, sympathetic to crying in front of paintings, at one point says he “thought [the student who had cried in front of a painting] hadn't behaved as a good art historian should [...]. [Her duty was] to understand how works of art were supposed to affect *other* people [...]. She should have been analyzing [sic] the show, not letting herself get swept away by it”.⁴⁷ But are getting 'swept away' by *The Ceiling* and analysing it necessarily such different propositions?

To relate to *The Ceiling* in tears was to have related to it in the subjective mode. It was *I*, only *I*, who stood there bawling. It would have been impossible to hide behind the name or words of another. My tears were my signature, my “way of taking on tradition [...] accepting or rejecting it and its authority”.⁴⁸ Authorised to some extent by Elkins—but indirectly also by Irigaray, Cixous, Deleuze, Barthes, Derrida, Lévinas—I have taken on their calls for other ways of being, other ways of reading, and, in the doorway of the Salle des Bronzes, made it my own.

The signature of one's own tears: in what way is this 'academic'? Elkins writes that when asked whether “there might be a link between the 'knowledge' gained by crying and the knowledge—not in quotation marks—gained by studying” most of the art historians he asked replied, unambiguously, that “crying is not part of the discipline, and has nothing to contribute”.⁴⁹ Other replies called crying “private, irrelevant, incommunicable, misguided, and ignorant [...] unprofessional, embarrassing, 'feminine', unreliable, incoherent, private, and largely inexplicable [...] philosophically dubious and historically outdated”.⁵⁰ None of these respondents denied that crying *could* happen in front of paintings (although few of them had experienced the phenomenon), but almost all of them seemed to believe that the appropriate scholarly gesture was one which divided such an experience from the appropriate matters for and stimuli of scholarship.

46 Elkins, 184.

47 Elkins, 185-186.

48 Naas, Michael. *Taking on The Tradition: Jacques Derrida and the Legacies of Deconstruction*. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003), xviii.

49 Elkins, 94.

50 Elkins, 95.

But delimiting crying in front of a painting from the scope of appropriate, even intellectual, possible reactions to it also places limitations on what can be 'intellect'. To walk into the Salle des Bronzes at the Louvre and start crying describes the dimensions of Twombly's painting more viscerally than a factual statement of the width and breadth of it, the time spent making it, or the forms that fill it. Although recounting my 'unprofessional, embarrassing, feminine' reaction to the ceiling will not tell a reader in the first instance that the ground of the painting is a rich cobalt blue marked with spindly Greek letters and the glowing bodies of spheres in whites, yellows, and golds, it provides a field within which these physical descriptions can resonate. That that field is the personal should not automatically relegate it to the sidelines of scholarship. It is honest to admit partiality, non-objectivity. Subjectivity. It also does not rule out the combination of the personal with a more 'dry-eyed' approach.

For me, that day, there was nothing to be done in that room that could have been accomplished *first* with my rational intellect. My intellect is small. This is not false modesty: I am not talking about 'intelligence', the category of ways of knowing which encompasses ways I know how I know what I know and ways I don't, but 'intellect', the faculty of reasoning and understanding 'objectively'—as my dictionary puts it. Understood this way, intellect is partial, and not even the greatest part of my experience. That is, it is something I am aware of; it is something whose reactions and tendencies and aims I generally know. It needs a small thing, or a manageable large thing, to look at or relate to, if it is going to stay afloat (which is to say, if it is going to try to hold back, rather than be overwhelmed by or even work with, my emotions). *The Ceiling* is many things, but it is not manageable. It is engulfing. It surrounds, it welcomes. My intellect, in the face of something which was so much bigger than it, deferred to an emotional response as primary. It was not some other person having that response to the painting: it was me, the scholar, thinker, and writer who has seen and studied and thought and written about other paintings without a tear. *The Ceiling* simply mobilised a different response and left me to allow—or not—that response to inflect my work.

C.3: Reading *The Ceiling*

“Paintings are intellectual things. It's not normal love.”⁵¹

I am trying to puzzle out whether perhaps there is a way I can conceive of—or can expand my conception to encompass—crying *as* an academic response, as a production of knowledge, and *from* that to read this painting in particular. I want to approach this work via its first effect on me, rather than ignore that effect.

I am used to understanding my scholarly work as taking certain forms. This is one of them—the written record of ideas, with footnotes, titles. But much in the same way that a piece of performance art is suspended somewhere between the performance and its documentation, I find myself questioning the location of my scholarship of *The Ceiling*. It seems to me that my tears were an intellectual product (that is, they created meaning that I can understand) but one that I cannot replicate by writing about them, no matter how much I circle or how often I try to recapture that moment. I want to say that I am trying to understand them, but I know as I say it that in fact I *have* understood them. It is the demand for a translation that I feel. Crying in front of *The Ceiling*, I wasn't able to phrase the question, but now, with the distance of time and the English Channel reducing that immediacy, I can ask, what did this picture want?

The answer that I receive, both when I imagine myself in the Salle des Bronzes and when I look at photographs taken that day of the ceiling and the room, is *nothing*. *The Ceiling* does not seem to *need* anything. The fact that it is suspended above you as you enter the room, filling the room without being oppressive, makes *The Ceiling* the most complete thing you can see. Like the sky, it appears everywhere. *The Ceiling* is so large that one cannot stand in front of it and see it all; even standing in the doorway, looking into the room, parts are not visible. The edges of the room, with their decorative mouldings, give the sense of being in a temple without a roof. They appear to support something that appears not to be there: of course, they are *actually* supporting the ceiling over which *The Ceiling* is stretched. But they seem to support nothing and open instead to a bright blue field floating with words and spheres. The temple is open to the heavens. At the far end, against the wall, four Corinthian columns and a portico decorated with gold reinforce the feeling of being in a temple. Along the wall, tall, rectangular windows let in daylight that complements the light of the

51 Elkins, 185.

gold, the lights in the cases of bronzes, and the light reflecting from the paler spheres. The blue of the field; the pale gold, deep indigo, blue-grey, yellow, and white of the spheres along the edge—these act together to make the movement of the painting one that gestures to the centre, which seems to recede, just as the sky does when one lies and looks up at it.

The word 'temple' comes from Latin: *templum* meant space which was open or consecrated, separate. Insofar as the Salle des Bronzes might be said to be consecrated, it is only consecrated to the memory of a religion no longer practiced, or perhaps to the non-religious conservation of the memory of past beliefs and their relics. But it is separate—a room with only one door, off another room, a way from the main corridors. And it *is* an open space, or feels like one. An open space, a vacuum, may not 'want' to be filled, but it does lack the quality of being-full. A person who enters that space fills it, or at least renders it not-empty. In the case of *The Ceiling*, the sense that the painting *is* the sky, receding above you, is what creates the feeling of being in a temple (the same feeling does not exist for me in rooms with much older 'sky' paintings, surrounded by cherubs, women, billowing yards of clothing). This sense of recession is perhaps the origin of the feeling of welcome that overwhelmed me: *The Ceiling* felt like it was waiting for a viewer to come in and see it there. Its largeness and its pervasion of the room did not push me out (*intruder!*) but welcomed me in; made space for me. That the painting makes its home in a room which is open via doors at one end and windows along the sides further enhances the feeling of welcome: I had opportunities to leave, to look away, and to move. At the same time, *The Ceiling* was always there, waiting for me (or any other viewer) to see it, stand under it, make connections between it and the delicate bronzes and the room around it. It makes space for others to be with it, and this space is temple-like both in its connectivity and in its openness.

The temple as a religious site: religion, perhaps related to the Latin 'ligare', which means to link or to bind. Religion here as the feeling of connection between things, and temple as a site of opening. The Salle des Bronzes as a site of religion is non-dogmatic; it preaches no sermon. There is a sense of being 'at home', of welcome, as I said above. But there is also disconnection—as soon as the sense of belonging or home, of 'ligare', linking, is felt, there is also the reminder, the poignancy, that this is *not* home, that this does *not* belong to you or you to it. *The Ceiling* is welcoming but aloof. It does not incorporate the viewer. The connections that are made between it and the human body are connections of difference, rather than assimilation. There are no human bodies in this painting; nothing of my scale or form to which to compare myself, no allegorical position I can assume within the painting. I cannot make the painting be *about me* or about beings who look like me. This keeps

me distant from *The Ceiling* and preserves my own sense of self even as I experience an overwhelming feeling of being surrounded by and related to the painting. The feeling of connection-disconnection is what kept me there, looking at the ceiling, almost attached but not quite, almost absorbed, but not quite. The obstacle in the way of assimilation is the painting's insistence on its own difference and its own distance. In this temple, this religious site, the links that occur are possible rather than necessary.

The size and composition of *The Ceiling* at least contribute to, if they don't actually create, the sense of warm encompassment by the painting. In the essay "Art and Objecthood", Michael Fried uses the word 'presentness' to stand for "the quality some artworks have of being immediately *there*, filling the field of experience, absorbing the viewer's gaze and thoughts".⁵² 'Presentness', of course, has echoes of 'presence' and through these to a transcendental or authentic presence that *is* outside of or beyond the bodies of things. But 'presentness', the *thereness* of art objects, is not about their fullness in terms of something *beyond* them, but about their being full as they are; the fullness of the single experience of them. If they transcend, this transcendence cannot be assured for anyone other than the subject experiencing that feeling of transcendence; if they absorb, it is likewise the single viewer's gaze and thoughts that are absorbed. Dogma and doctrine cannot be made out of presentness, which preserves in itself the contradiction of transcendence which is non-iterable, non-transferable. 'Presentness' is not a transcendent transcendence, then, but an immanent one. *The Ceiling* by grace of its physical properties, *does* actually 'fill the field of experience'. It *is* very immediately *there*, materially present in the first view of the Salle des Bronzes almost no matter how one enters (unless it is with one's eyes fixed on the floor). The attributes of the painting are such that it *is with* the viewer, even an unwitting or unintentioned viewer, as soon as the viewer enters the room.

Another figure used by art historians who have come to the ends of their descriptive rope when approaching paintings is related more directly to the feeling of being in a temple, albeit one which is no longer consecrated to anything, or one in which the gods to whom it was consecrated have fallen out of belief. This figure is grace. Fried concludes his essay with the sentence "Presentness is grace". Both words are possible "euphemisms for religious experience"; Elkins names the "numinous; the frightening, intimate, overwhelming presence of the sacred" as a synonymic euphemism.⁵³ The 'presentness' of *The Ceiling* is intimate and overwhelming. That this is immanent rather than transcendent fits the painting and its space: this decommissioned or never-holy temple-like space filled not with the Authorised Presence of God but with the material and physical presentness of *The*

⁵² Elkins, 179.

⁵³ Elkins, 180.

Ceiling has a grace which is not reliant on belief in something 'out there' but on experience of what is physically present here: the geometry of the room, the space of it, the painting on the ceiling. *The Ceiling* is an offering, simply appearing in the same way as the sky does. Unlike the sky, it speaks. Inscribed in rectangular lozenges are words (Greek words, in contrast to the Hebrew words inscribed in the tablets of the example with which I'll close this dissertation), or, more precisely, the names of Greek sculptors—although not sculptors whose works appear in the Salle des Bronzes. If "language makes it possible to evoke what is not there"⁵⁴ then Twombly's painted names evoke the presence of these sculptors—and, metonymically, of an ongoing process of creation, making them present despite their actual absence (and they are doubly absent: both dead and thus not in the room, and unrepresented by their work).

Immanent presentness; religion as a linking or a connection; the subjective experience of the painting; the painting speaking: these ways of talking about *The Ceiling* are really ways of talking about how—by its size, its visibility, its positioning, or qualities that can't be named, only experienced—the painting puts itself into, and seems, by doing so, to desire, relation with the viewer. In the end, the experience of a painting is always entered into as a relation: the painting alone cannot be viewed, and without a painting I cannot become the viewer of one. What the painting lacks, waits for, is to be seen. Which is to say, to be in relation. The question is, what kind of relation? Instead of the historical relationship between icon and iconoclast (as articulated by Mitchell), a relationship that takes into consideration the possibility of desire on the part of the painting. A relationship, then, that is totemic—that believes in the special significance and relationship between the painting and the viewer. It might be silly to say the painting has desires in the way that a human being has desires, or even in the way an animal or plant can be said to 'want' something. But the painting's desire for relation is built into its structure. And the desire for relation is most often a desire for relation that will take care with that relation, will not be violent toward it. *The Ceiling* seems to call for this kind of relation by the way it is present to the viewer, but also by its situation as something which recalls the sacred without invoking a particular transcendence.

⁵⁴ Richard Leeman, quoted in "Louvre art books: Cy Twombly", a post on <http://www.eveningallafternoon.com/2011/07/louvre-art-books-cy-twombly.html>, accessed 15 July 2011.

C.4: Other ways of reading

"Whole histories of painting assume that modernism has an analytic, deconstructive heart",⁵⁵ and perhaps it does. But that is not to say that such a heart is necessarily unconcerned with or unaffected by relation to the other, or the non-rational ways and kinds of knowing that attend relation, any more than the general noun 'science' is uninflected by desire (to know) or by feelings (curiosity, intuition). If deconstruction can be taken to mean, at its most fundamental, a deep, living attention to the other, then that attention extends to how we go about responding to others, including paintings (or traditions of painting). This understanding of deconstruction offers the possibility for analysis to live in the same space as—or at times stem from, or appear as—emotional or non-rational responses, such as crying. In order to participate in the tradition of deconstruction, it is not a matter only of restating arguments in familiar forms, or engaging 'methodically' with a certain category of subject matter; it is a question of "affirm[ing] and contest[ing] not only the arguments and claims of the tradition but traditional ways of making arguments and claims, of claiming authority, producing evidence, and gaining conviction, traditional modes of receiving and reading the tradition".⁵⁶

At one point, puzzled by his own inability to cry in front of a painting, and thinking through the reaction of his graduate student who *did* cry at an exhibition, Elkins writes, "Would I have cried if I hadn't been so much on the defensive? If I hadn't been so intent on resisting whatever the show had to offer?".⁵⁷ Elkins is privileging crying here, assigning it a value which is not inherent, because he 'can't' do it. But the fact that some people will cry in front of paintings and some will not; that some people will take crying as a kind of thought and some will dismiss it as meaningless to scholarship would be falsely construed as a drama in which one thing is triumphantly Good and the other abjectly Bad. The point of crying here is to complicate ideas that there could be a single, 'authentic' way to experience thought or to produce it, and tears themselves are no more 'authentic' than any other response. Elkins' reintroduction of the question of tears in the study of art is, however, an attempt to redress the tendency (*his* tendency) to dismiss what does not come from the dry-eyed intellect.

Of course, in the end, there is not just one way of going about making knowledge or of interacting with objects. The idea is not that tears are categorically better or more appropriate or more

⁵⁵ Elkins, 200.

⁵⁶ Naas, 2003: xix.

⁵⁷ Elkins, 185.

meaningful than intellectualising or arguing or theorising or thinking or laughing or jumping up and down. It is simply that tears *also* fall on the spectrum of possible human responses, even the responses of scholars, and that, as such, it is possible that tears, too, can teach us—and may even be able to teach things which drier eyes cannot.

I was able to cry because I had the time to do so. There was nowhere to go, no deadline to make. There was nothing that pressured me out of that response and into another mode. I had no role, officially. I was free to find my own way toward the painting, and the way I found was in tears. My crying in front of *The Ceiling* did not supplant my ability to think about it as an art historian; it complemented it and provided me with a more nuanced response. I came to an understanding of this painting that is different from that which I have of any other painting in front of which I have not cried. Moreover, crying in front of this painting demonstrated to me the possibility of intellectual knowledge originating in a non-objective experience. The written law which makes room for interpretation, the space in fundamental stories for the unknowable, the possibility of scholarship arising from tears, the way that each of these demonstrates connection rather than separation: connection between the reader and the text, connection between the object and the subject. It is this connection which begs an approach that is delicate while critical, sensitive while rigorous; an approach which acknowledges the whole person who senses, feels, and thinks—who both effects changes in the text and is affected by it.

Introduction and literature review

A. Introduction

“Again, there was always a context, she never simply held forth. She situated.”

C. D. Wright¹

“When I draw a straight line or conceive of an arrangement of tangible elements [...] I inevitably impose my own order on matter.”

Anne Truitt²

Looking at the night sky in my first weeks in England, I was glad to see the shapes of Orion, the Big Dipper, and Cassiopeia. The presence of these familiar figures in a strange country was reassuring. The comfort I found in those constellations was arbitrary, based my recognition of imagined lines between a few bright stars describing a legendary hunter. Despite this contingency, however, the comfort—the meaning—was there. Finding those stars, I was no longer lost and foreign; I belonged, things made sense. Such is the role of the constellation, whether the word refers to the well-known ancient groupings of stars or is used figuratively: juxtaposition, copresence create meaning.³ The figure of the constellation as a model for knowing, understanding, or finding out occurs in the writings of Walter Benjamin (“image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation”;⁴ “Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars”⁵) and, later, Theodor Adorno (“As a constellation, theoretical thought circles the concept it would like to unseal, hoping that it may fly open like the lock of a well-guarded safe-deposit box: in response, not to a single key or a single number, but to a combination of numbers”⁶). It is through this figure that this dissertation will broach the question of love as a mode of approach to texts. A constellation is a fitting figure for such an action, in that it emphasises production rather than creation: although new ‘lines’ might be drawn in the sky, the stars that the lines join are already there.

The central question of this dissertation is, “What would it be like, what would it mean, to approach texts lovingly?”. Such an approach is a consideration of relation to the other in which “the relation is

1 Wright, C. D. *Cooling Time: An American Poetry Vigil*. (Port Townsend, Washington: Copper Canyon Press, 2005), p. 34.

2 Truitt, Anne. From *Daybook: The Journal of an Artist (1974-79)*, excerpted in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*. Ed. Kristina Stiles, Peter Howard Selz. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 99.

3 The power of constellated objects is of course also at play in Twombly’s *The Ceiling*.

4 Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 463.

5 Benjamin, Walter, *Origin of the German Mourning Play*, p. 34, quoted in Weber, Samuel. *Benjamin’s -abilities*. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 313.

6 Adorno, Theodor. *Negative Dialectics*. Trans. E. B. Ashton. (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005), p. 163.

the smallest possible unit of analysis".⁷ As with any constellating, the question does not come out of thin air, but out of the greater assembly; in this case, the voices of writers in the canon of 20th-century theory and literature who gesture independently toward such a way of being with texts. These voices speak of a desire for a relation with the other, and consider that relation in terms of the word 'love'. For example, there is the voice of Luce Irigaray: "To go in search of oneself, especially in the relation with the other, represents a work not yet carried out by our culture of speaking"⁸ and "To go toward the other, to welcome the other into oneself open[s] non-vertical dimensions in the relation".⁹ There is the voice of Roland Barthes, who writes, "I unceasingly affirm love, within myself, as a value";¹⁰ and "The pleasure of the text is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas—for my body does not have the same ideas I do".¹¹

The body having its own ideas is echoed in the writing of Emmanuel Lévinas—he writes that "the caress is a mode of the subject's being [...] The seeking of the caress does not know what it seeks", and continues, "This 'not knowing', this fundamental disorder, is the essential", placing the unknown at the centre.¹² In writings by a Catholic theologian (Jean-Luc Marion) and a German poet (Rainer Maria Rilke), in the poems of E.E. Cummings and the theory of W. J. T. Mitchell, are calls for relation with the other as an essentially unknowable being. Such a relation, in such terms, resists assimilation of one party by another by its awareness of the otherness of the other.

It is Derrida who establishes the necessity of the otherness of the other for this dissertation, saying that to "ask a question, you must first tell the Other that I am speaking to you. Even to oppose or challenge the Other, you must say 'at least I speak to you', 'I say yes to our being in common together'". He goes on to say that "this is what I meant by love, this reaffirmation of the affirmation".¹³ In this case, the relation between the self and the other is underwritten by an acknowledgement of the other as an entity separate from the self, and Derrida speaks about it in reference to love as an ethos in his work. Love for the other is not, however, the only necessary

7 Haraway, Donna. *The Companion Species Manifesto*. (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), p. 20.

8 Irigaray, Luce. *The Way of Love*. (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), p. 43.

9 Ibid, 149.

10 Barthes, Roland. *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*. Trans. R. Howard. (London: Vintage, 2002), p. 22.

11 Barthes, Roland. *The Pleasure of the Text*. Trans. R. Miller. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p. 17.

12 Lévinas, Emmanuel. *The Lévinas Reader*. Ed. S. Hand. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 51.

13 Derrida, Jacques. "An Interview with Jacques Derrida". Interview with Nikhil Padgaonkar. Originally published in *Biblio: A Review of Books*, Vol. 3, no. 1, January-February 1997. Posted on Scribd and accessed there on 15/10/2010. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/6990116/Derrida-Interview-on-LoveNikhil-Padgaonkar>. Originally posted on <http://www.csun.edu/coms/grad/jd.nik.html>, and accessed there 27/10/2008. N. pag.

quantity in this relation. In *Points de suspension*, Derrida replies to a question about deconstruction as a term by saying,

La déconstruction comme telle ne se réduit ni à une méthode ni à une analyse [...] elle va au-delà de la décision critique même. C'est pourquoi elle n'est pas négative, bien qu'on l'ait souvent, malgré tant de précautions, interprétée ainsi. Pour moi, elle accompagne toujours une exigence affirmative, je dirai même qu'elle ne va jamais sans amour.¹⁴

That deconstruction accompanies and is accompanied by love (that it doesn't happen without love) means that the encounter with the other is marked by this attitude. In order for an encounter to take place—in order for a 'yes' to be able to be said and to be said-to—there must be two parties (at least): an I who is speaking and a you who is spoken to. That deconstruction in these two instances is referred to by Derrida as something that takes place with love, and that it is something enacted by someone in reference to something implies both that two mutually non-assimilated parties are necessary and that love has something to do with the parties' non-assimilation. Derrida's definition of love in deconstruction is not singular or simple; the affirmation of the other is not its limit, and involvement with the other does not necessarily equal an effacement of the self. Indeed Derrida acknowledges the relationship between love and narcissism in *Points*, saying,

Il n'y a pas le narcissisme et le non-narcissisme ; il y a des narcissismes plus ou moins compréhensifs, généreux, ouverts, étendus, et ce qu'on appelle le non-narcissisme n'est en général que l'économie d'un narcissisme beaucoup plus accueillant, hospitalier et ouvert à l'expérience de l'autre comme autre. Je crois que sans un mouvement de réappropriation narcissique, le rapport à l'autre serait absolument détruit, serait détruit d'avance. Il faut que le rapport à l'autre[...]—même s'il reste dissymétrique, ouvert sans réappropriation possible— il faut qu'il esquisse un mouvement de réappropriation dans l'image de soi-même pour que l'amour soit possible, par exemple. L'amour est narcissique".¹⁵

That is, without an open realization of the role of the self in the love of the other—the role of the love of the self which must be present in order for there to be a self which can love—relations with the other would be completely destroyed. A lack of relation to the self, a lack of a 'generous, open, reaching-out, welcoming' kind of narcissism (the effacement of the self in relations with the other) is not love; love is possible *via* a retaking of certain narcissisms. So when Derrida says that the love in deconstruction is 'saying yes to the other', what is present in that statement is not only a 'yes' to an other, but the a priori existence of the self who says yes (who desires a relation, whose relation to the other comes about because it is not assimilated to the other any more than it assimilates the other to

14 Derrida, Jacques. *Points de suspension: entretiens*, Choisis et présentés par Elisabeth Weber. (Paris: Galilée, 1992): 88-89.

15 Ibid, 212-213.

it) as well as the other whose being is not assimilated to the self. Love occurs between an assured self and an assured other, rather than between an obliterated self and an assured other, or vice-versa, or between two obliterated selves. It is, therefore, a way of knowing the other which at the same time requires a discerning attention to the self and to the currents between the self and the other.

As a sustained discussion contained in the literature review at the end of this introduction shows, there has been a turn within the humanities toward theories of affect and studies of the senses, and to some extent it is within this turn that this dissertation falls. I am interested in the possibility of love as a way of knowing, or love even as a challenge to (not a replacement for, but a complement to) other ways of knowing. Insofar as love, like affect and the body, has been repressed by a desire, or the imitation of a desire, to appear untouched by the personal, the subjective, this thesis benefits from the work done in affect theory.

While affect theory (with its emphasis on the bodily and felt as sites of knowing and its recourse to scientific language and ways of gathering information) provides a somatic counter to the heavy textualism of deconstruction, Derrida's work in particular offers balance to approaches that centralize life or vitality by insisting that the experience of life is mediated by structures such as language which distance us from it, and that life is thus only possible via the anticipation of life's opposite—nonpresence, death. This balance, in addition to the focus on the text, and the expansiveness with which 'text' is considered in deconstruction, are the reasoning behind my recourse to deconstruction here.

The third area into which this work falls, or from which it comes, is the movement of women's writing called *écriture féminine*, and in particular the writing of Hélène Cixous, with its insistence on the body as something that writes, is written, reads, and is read. Cixous' work (discussed at the end of the literature review) offers precedent for the inclusion of the body and personal, emotional experience not only within the set of 'things to be studied' but within the set of 'things that can be read' and 'things that can write', and provides an example of a mode of writing which is ethical in ways that I would like my writing to be.

The dissertation combines areas of recent work in affect theory with aspects of Derrida's work and the work of other writers to ask how to understand love as a way of being with texts. What would

the qualities of such a relation be? Lévinas, Derrida, Barthes, Irigaray, Marion, Rilke, Cummings, and others speak to this relation. This dissertation aims to bring their ideas together in concert, and from them to develop a way of approaching texts with love. To continue the metaphor from the opening of this section, these voices are bright stars which, when ligamented, make a figure. Dissertation as astronomer: the work here is a situating, an 'arrangement of tangible elements'—and an activation of these voices in the context of each other in order to demonstrate both the desire for and the gestures toward a loving approach.

Derrida's statements about 'the love in deconstruction', and Mitchell's work on relations with pictures in particular, provide an impetus for considering that relation as with an other typically conceived as object: in Mitchell's case, paintings; in the case of this dissertation, texts. Given models of love as a relation between people, how might one understand love as a way of being with texts? What would the qualities of such a relation be? The voices of Lévinas, Derrida, Barthes, Irigaray, Marion, Rilke, Cummings, and others speak to this relation. However, although these voices appear, they have not yet been concerted; that is the role of this dissertation, which orchestrates this conversation and builds from it a loving approach to texts. To continue the metaphor from the opening of this section, these voices are bright stars which, when ligamented, make a figure. Dissertation as astronomer: the work here is a situating, making an 'arrangement of tangible elements'—and an activation of these voices in the context of each other in order to demonstrate both the desire for and the gestures toward a loving approach.

B. The place of this dissertation; its themes

This dissertation concerns itself with the possibility of love being a way of approaching texts. In order to do so, it has to work out responses to the questions "What is a text?" and "What is love?". These responses take as their central idea that of distance. For Barthes, through whose writings the concept of text is explored, the text-as-erotic is characterised by its ongoing self-production, its limitlessness; the text "is made, is worked out in a perpetual interweaving".¹⁶ The result of this ongoing production is that an object which is to be called 'text', a complete and final version of itself, is never achieved. Instead, the defining quality of text is its expansion. The way this dissertation approaches love is, similarly, through a trope of wideness. Rainer Maria Rilke conceived of love not as an assimilation of one person by another, but as a recognition that "between even the *closest* human beings infinite

16 Barthes, 1975: 65.

distances continue to exist” and exhorted the young poet to whom he addressed his letters to “[love] the distances”.¹⁷ Rilke’s attention to the role of non-identity in love is given a textual turn by Derrida’s understanding of the ‘love in deconstruction’—an attention to the otherness of the other. To approach texts with love is to approach without assimilating, with respect for their difference and for their unknowability; to see them as “whole and against a wide sky”.¹⁸

Adapting W. J. T. Mitchell’s approach to pictures, this dissertation proposes ways of being with texts that consider them as others. It identifies points in the literature which suggest the possibility of such an approach, or which begin to advance it. As such, this dissertation is to some extent concerned with methodology; specifically, it aims to develop a ‘methodology’ for reading or being-with texts which draws a distinction between ‘approach’ (the term that will be active here) and ‘method’ (a more usual term). Part of the question this dissertation addresses is the nature of such an approach: what would it resemble? How would it be practiced? Take, for a gestural example of such an approach, Irwin Panofsky’s image of “meeting with ‘an acquaintance’ who ‘greet[s] me on the street by removing his hat’”.¹⁹ Rather than a methodology as such, then, this dissertation offers a motion of method, an approach that takes up that gesture of recognition. It proposes that, latent in the literature alluded to above, there is both a desire and a possibility for the construction of such an approach.

As far as the question of potential: the possibilities for this approach lie in the varied suggestions of such a way of reading or being-with found in the work of writers such as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Teresa Brennan, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Lévinas, and Jean-Luc Marion, whose work appears throughout the dissertation. This dissertation synthesises instances or suggestions of this approach in order to put in concert writers and thinkers whose work indicates that in some way loving concern, or love itself, is part of a thoughtful and critical approach to the other and to the text.²⁰ It will concern itself with what happens when we interact with texts lovingly. In response to the question of what ‘lovingly’ means, the dissertation will refer to a history of love in philosophy, psychoanalysis, *écriture féminine* (specifically Cixous’ writings), and affect theory to be found in the literature review which caps this introduction. First, however, a brief discussion of the choice of ‘approach’ instead of ‘method’.

17 Rilke, Rainer Maria. *Rilke on Love and Other Difficulties*. Ed. and trans. John J. L. Mood. (New York: Norton, 1975), p. 28.

18 Ibid.

19 Quoted in Mitchell, 48.

20 The question of what a text is, for the purposes of this dissertation, can be answered briefly: it is that which operates within a signifying structure—it means, refers, signifies (even if what is signified is absence)—and which by this signification extends outside of its perceptual borders, creating an ongoing ‘opening’ whether to other meanings or other approaches. For an extended discussion, please see Chapter 2, “An Ontology Of/For Texts”.

C. 'Method': a brief history

The scene upon which Structuralism arrived in the middle of the long 20th century was, politically, intellectually, and artistically, one concerned with methods and with the systematization thereof. Althusser's Marxism represented "scientificity in politics".²¹ Freudian psychoanalysis bridged the gap between psychology and science with a vocabulary of 'hypothesis' and 'method'. Thinkers of the 20th century made a radical break with metaphysical philosophical traditions and with the positivist tradition of classical science, but, unsurprisingly, remnants of both continued to inform both scholastic and popular thought, especially as the 'space age' dawned and science filled childhood games, cured the body's problems in middle age, and offered the tempting prospect of defrosted life after death, or exportation to other planets. This milieu not only formed or perhaps called for the Structuralist view from which culture, language, and meaning could be reduced to underlying and fundamental forms, but would also shape the later appearance of post-structural critiques of Structuralism. The embedding of Structuralism and post-structuralism within European and American academic institutions,²² where value is placed on empiricism and objectivity, must likewise have influenced the forms that the expressions of these theories took.

The 'science of criticism' identified by Barthes²³ speaks to the perhaps tacit pressure for theoretical work in 'soft' disciplines, such as philosophy and linguistics, to stand up to the rigorous and objective testing of theoretical work in corresponding 'hard' science. But also requires the development of a form that resembles those of other sciences—a method by which to communicate, but also by which a standard of examination and of investigation could be assured. Barthes' continual resort to the term 'science' indicates the centrality, conscious or not, of a method that could be 'scientific' to Structuralism. Although, as Jonathan Culler notes, "*science* in French [...] means systematic thought, not, as in English, an empirical and experimental enterprise",²⁴ it was not simply that the application of a name to a process informed the theories of Barthes and other structuralists; nor does the nuance Culler finds between 'systematic thought' and empiricism change the fact that here, theoretical work in the humanities would adopt an explicit *method*.

21 Althusser, Louis. *Lenin and Philosophy, and other essays*. (New York: Montly Review Press, 1972), p. 65.

22 For example, Derrida's 1966 delivery of "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" at Johns Hopkins University.

23 Barthes, Roland. *Criticism and Truth*, trans. Katrine P. Keunemen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 73.

24 Culler, Jonathan. *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, linguistics, and the study of literature* (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), ix.

Briefly, when 'science' is invoked here, it is shorthand for a tradition of positivist, empiricist science which employed a method that believed in the observer as separate from the field of observation, an authority whose less-dependable modes of knowing (feeling, sensing, loving) had to be switched off. 'Science' in this usage does not imply, for example, 20th-century physics (Bohr, Einstein). The critique is not of science as such, but of the separation presumed by some scholarly traditions, including those within which I am writing, between the observer and the observed—and the way that inflects textual theories to the point that the reader becomes, in the middle of the 20th century, separate from the text.²⁵ As above, this dissertation argues that the smallest unit of analysis is *relation*. The problem of a presumed objectivity is the removal of the relation on which it depends: objectivity ignores the potential interaction between subject and object. Approaching via a concern for relations, the boundary between subject (myself and you-who-are-like-me) and object (you-who-are-not-like-me) becomes tenuous, or even collapses. Such a collapse extends to the 'object' the possibility of relations and agency, desire and meaning, similar to that otherwise only extended to 'subjects'. This includes the possibility of 'objects' acting on 'subjects' or causing them to experience changes (in affect, for example). But it is impossible to consider such a collapse in the tradition of positivist, empiricist science.

To some extent, the post-structural response to structuralism takes issue with the uniformity that a method, especially a 'scientific' one, presupposes. Despite great differences among the work and practices of writers who are now called post-structuralists, the tendency to reject underlying notions of structure or fundamental truths is a working generality, which would seem to indicate a coextensive rejection of the methods by which these truths were 'uncovered' or displayed. This generality is reflected in the destabilisation of meaning which occurs in much post-structuralist writing, such destabilisation being one way of bringing 'truth' itself into question and of clouding the process by which one arrives at such ends. If slippery language indicates that there are no truths, the way taken to find these non-existent truths must also be slippery—if it exists at all.

Post-structuralism, however, arose within the context of the French (and other) education systems; its 'practitioners', if they were ever to accept such a title, were embedded in the modes of that system even as they worked to exit or deconstruct it. Appropriate to thinkers for whom the binary was a false structure, their writing and lectures both continued and attempted to derail the systems from which

25 Obviously, the work of Barthes and others runs counter to this. The question of the reader/writer-text relation is dealt with in Chapter 2.

they came. Thus, despite Derrida's insistence that deconstruction, a central strategy or action of many post-structuralist writings, is *not* a method, his very writings on deconstruction came out of the methodised, structured, ritualised setting of the French academy, and have been since used (by Culler, among others, as will be discussed in Chapter 3) if not as step-by-step instructions, at least as a set of possibilities for action or an outline for one's attitude 'as a deconstructionist'. Of course, any 'method' used by a scholar in the humanities, whether or not he or she identifies as a deconstructionist, will differ in application, in use, and in form from the scientific method standardised among laboratories and scientific disciplines. But it is the idea of a *method* appearing in literary theory at all which is at stake here.

The term 'method' is at stake because it links disciplines which cannot be empirical to others which are rooted in empiricism; because it proposes the possibility of singular ways of dealing with others; and because it sets the one who conducts the research apart from her subject. This dissertation concerns itself in the first instance with questions of methodology. It aims to offer an approach to texts which will draw a distinction between that term—approach—and 'method', a more generally used term. It will locate intimations of such a methodology in the writings of theorists of the late 20th century, many of whom are identified with Structuralism, post-structuralism, and deconstruction. It will synthesise instances or suggestions of such a methodology in order to mobilise a collectivity—writers who have already offered or gestured toward a way of being with texts which is both loving and critical.

Since 'method' is the term in question, let us proceed by undertaking an examination of that term. A method is a form or procedure for accomplishing something; an orderliness of thought or behaviour. Methodos, via Greek: the pursuit of knowledge, from meta- (development) + hodos (way). The pursuit of knowledge via a *set* procedure, the ensconcement of knowledge within an institution, a form. A 'method' proposes a way which is already set—discovered by another whose authority is followed, even if vestigially. It offers a path to follow, a procedure. It has intimations of iterability (as any map does), and in those intimations lie part of its value—that of exact, or near, reproduction. All this conspires to create the aura of order that surrounds method.

The appropriateness of this orderliness to scholarly work is not up for debate in this dissertation; a certain adherence to form and convention both shape and locate the dissertation as a product of scholarly culture, as well as the field within which dissertations fall. But orderliness is not necessarily the same as form or procedure; order is relational—one thing relating to another, as in perceptions

of chronology or hierarchy or alphabet. (And a certain 'disorder' is elemental to the relation between texts identified as 'deconstructionist' and 'post-structuralist'.) What is in question is the appropriateness of 'method' as a term to describe setting forth in pursuit of wisdom, or as a term used to imply that the pursuit of knowledge is a set procedure, to be followed by a subject who applies it to an object.

The use of the term 'method' in the pursuit of philosophical knowledge, and the importance of that term to Western thought, can be traced at least to the 1637 publication of Descartes' *Discourse of the Method of Rightly Conducting Reason*. Descartes, taking the capability of mathematical reasoning to achieve 'perfect' knowledge, or certainty, as a desirable end, proposes an intellectual process for philosophy which emulates the one by which mathematical knowledge is achieved. While more direct descendants of Descartes' thought now belong to traditions of analytic philosophy rather than Continental ones, Descartes' role in the development of modern philosophy cannot be overlooked even in a consideration of non-analytic philosophy, if only because it is from Descartes' work that the use of the specific term 'method' emerges. Descartes' thinking on subjecthood and thought itself formed cornerstones of philosophical inquiry. Therefore, what might seem like a minor question of word-choice (choosing 'méthode' over other possible synonyms or descriptors of his practice) nevertheless has had widening consequences for the practice of philosophy even to the present day.

Of course, the choice of 'method' is not a minor one. It indicates that, from Descartes on, it would be possible to proceed in questions of philosophy in the same manner in which one proceeds in questions of mathematics: first of all, in an objective or empirical way, and second of all, as a subject acting upon an inert, observable object to which there is no necessary relationship. If there is a relationship to be described in terms of method, it is a one-way relation: that of observer or actor observing or acting on the object of observation or action. It is hardly necessary to trace the implications of this relationship in the history of Western thought—or its practical significance in disciplines influenced by philosophy, including history, politics, literary studies.

Descartes' own relationship to the narrative of Western thought intimates the place method as an informing construct would take. This construct is echoed, for example, in Hegel's 'Science of Logic' ('Wissenschaft') and the establishment by his students and followers of a Hegelian 'method' (the procedure of thesis/antithesis/synthesis). Regardless of whether Hegel's intent was to demonstrate a procedure or method, and despite thoughtful application and use, this method has become a pat

formula useful for explaining Hegel's thought,²⁶ and at the same time further embeds the idea of a scientific, procedural process in the heart of philosophy. Philosophy's connection to Descartes' use of the term 'method' persists: although Descartes' work comes under fire in the 20th century²⁷ from Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty, among others, these criticisms do not directly broach the issue of the word 'method'. In fact, the term is consistently used to describe the work even of thinkers who object, directly or indirectly, to central Cartesian concepts.²⁸ It is pertinent to note here that 'method' is often a term applied post-hoc to processes of thought as attempts are made to replicate

26 See, for example, *Guide to philosophy* by C. E. M. Joad, Courier Dover Publications, 1957, where 'method' appears about 50 times, among which are references to Hegel's method as well as Spinoza's (122), the scientific method (111, 187, 531), the "traditional method of philosophy" or the "method of philosophy" (respectively, 174, footnote; 412), and the "method of the Hegelian dialectic" (421). Method here is not only the practice of philosophy (i.e. how one arrives at conclusions), but also the way in which arguments are communicated, as in a method of writing—still with the implication that there is a procedure which has been followed and by which the writer has arrived at their present state of eloquence (or difficulty). See "Hegel's Phenomenological Method", Kenley R. Dove, *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol 23., No. 4 (June 1970), pp. 615-41 for a further example of the application of the term.

27 Descartes' work was also criticised by a contemporary, Anne Conway, whose critique includes arguments against Cartesian dualism. See Sarah Hutton's book *Anne Conway: A Woman Philosopher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) for a full discussion of Conway's critiques of Descartes, their origins, and their effects.

28 A few examples, from early to late, of references to Heidegger and 'method': "Heidegger's method seems to consist in the familiar handling of metaphysical problems through a prior analysis of human nature" ("A Note on the Philosophy of Heidegger", Marjorie Glicksman, *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Feb. 17, 1938), p. 93); "Presuming two Heideggers, even if one is continuous with the other, do the two lend themselves to a unified hermeneutical method?" ("From Heidegger to Derrida to Chance: Doubling and (Poetic) Language", Joseph N. Riddel, *boundary 2*, Vol. 4, No. 2, Martin Heidegger and Literature (Winter, 1976), p. 572, my emphasis); "Heidegger's Method: Philosophical Concepts as Formal Indications", Daniel O. Dahlstrom, *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 47 (1994)).

For references to Husserl's 'method', see "Lebenswelt and Lebensformen: Husserl and Wittgenstein on the Goal and Method of Philosophy", Earl Taylor, *Human Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (April, 1978), pp. 184-200; "can we not say that Husserl's method of analysing intention may be described as just the method of using such 'guiding principles'", ("On the Relationship Between Husserl's Phenomenology and Psychological Insight", Ludwig Binswanger, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Dec., 1941), p. 202).

Additionally, Paul deMan refers to literary theory as something which cannot be "studied according to methods which are scientific rather than historical", but employs the term 'method' nonetheless (*Daedalus*, Vol. 99, No. 2, Theory in Humanistic Studies (Spring, 1970), p. 402). And, despite Derrida's famous resistance to the application of the word 'method' to deconstruction, Daniel O'Hara, reviewing *Of Grammatology*, refers to deconstruction (by capitalised name) as "Derrida's method for making problematical the entire question of 'reading', and later as "Derrida's method of adamant indecision", placing deconstruction not only within the form of method and the ideological rules that govern that form, but also as, in both cases, firmly "Derrida's", belonging to or originating from Derrida, fixed and set by him and by his practice, iterable (if iteration follows the original) in the way that methods are: followed correctly, they yield a correct result ("Review: [Untitled]", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 36, No. 3, Critical Interpretation (Spring, 1978), p. 363). A further reference to "Derrida's method of deconstruction", which of course implies not only that there is (are) a method(s) to deconstruction, but also that Derrida in particular has his own such method, is to be found in Michael Ryan's 1976 review of Jeffery Mehlman's *A Structural Study of Autobiography: Proust, Leiris, Sartre, Levi-Strauss* (*Diacritics*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Spring, 1976), p. 35). These recurrences of the problematic term serve, if nothing else, to demonstrate how deeply entrenched in critical use the word 'method' is, when talking about the ways in which theorists and theoretical writing (or philosophers and philosophical writing) relate to other texts.

Note, however, that at least in some instances, 'method' is not the term adopted. In his 1986 article "The Hollow King: A Heideggerian Approach to George Seferis's 'The King of Asini'", Alexander Argyros uses the same word I will adopt in this dissertation—'approach' (*boundary 2*, Vol. 15, No. 1/2 (Autumn, 1986 - Winter, 1987), pp. 305-321). Likewise, in a review of *Of Grammatology* in *diacritics* in 1972, Alexander Gelley makes reference to critical activity in the form of both "approach" (his application of quotation marks) and "method" (*diacritics*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Spring, 1972), p. 9).

their results. It is also apposite that the term 'method' in 20th-century theoretical practices such as structuralism makes a kind of sense, given structuralism's basis in linguistics—treading the line between soft and hard science, a method does apply to linguistics—although the appropriateness of a term to one practice alone is not sufficient reason for the continued use of that term in other practices, or across time. Nevertheless, the continued currency of 'method' as a term for the gathering of and movement through knowledge indicates two things: first of all, an unsevered tie to Cartesianism, and second, an underlying or repressed belief within philosophy that it, like science, can be empirical and objective, and produce replicable results via the application of a uniform procedure.

This dissertation finds its heritage in late 20th-century theory, but from that heritage and context will demonstrate that, despite predominant use of the term 'method' to characterise what a theorist does with a text, there are precedents in the literature for another way of being-with a text or an other. It will begin to consider the possibilities for something other than a 'method' employed in the reading of texts; the term which this dissertation suggests in place of 'method' is 'approach'.

D. 'Method' ≠ 'approach'

Having already discussed the root of 'method' in its philosophical usages, as well as the implications the activation of such a term has for philosophy, I now turn to a discussion of the term that will be called upon in this dissertation—'approach'. At its etymological roots, the word has in it the idea of relation. 'Approach' descends from French (*approcher*) via Latin (*appropriare* = 'go nearer to'). The ablative 'ad-' of Latin becomes 'a[p]-' and its indication of *movement toward* combines with the sense in '-proach' (from 'propriare' [come nearer], think of French 'prochaine', or next) of increased nearness. To approach something, then, combines the purposeful action of movement implied by the ablative morpheme 'a-' with the connotations of nearness and proximity of 'proach'. To move toward something puts the mover into relation with that something because without relationality the concept of moving *toward* or moving into proximity with could not be understood. However, I want to differentiate between 'method', which also has etymological connotations of movement, and approach: the 'hodos' ('way') of method indicates a singular path that *is to be taken*. 'Approach,' on the other hand, is simply about *moving toward*, without designating which path to take. 'Approach' foregrounds relation to the other; 'method', to the path one takes. So it is because of this basic position of being in relation that this dissertation adopts the term 'approach', but also as a measure of

discipline for the work itself as it is undertaken here. Adopting a term outside of regular use means a forced and continual attention to and consideration of seemingly minor facets of communication. This attention is a way of attending to, respecting, and gesturing toward the relation that the word 'approach' implies as a possibility in the making of theory.

Beyond the etymological traces from which I have begun, there are of course other reasons for the choice of 'approach' over 'method'. As outlined briefly in the introductory section of this chapter, one objective of this dissertation is to demonstrate the desirability of this methodology. This desirability, again, lies in the possibility for openness, respect for difference, and affirmation which an 'approach', rather than a 'method', could offer. I will consider each of these characteristics here. All three characteristics are linked to the etymological senses in which 'approach' contains an idea of separation and relation; that is their strength.

First of all, to open up what is meant here by 'respect for difference'. 'Approach' is a state which is incomplete. Lacking arrival, the 'approach' cannot close the metaphorical gap and achieve full understanding; there is always something between the one who approaches and the one who is approached—territory still to be covered, room for a further approach. The 'approach' necessarily respects difference between the one and the other because it inherently acknowledges that achievement of total understanding cannot occur. How this respect occurs, how it is manifest—these are questions which cannot be answered in general, only in situations, because the idea of the approach is site-specific, unknowable in sum. That is, the idea of approach, being one of relation, cannot be outlined and reduced to a schematic. It must be practiced carefully and attentively, and will require different things in each case where it is put into play, because relation is always a question of adaptation to the needs and ways of the concerned parties. Secondly, the question of 'openness'. The openness of 'approach' lies in its unknowability. Its openness is both the imagined space of unknowing and the space between the one and the other that this unknowing shows to exist. This is also the openness that permits the other to be as they are, does not subject them to a prodding or a bending to fit a mould pre-designed to contain them despite their different form. Both of these first points lead to the third, the idea of 'affirmation', which is the explicit acknowledgement of what is tacit in approach, in respect for the other, and in openness. Affirmation is the a priori 'yes' that must be said in order for relation to occur at all; it is the "original ethics"²⁹ without which relation in terms of difference cannot occur.

29 Derrida, Interview (1997).

The desirability of such an approach can also be inferred by certain gestures of valuation made toward these qualities which have been made by other practitioners of literary and cultural theory. I term these 'gestures' in part because that is what they are: there is no explicit place in the literature where each writer, using my terminology and to my ends, theorises an approach. But there are intimations, movements of parts of the literary-theoretical body which express the possibility of such a thing. I also use the term 'gestures' in response to Luce Irigaray's call for a "touchful way of speaking or saying and of listening".³⁰ With its connotations of bodily movement, the word 'gestures' reminds me that what is communicable is not only spoken through the word or in what is completely and neatly executed: the story is often, like a gesture of the hand, only partial and achieved through the collection of structures which work together for a kind of metonymy. 'Gesture' here is a gesture itself—to Irigaray, of course, but also to Panofsky's gentleman tipping his hat, and to Agamben.³¹ It is also a gesture to the necessary incompleteness of the movements this dissertation makes.

Like 'gesture', 'approach' contains its own incompleteness or imperfection. Approach is ongoing and progressive; it is tentative—as in 'making an approach' to someone—something which has no concrete or certain ends. Reliance on the metaphor of 'method' to describe a theoretical interaction with texts means relying on a metaphor which implies a procedure can be planned out in advance. Method at its most procedural is less a way of discovering than of fitting a thing into the confines of what is expected about it. In the section to follow this one, I will briefly introduce these gestures of approach. They will be revisited in depth in Chapters 3 through 5.

E. Gesturing toward approach

The desirability and indeed the potential for a methodology like the one which this dissertation proposes is suggested in the literature which forms its context; that is to say, the canon of theoretical and philosophical writing in the humanities (literary theory, art history/theory, philosophy) of the 20th and 21st Centuries. This section will very briefly light upon examples of such suggestions in the literature. These examples will in most cases be developed more fully in later sections of this dissertation. Therefore, this section should not be seen either as an exhaustive list of occurrences of support for the approach proposed by this dissertation, or as the final word on how such support

27 Irigaray, xx.

28 Agamben, Giorgio. "Notes on Gesture", *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*. (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 133-140.

occurs in the named sources. Instead, this section will serve as a 'road map' or 'playbill', with the intent to equip the reader for what lies ahead by introducing the major players and their roles.

Suggestions of the value of or desire for a methodology such as the one this dissertation proposes are various and sometimes indirect; they occur across the work of writers and theorists whose work otherwise seems to be at odds in certain ways (such as intimations of such a methodology in both famously anti-foundational Derrida and Catholic theologian Jean-Luc Marion). The way of being with a text which this dissertation terms 'approach' is intimated in instances such as Mary Midgley's arguments against the repression of poetry in science,³² where the desirability of a so-called 'scientific' (meaning objective) method is challenged; in the work of Jacques Rancière, writing about his own "method";³³ and in the art-historical methodology presented in W. J. T. Mitchell's *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images*, which adopts a mode of being with pictures that assumes they have some kind of (relational) agency. It is also, as noted in the section above, present in Luce Irigaray's call for a "touchful" way of writing, speaking, and listening, as well as in Hélène Cixous' desire for thinking with the "whole body".³⁴ Such a methodology is further intimated by Roland Barthes in *A Lover's Discourse*, where he asserts the "exile" of love from "science, techniques, arts"³⁵ and goes on to insist that the separation of the lover's discourse "from all gregariness" means that the discourse (in its position as exile) has "no recourse but to become the site, however exiguous, of an *affirmation*".³⁶ When Lévinas calls for a relationship with the other which involves approaching the other through "sympathy or love, ways of being that are different from impassive contemplation",³⁷ he never mentions 'method', but he specifically differentiates love and sympathy as ways of being from 'impassive contemplation', the cornerstone of scientific (or, could we say, academic) rigour, and identifies them as desirable. And Derrida's assertion that deconstruction is always accompanied by love, which he makes in a 1982 interview in *Le Monde*³⁸ and on which he elaborates in a later interview,³⁹ links deconstruction and its methodlessness to the ethical position of openness and affirmation toward the otherness of the other.

29 See Chapter 1.

33 Jacques Rancière. "A few remarks on the method of Jacques Rancière" *Parallax*, 15:3 (2009), pp. 114-123.

34 Hélène Cixous. *The Cixous Reader*, Ed. Susan Sellers. (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 203. Note that Mary Midgley also refers specifically to the importance of 'whole body' thinking: "Thought involves communication [...] *What thinks has to be the whole person, living in a public world*" (*Science and Poetry* (London: Routledge Classics, 2006) pp. 118-119).

35 Barthes, Roland. *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (London: Vintage, 2002), preface (n. pag).

36 Ibid, italics in original.

37 Emmanuel Lévinas. *On Thinking-of-the-Other (Entre Nous)*, trans. Michael B. Smith & Barbara Harshav, (London: Athlone, 1998), 5.

38 Jacques Derrida. "Sur les traces de la philosophie". With C. Deschamps. *Entretiens avec le Monde: Philosophies*. Ed. *Le Monde*. (Paris: La Découverte/Le Monde, 1984).

39 Derrida, Interview (1997).

The specific cases outlined in the paragraph above—and the very fact that many thinkers and writers have called for or undertaken a way of being with texts and others that renounces a method straitjacketed into objectivity—form the impetus for this dissertation, as well as demarcating its place in the literature. That so many have approached the territory this dissertation seeks to engage but that the area remains diffuse is precisely what impels this dissertation's consideration of these writers in terms of a synthesising moment, a constellation. Major writers and thinkers of this century and the last have brought a loving approach to texts and to the other into their work—momentarily. This dissertation, taking these moments, will trace lines between them in order to demonstrate the possibilities for, and the inherence of, such an approach to its field.

F. A note on lexicon

Before continuing to a more thorough examination of the sources noted above, I would like to establish the terms which this dissertation will engage. Because the aim of this work is in part to provide an alternative model to the dominant methodological framework (method, with its connotations of regularity and objectivity), the dissertation is responsible for providing alternative lexical choices. The objection to 'method' as a unit of vocabulary and as a practice means that other words that accompany 'method' and its practice, are also in question. I will here undertake a brief exposition of these words, and propose alternatives in order to develop a substitute nomenclature.

'Apply' is a word which often accompanies 'method' and which articulates the tacit, one-way relationship that method relies upon. To apply something to something else first of all presumes a hierarchy: a place from which something may be applied to something else. The word itself comes via Latin—with the same /ad-/ prefix as 'approach'. Its dative sense comes from this prefix.

Metaphorically, application takes its tenor from the action of something being laid onto something else; the one doing the applying is thus in a higher position (literally or metaphorically) than the thing or person onto which X is applied. When talking about making an approach, I will substitute the word 'attend' in place of 'apply' in this dissertation. 'Attend' is rooted in a care which is not necessarily hierarchical, or which, when hierarchical, may also be honorific—that is, directed from a subject in a lower position in hierarchy to a subject in a higher one. Secondly, the double meaning of 'attend'—to be present and to look after—produces this sense of care; a third meaning, the sense of escorting someone (as in a bridal attendant, or, in older diction, a 'lady-in-waiting') displays the tie

between waiting *on* someone and waiting *for* them in order to go together. In addition, Teresa Brennan defines love as a form of 'living attention'⁴⁰ by which one can approach the other without violence. I hope that 'attend' can be a humble way to approach texts within this dissertation: in 'attending to' texts, the dissertation disavows mastery of them. As Massumi writes, if you

apply a concept or system of connection between concepts, it is the material you apply it to that undergoes change, much more markedly than do the concepts. The change is imposed upon the material by the concepts' systematicity and constitutes a becoming homologous of the material to the system [...] It has less to do with invention than mastery and control.⁴¹

The research that simply stands near, or waits upon, or attends to the needs of another text is at its best a text-among-texts. Which leads to my next point.

This dissertation has exchanged the more typical language of the 'case study' for that of the 'exemplar'. The case study assumes to some extent that what is to be examined fits or can be fitted within the outline of the project which it supports. It is used to illustrate a principle or to stand as a record of observation of the object of research. As with 'apply', embedded in the term is a hierarchical discourse: the researcher looks at the case study, which does not look back. This implies the possibility of detachment from one's subject, as well as the value of empiricism and objectivity. While these qualities may be desirable (if perhaps, as Midgley argues, unattainable) in a laboratory situation, they are not possible or even applicable in a dissertation such as this one. This dissertation takes its cue from Midgley's argument that it is in the best interests of both researchers and their research to be "*objective*—that is, fair, honest and methodical—about the whole range of the subjective...the whole range where subjective experience affects objective facts".⁴² And, following from this, it will take on Massumi's assertion that "writing in the humanities can be affirmative",⁴³ which is to say, can be a writing that says 'yes' to the other. In the place of vocabulary which emphasises fitting things into the form of something pre-designed, as in the case study, this dissertation will suggest "an 'exemplary' method".⁴⁴ The example is

neither general (as is a system of concepts) nor particular (as is the material to which the system is applied). It is 'singular'. It is defined by a disjunctive self-inclusion: a belonging to itself that is simultaneously an extendability to everything else with which it might be connected [...] In short, exemplification is the logical category corresponding to self-relation.⁴⁵

40 Brennan, Teresa. *The Transmission of Affect*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 41..

41 Brian Massumi. *Parables for the Virtual* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 17.

42 Midgley, Mary. *Science and Poetry*. (Oxfordshire: Routledge Classics, 2006), p. 172-173. Her emphasis.

43 Massumi, 17.

44 Ibid. Of course, 'method' here is Massumi's word. This dissertation will consider the exemplary in terms of an approach.

45 Ibid, 17-18.

Where the case study displays the results of the application of a system to an object, the example stands as itself, by itself, but in relation to what surrounds it; it comprises what Massumi calls "microexample[s]",⁴⁶ the details which make up the example and are activated by it. The exemplary approach is inseparable from a layered and active attention to details because its "success [...] hinges on the details. Every little one matters".⁴⁷ This approach is particularly apt in terms of this dissertation's relationship to deconstruction, which is herein to be considered a non-systematisable way of being with texts. Again, the preferred term throughout this dissertation to replace 'method' will be the word 'approach', for reasons outlined above.

Finally, just as this dissertation will try to avoid thinking of what it considers in terms of an application of one thing to another, it will attempt to keep its distance from 'use'. Thinking in terms of how one thing is useful, put to use, employed, by another brings a hierarchical relationship into play; it also ignores the bidirectional quality of most relationships, even those with 'inanimate objects'. In place of 'use' and its corollaries, this dissertation proposes questions of value. Since value is subjective and questionable, any priority that this dissertation places on one concept over another will be unstable and non-absolute. What is valuable here may not be valuable (i.e. 'of use') elsewhere.

In the course of the dissertation, it is possible that words outlined above may occur. In reference to others' writing, others' ideas, and sources, I will use the vocabulary present in the original. And of course, despite my desire to construct an approach to texts which both acknowledges my own participation and in some ways evens the playing field between researcher and researched, I must concede from the start my own tendency to fail. This concession is part of "studying what one has experienced oneself and valuing it, or valuing the subjective side of one's interactions with the object studied" and rejecting the notion that to think or study well the "individual has to be severed from affective connections with the surrounding environment and others in it".⁴⁸ Like Midgley, Teresa Brennan rejects the "particular understanding of objectivity [...] based on the notion that the objective is somehow free of affect".⁴⁹

I am sure there will be places where my work shows the difficulty of adhering to its own constraints. However, it is possible that such failures go to show the very nature of an 'approach', which, since it is *not* a 'method', cannot be absolutely systematised, and therefore may include instances of its own

46 Ibid, 18.

47 Ibid.

48 Brennan, 19.

49 Ibid.

failure. These are not precluded, because, after all, the loving approach to some extent moulds itself to the needs of the text in front of it at any given time. And that must include this text. As an overall guide—above any concept of absolute in lexicon or way of being—is the principle of saying yes to the other.

This principle comes from Jacques Derrida's assertion of the central or even, in his words, "original"⁵⁰ place of the affirmation of the other as the love in deconstruction. Deconstruction perhaps comes closest to what this dissertation attempts to propose as a way of being with texts, not only for Derrida's insistence on the affirmation at its heart but also because of the way in which Derrida insisted that it was *not* a method or system by which one could read texts or construct meanings. However, in practice (and these assertions will be dealt with in Chapter 3), deconstruction *has* been used as a method or treated as a system. Therefore, deconstruction alone is not enough. Or, to put it better, deconstruction understood as the *application* of Derrida's ideas to texts is not enough, because this application implies a systemisation or method, and it does violence to the texts that receive this application. It also ignores the affirmation possible via deconstruction when it is treated not as a method, but as an exemplar. Deconstruction is, in Massumi's terms, exemplary because it is, in its best practices, not about "mastery and control".⁵¹ It takes joy in its digressions, it "harbors terrible powers of deviation and digression",⁵² points from which "the openness of the system will spread".⁵³ As an exemplar, deconstruction is only itself—but *as* an exemplar, deconstruction's self-relation indicates the possibility of relation to all things (this extension is Massumi's characteristic of the exemplar). These ideas will be treated in more detail in Chapter 3. I bring them up here simply to acknowledge during this discussion of nomenclature that an approach which corresponds to the one this dissertation proposes already exists, to some extent, or can at least be constellated from the work of others.

G. Literature Review

The conjunction of love and philosophy is as old as the concept of philosophy itself, embedded as the Greek word for one kind of love (*philia*) is within the word that meant the pursuit (and love) of wisdom. While love and wisdom, the knowledge of the body and that of the mind, have endured a long separation in the history of philosophy, there are places where their recombination erupts and

50 Derrida: Interview (1997),

51 Massumi, 17.

52 Massumi, 18.

53 Massumi, 19.

makes itself heard. Given the importance of love to this dissertation and to certain strains of late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century thought (such as *écriture féminine*), and given the fact that more and more cultural studies and critical theory scholars are accepting affect as a subject worthy of consideration, this literature review will track the role of love in early philosophy; understandings of love in Freud and Lacan; the emergence of considerations of affect in humanities scholarship; and the role of the body in the same, via the work of Hélène Cixous.

G.1: Plato's *Symposium*

The wisdom the philosopher loves is “absorbed in the pleasures of the soul”.⁵⁴ From the beginning, as Plato depicts Socrates' argument about philosopher-kings, information that comes from the body is differentiated from that which comes from the soul, or mind. The pleasures of the soul are better pleasures; wisdom is better than “bodily pleasure”, and the mark of a “sham” philosopher is his absorption in bodily pleasure. We know immediately in this argument, then, that there is a distinction in purpose and in value between information gathered or knowledge won by the body and the gathered or won by the mind. When Plato describes the philosopher as one who “always love[s] knowledge of a sort which shows them the eternal nature not varying from generation and corruption”,⁵⁵ we also understand that this is knowledge which is available to the intellect if not to the senses; that the Platonic ideal is an unchanging one, beyond the experience of the material world, after which philosophers continually quest. Such questing implies that the knowledge in question is out of reach, and that the act of philosophizing is not a restive state of knowing, but a moving state of pursuit. The philosopher's love of wisdom does not have a measure, at which point no more wisdom is required; instead, this “desire” is “drawn toward knowledge in every form”.⁵⁶ We are left with two understandings of philosophy: first, that true philosophers are absorbed in the pleasures of the soul, rejecting those of the body; second, that the desire of a philosopher is ‘drawn’ toward wisdom—which does not imply that it necessarily reaches its goal.

The gathering described in *The Symposium* comes about because of questions about the rightness of loving, the right ways of loving, and the relationship between love and the work of being a philosopher. Early on in the gathering, Phaedrus identifies love as something—though not the only thing (he mentions family ties and public office)—that effectively imparts guidance to the individual wishing to lead “a good life”. Love gives the “ability to feel shame at disgraceful behaviour and pride in good behaviour”, without which “no individual or community could achieve anything great or fine”.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Plato, *Republic*, Book VI. <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html>, accessed 10 December 2012.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Plato, *The Symposium*, trans. Robin Waterfield. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 11 (178 c).

Love is, therefore, linked to one's own good life, but also to the good life of the individual in the community, because one's ability to feel shame comes in part from a sense of being seen to conform or not conform to expectations or rules. Individual conformity or non-conformity to rules in turn affects the community. 'Greatness' and 'finesness' depend on one's ability to distinguish between behaviour that is acceptable or praiseworthy, and behaviour that is condemnable, undesirable, destructive. But something has to happen in order for the individual to aim for greatness and finesness; these are not natural targets. Thus the suggestion of love (or family ties, or public office) as motivators. First, love (and family, and governance) put the individual into relation with others which in some way makes the individual visible—his or her actions can be seen. Second, these relations, in making the individual visible, render his or her actions not neutral but tinted with goodness and badness. In relation to others, the individual can register the timbre of his or her actions; he or she can also register the perception of these actions. Third, in love, as in families and in governments in the best of circumstances, the perception of one's actions matters. How one is thought of by one's beloved (or mother, or constituents) matters. This sense of wanting to do well in the eyes of someone else is a motivation to behave correctly; as such, it partially constitutes what Plato identifies as necessary guidance for those who want to live a good life. Love is one means to this end.

But what *is* love, in an ontological sense? What is this thing that can be a means to a good life? What is it made of, where does it come from? In the Symposium, where philosophers gather to drink and think and talk about thought, love and knowledge are bound up together, not least because the role of the older philosopher is in part that of teacher to his younger lovers. Teaching about philosophy, teaching how to think, and teaching how to love intertwine. In fact, the love of the beautiful (or otherwise attractive) individual is a stepping stone to a more general love of physical beauty, and then the love of what bodies can do, and then the love of how people can think, and then to the love of intellectual endeavours in general. If, as Phaedrus claims, "Love is a primordial god",⁵⁸ originary, fundamental, then it is in part fundamental to thought. This relation, however, is not a necessary but a contingent one. Love and thought are related only in places like Athens and Sparta, where matters of love (such as whether or not one ought to go after one's young and beautiful students, or with which students to share one's array of erotic and philosophical knowledge) are complex. Where the "guidelines of convention"⁵⁹ are tricky, argument about the nature of love becomes necessary. Indeed, the straightforward social acceptance of gratifying a lover is a sign of "mental sluggishness on the part

⁵⁸ Ibid, 10 (178 c).

⁵⁹ Ibid, 15 (182 a).

of the rule-makers".⁶⁰ Those who make the rules decide on the kind of love that is acceptable. In a society of philosophers, love is thought—an aphorism with an etymological core: in Plato's language, philosophy is composed of 'love' and 'wisdom'. But love is also *thought* (verb in the passive sense); the role of the philosopher is to figure out what love is and what it does. In the Symposium, a distinction is drawn between kinds of love (a lover is "bad if he is of the common type, who loves the body rather than the mind"⁶¹) that splits the love of beauty from the love of knowledge. Bodily love is in service to philosophy, and its end is to "scorn and think little of"⁶² the individual body to which one is attached. The project is generalisation rather than focus. Although love is always love *of* something, what the *something* is is not predetermined. It is the role of the lover to find or develop a love which is virtuous (not only of the body) and which motivates via the ability to feel shame and pride; that is, it is the role of the lover to find love which aids in the creation of a good life.

But what love *is* is not the same as what it *does*. Socrates argues that love is relational; one of its characteristics is to "stand in relation to something".⁶³ Love, he says, loves *something*, not nothing; desire is "*necessarily* desire for something which is lacking",⁶⁴ not for the lack itself. If Love desires the beautiful and the good, then this indicates that these qualities are lacking on Love's part; if Love desires knowledge (if Love is love of knowledge), this indicates a lack of wisdom, which is nevertheless *not* ignorance, since Love at least knows that knowledge exists, and to desire it (i.e. that it is lacking). As Diotima says, a bit later, if "a person isn't aware of a lack, he [sic] can't desire the thing which he isn't aware of lacking".⁶⁵ Love falls into a middle ground, in particular in its relation to wisdom: it knows what it lacks (is not ignorant) and yet still lacks it (is not wise).

Diotima also demonstrates that Love is neither a god (because it lacks good and attractive attributes, and it is not wise), nor mortal. Instead, it "occupies middle ground" between the human and the divine, "translating and carrying messages from men to gods and gods to men", making "the universe an interconnected whole".⁶⁶ Between the lacking human and the complete divine goes Love, back and forth, aware of its own desire. If this back-and-forth results in a wholeness, an interconnectedness that resembles more a web than a block of cement, then the resulting network is

60 Ibid, 16 (182 d).

61 Ibid, 17 (183 c).

62 Ibid, 48 (210 b).

63 Ibid, 38 (199 d).

64 Ibid, 39 (200 a).

65 Ibid, 45 (204 a).

66 Ibid, 43 (202 d-e).

a way of drawing in the known and loved. The “desire for and pursuit of wholeness”⁶⁷ in the fable of the bodies cleaved into two human halves is also a desire for wisdom, a desire for the good, and a desire to be able to rest with some stability in a sense of the good. Diotima concludes that “the object of love is the permanent possession of goodness for oneself”,⁶⁸ which results in heterosexual unions in the procreative impulse, and in homosexual ones such as those between the philosophers and their students in the propagation of knowledge and wisdom; in teaching. But the possession of goodness that equates to the bearing and raising of children or the teaching of one's students is limited by these things. Diotima's model for the possession of goodness creates an outer border within which goodness can take place but no sense that crossing that boundary might also offer ways of making a good life; that is, that Love's transit need not be relegated to short hops, but can withstand longer flights over unknown territories.

In order to possess goodness permanently, however, more than pursuit of goodness must take place. A construction of belief must accompany this pursuit—a belief in one's own good (the value of one's own knowledge). After all, says Diotima, “[it's] only when a person describes what he's [sic] got as good and what he [sic] hasn't as bad that he's [sic] capable of being contented with what belongs to him [sic].” Although “the sole object of people's love is goodness”, goodness in Diotima's terms also depends on the establishment of *relative* goodness, whereby I assure the goodness of what I have by comparing it favourably to what I don't have. What any other has, by this logic, unless it resembles what I have, is bad. Besides furnishing me with a compass for my own actions (shame/pride) love also provides me a way of evaluating the actions and possessions of others. In the comparison between what I have and what I don't, what I don't have has to look undesirable; otherwise, I'm cast into doubt about the goodness of what I have. Love as a motivator toward goodness relies, as long as goodness is limited to 'what is good for me/what belongs to me and my good life', on a distinction between mine/theirs. The love Diotima and Socrates talk about, which is predicated on knowing what is good and what is bad, relies on a clear line between inside and outside. While this might be useful in terms of social mores—familial and social ties establishing 'good life' to include things like not marrying cousins creates a stable in-group who substantiate the taboo by reference to out-groups who 'disgustingly' engage in the practice—it limits the ability of love to do more than hold things in their places once those places are established, or to drive people toward what has been determined to be 'good'. This does, of course, require continued examination of what 'good' is—one role of the philosopher. As long as love remains a motivating factor for living out some idea of good, and as long

67 Ibid, 29 (129 c).

68 Ibid, 48 (206 a).

as what 'good' *is* is the domain of the philosopher, love also remains in the territory of thought.

The potential for love to delineate what is good and what is bad, and the tendency to disassociate oneself from what one has defined as undesirable, leaving the desirable located in the self or the in-group is at the root of later explorations of the role of the self in the love relationship. Whether a familial, friendly, or amorous/erotic relation, the self at the center must first *be*. In its being, the loving self establishes itself as important—integral—to the love relationship, as integral as the other. Love, therefore, is not only a relation to the other but to the self. Given that for love to exist there must be two parties (not only a beloved other but a self who loves), and given that one function of love is to demarcate territory along lines of 'good' and 'bad', it stands to reason that love can actually reinforce the sense of the self as good and the other as not-good, rather than necessarily including the other in 'good'ness or extending this concept of the 'good' to the other. In love, it is possible for the self who loves to be absorbed in the 'good'ness of loving, even to the denigration or neglect of the beloved other. In other words, love is not a necessarily or exclusively other-focussed action; it concerns the self as much, and therefore contains within itself the danger or possibility of self-involvement, egotism.

G.2: Freud and Lacan

Over the centuries that follow the *Symposium*, the centrality of love to the life of the philosopher may not stay as apparent as it does there. Certainly, where it appears, the idea of love changes to fit social mores as well as the particular aims of the person writing or thinking about it. Although only rarely central to thought—more often so as we near the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, when love becomes an acceptable reason to do things like get married—love does appear where writers and thinkers are forced to confront the actuality of human relationships.

Psychoanalysis, with its consideration of human relationships and the relation between the conscious and unconscious, as well as Freud's theory of the sexual (not amorous, but not always too far) origin of neuroses is an obvious point when thought about love reemerges. In terms of this dissertation, the discussion of love in Classical philosophy serves to ground the thesis in its long history and give a sense of the longevity of the relation between love and philosophy. Here, a consideration of psychoanalysis in terms of two great theoretical practitioners, Freud and Lacan, will examine the ways that love is invoked within psychoanalysis, especially as it pertains to a sense of the self and the

other. Psychoanalysis is one of the long 20th century's major modes of thinking, and imbues all manner of discourses, from popular television to scholarly writing. Because psychoanalysis is, in particular, an accepted approach to texts within the umbrella of theory, it is especially appropriate to outline its treatment of the topic of this dissertation.

To begin with a brief detour: in terms of this dissertation's focus on ways of knowing other than those which have historically been privileged in scholarship (empiricism, observation, intellect), it is interesting to note that Freud, in advancing the idea that dreams are meaningful, can be interpreted, can be understood, was arguing for ways of knowing that are not based in the concrete real of our waking lives. Of course, in "On Dreams", Freud does refer to "the necessity for applying the technical rules which [he] gave",⁶⁹ eliding the charge that psychoanalysis as a practice could slip completely outside the boundaries of ways of knowing which are more 'scientific' than superstitious. After translating dreams, with recourse to dream-symbolism, one moves on to the process of analysis; Freud writes, in "An Autobiographical Study", "I have always felt it a gross injustice that people have refused to treat psychoanalysis as any other science"⁷⁰. However, despite Freud's repeated insistence that there be, for example a "strictly scientific treatment" of the field of human love,⁷¹ the possibility of meaning arriving from a source not primarily intellectual is there.

Freud identifies a stage in human development that arises before the Oedipal, before the attachment of the libido to the parental figures. In this stage, in which "there were no such [parental/Oedipal] objects", Freud identifies a "state in which the subject's libido filled his [sic] own ego and had that for its object" and calls this state "*narcissism* or self-love".⁷² He goes on to say that "this state never completely ceases [... the] ego remains the great reservoir of [the subject's] libido".⁷³ The ego, site of conscious perceptions of the world and of self-awareness, is also the seat of the libido, "from which object-cathexes are sent out and into which the libido can stream back again from the objects".⁷⁴ If the ego is the site of this libidinal energy, to which it returns and from which it originates, then sexual energy is implicated in the concern of the self for the self. Narcissism, or self-love, is foundational for the love of or relation to the other. Preceding even an Oedipal relation to a parent, psychoanalytically speaking the love of self is original love. Love for the other, fascination with the other (cathex) arises from this love, from the deposits of libido in the ego which are 'sent out' towards

69 Freud, Sigmund. "On Dreams", *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay. London: Vintage, 1995, p. 171.

70 Ibid, "An Autobiographical Study", p. 37.

71 Ibid, "A Special Choice of Objects Made by Men (Contributions to the Psychology of Love I)", p. 388.

72 Ibid, "An Autobiographical Study", p. 35

73 Ibid, "An Autobiographical Study", p. 35

74 Ibid, "An Autobiographical Study", p. 35

the object of interest. Although Freud does not explicitly call narcissism or self-love 'natural', he does refer to the self as one of the two 'original sexual objects'⁷⁵ and to self-love as "the primal state from which instinctual life proceeds".⁷⁶ Because of the position this kind of love takes both chronologically (occurring before any other kind of love) and relationally (it fills the ego, thereby constituting the self at least in part), we can understand narcissism or self-love as a sort of default position, which despite not being called natural by Freud is treated as though it is, and which is identified as 'primal'.

For Freud, narcissism or self-love is fundamental in terms of the ego's relation to its surroundings; from the beginning, sexual instincts are "attached to the satisfaction of the ego-instincts".⁷⁷ The ego and its love for itself are the source of the ability to relate to others, and self-love both precedes and outlasts even very early kinds of attachment (such as the Oedipal). But Freud's treatment of love in other of his essays suggests that he senses a difference between love for the self and love for the other, or, perhaps, that he needs for some reason to separate love of the other from a healthy or 'natural' narcissism. While narcissism or self-love imbues a subject's life from its earliest days and continues to be a source of direction and information, consciously or unconsciously, for the desires and decisions of that subject, Freud notes that "things that have to do with love are incommensurable with everything else".⁷⁸ In the psychoanalytic relationship, in fact, it seems that love is the source of little but difficulty, or even sabotage. For example, Freud refers to a desire "to destroy the doctor's authority by bringing him down to the level of a lover"⁷⁹ as a motive for positive transference (the process wherein a patient falls in love with an analyst). Love, in this case, is still a way of relating to what is outside the ego, but it is specifically destructive. It destroys the authority of the doctor. Moreover, it upsets the 'natural' hierarchy of wise and powerful doctor/sick and incapable patient, bringing the doctor 'down to the level of the lover'. The way Freud phrases this—the violence of 'destroy', the authority of the doctor (vs. the presumed non-authority of the [female] patient, the 'level' to which the doctor is brought down (the level of being a lover somehow beneath that of being a doctor)—makes it clear that this sort of love is undesirable, unacceptable. Transference of feelings to an analyst is perhaps undesirable in that it might inhibit the progress of analysis, but for Freud there seems to be something more at stake. He refers later in this essay to "Genuine love", which

75 Ibid, "On Narcissism: An Introduction", p. 554.

76 Ibid, "Mourning and Melancholia", p. 588.

77 Ibid, "On Narcissism: An Introduction", p. 553.

78 Ibid, "Observations in Transference-Love", p. 379.

79 Ibid, "Observations in Transference-Love", p. 381.

would make the patient “docile and intensify her readiness to solve the problems of her case”.⁸⁰ In other words, *real* love—“a real happy love corresponds to the primal condition in which object-libido and ego-libido cannot be distinguished”⁸¹—is not directed toward the other, but toward the self; in the case of the psychoanalytic relationship, transference of love toward the analyst prevents the analysand from grasping her situation. The patient’s docility and willingness to solve her problems would, by contrast, demonstrate the presence of self-love in her desire to be well. Before love of the other can take place, the subject must be willing to pay attention to the self and to develop a healthy form of self-love.

Freud’s attention to the debasement of the doctor which the transference of the patient’s amorous feelings enacts reveals an attitude toward love which persists in several of his essays. Freud explains the necessity of science—of psychoanalysis—to engage with the question of and conditions for loving in part because writers and artists, to whom such examination has been left, “are under the necessity to produce intellectual and aesthetic pleasure, as well as certain emotional effects”. Because of this, writers and artists “cannot reproduce the stuff of reality unchanged, but must isolate portions of it, remove disturbing associations, tone down the whole, and fill in what is missing”.⁸² Where artists and writers owe some debt to ‘pleasure’, Freud writes, science, which is “the most complete renunciation of the pleasure principle of which our mental activity is capable”,⁸³ does not. Love debases; it brings authorities low or strips them of their authority; it requires a ‘scientific treatment’ because any other will overlook its ‘disturbing associations’. None of this criticism is to imply that love is some ‘pure’ thing, a field of meadowflowers through which all lovers frolic, endlessly, and endlessly content. But Freud’s anecdote about the patient who poses such a threat to her analyst (perhaps in part because of Freud’s encouragement of his patients to deconstruct and question his authority), and the disgust that tinges words like ‘destroy’ and ‘bring him down to the level of a lover’ are themselves not markers of a neutral or ‘scientific’ attention to the idea of love. The desire to ‘rescue’ love by talking about it scientifically is a model of the separation of feeling from thought which has structured much of Western thought, from the exile of the poets in *The Republic* to the Cartesian body-mind split. Love, deranging and debasing, can be saved by regarding it with the

80 Ibid, “Observations in Transference-Love”, p. 384. While I understand why Freud identifies transference as an inappropriate/bad form of love and ‘docility’ as genuine love in analysis, it is not unproblematic that the female subject of whom he writes here is a better subject if/when she is ‘docile’ and willing to follow the authoritative lead of the (male) doctor. The active female subject is castigated, the passive one ideal (Freud contrasts this docility to the patient’s “stubborn and rebellious spirit”, on the same page).

81 Ibid, “On Narcissism: An Introduction”, p. 561.

82 Ibid, “A Special Choice of Objects Made by Men (Contributions to the Psychology of Love I)”, p. 387.

83 Ibid, “A Special Choice of Objects Made by Men (Contributions to the Psychology of Love I)”, p. 388.

dispassionate eye of objectivity, which *can* “reproduce the stuff of reality unchanged”.⁸⁴

In other words, love can be rescued by including all of its parts, by treating it as whole rather than by ignoring what does not seem to fit. In “On the Unique Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love (Contributions to the Psychology of Love II)”, however, Freud introduces the idea of “two currents” in love, “the *affectionate* and the *sensual* current”, the union of which is “necessary to ensure a completely normal attitude in love”.⁸⁵ These two currents, on the one hand “sacred” (i.e., non-sexual, impotent, or repressive) and on the other “profane or animal” (sexual), when out of balance, cause what Freud refers to as “psychical impotence”.⁸⁶ For those in whom the currents are not in union, “[what] they love they do not desire, and [what] they desire they cannot love”. Instead, these people “seek objects which they do not need to love, in order to keep their sensuality away from the objects they love”.⁸⁷ Instead of imagining a split between the body (sensual current) and mind (affectionate current), Freud advocates for “people in whom the two currents [...] have become properly fused”. In those who lack ‘properly fused currents’, he warns, “the man almost always feels his respect for the woman acting as a restriction on his sexual activity”. Wholeness, rather than separation, is valued (experienced by “only a few educated people”),⁸⁸ and this valuing echoes Freud’s descriptions of the development of the ego in the individual, which must be developed to incorporate both self-love and attention to the other.

Later in the 20th century, Freud’s ideas are addressed by Jacques Lacan, who writes that “Freud’s thought is the most perennially open to revision”,⁸⁹ and it is in this sense of ‘revision’—re-seeing, re-imagining, reconstructing, revisiting, and revising as one would a text which was imperfect in its first manifestation that Lacan relates to Freud in his seminars. Of course, the seminar itself is a site of revision, where histories or ideas the seminar-conductor has already thought through, at least in part, are represented to other listeners.

Through the writings of both Freud and Lacan we see that the question of love is integral to the *human being*, not only to philosophers or to the practice of philosophy (which is not the implication of the *Symposium* except insofar as it does not explicitly and materially extend its consideration of

84 Ibid, “A Special Choice of Objects Made by Men (Contributions to the Psychology of Love I)”, p. 388.

85 Ibid, “On the Unique Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love (Contributions to the Psychology of Love II)”, p. 395.

86 Ibid, “On the Unique Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love (Contributions to the Psychology of Love II)”, p. 397.

87 Ibid, “On the Unique Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love (Contributions to the Psychology of Love II)”, p. 397.

88 Ibid, “On the Unique Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love (Contributions to the Psychology of Love II)”, p. 397.

89 Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud’s Papers on Technique, 1953-1954*, Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Trans. and notes John Forrester. New York: Norton, 1988, p. 1.

love beyond the room full of philosophers in which this takes place; any such extension is theoretical and general). For Freud and for Lacan, love, under the banner of narcissism or self-love, takes place before the other even comes along; it takes place, that is, regardless of the advent or arrival of the other. If the human *is*, they love. Although Lacan calls himself a Freudian, he is not uncritical of Freud, and his method differs from Freud's in that he emphasises the ideological structures which cause the subject to come to self-knowledge and knowledge of the other, rather than focusing on the biological causes of behaviour; in addition, Lacan's primary metaphor or way of understanding these structures is linguistic. Language and its use constitute a break with the material (real) world; the subject develops through his or her misrecognition of the real in favor of a reality (based on projection and fantasy) that is constructed through language in response to pressures from social conditions such as law, meaning, convention, manners, and (appropriate) desires. In respect to narcissism in particular, Lacan does not treat it as automatic in the way the Freud does; instead, narcissism comes about through the approval of a parent or other who holds the mirror in which the child sees him- or herself. This approval is what causes the image of the self to become so important.

Despite the differences in their approaches, Freud remains a platform from which Lacan begins many of his discussions. At one point, Lacan refers to what he perceives as an oversight in Freud to demonstrate the validity of his own assertions about self-love or narcissism; amused that Freud "at first attributed the perversions to women", Lacan goes on to say that that "is truly a confirmation that, when one is a man, one sees in one's partner what one props oneself up on, what one is propped up by narcissistically".⁹⁰ Even Freud's own beliefs about sexual behaviour, Lacan is saying, show how we go out of our way to associate with the Other what we believe about, need, or desire the Other to be, regardless of the Other's actual state. It is not the Other whom one loves, but "one's own ego that one loves in love, one's own ego made real on the imaginary level".⁹¹ Desire is a misrecognition of presence where there is in fact only a sort of 'screen' onto which we project our self-involved fantasies—our narcissism or self-love—constructed by the conventions in which we live. Because our desires are created through fantasies that are entangled in cultural constructions rather than the materiality of our bodies and sexuality, they have more to do with what is absent (materially) than with what is present. Desire is thus constituted in part by what is *not there*, by the lack of the object of desire, and this lack ensures desire's continuity.

90 Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Trans. Bruce Fink. New York: Norton, 1998, p. 87.

91 Lacan 1988, p. 142.

The 'perversion' Lacan refers to is the idea in psychoanalytical discourse that "one's jouissance of the Other taken as a body is always inadequate—perverse, on the one hand, insofar as the Other is reduced to object *a* [the imaginary]".⁹² Perversion is located "at the limit of the register of recognition", and it is "this gap in human desire [...] whereby human desire in its entirety is exposed, in the deepest sense of the term, to the desire of the other".⁹³ In love, both men and women are caught up in fantasy or ideal images of the self and the other. This embeddedness in fantasy means that instead of being able to relate to the other as they are, we relate to the other as we imagine them, desire them, or make demands for them to be. In other words, the love relation stems from a relation to the interior self, perhaps the unarticulated self, which projects its desires onto the other. That which we prop ourselves up on is our perception of the world, a fantasy we convince ourselves is real.

Through analysis, Lacan writes, it is possible to demonstrate that "the substance of what is supposedly object-like (*objectal*) [...] is in fact that which constitutes a remainder in desire" and which "sustains desire through its lack of satisfaction (*insatisfaction*), and even its impossibility".⁹⁴ The body of the other, which is supposedly what is desired, or which is what triggers desire, becomes a side-note once desire is entered into; in fact, the relationship is between one's projection and oneself, rather than between oneself and another. The place where we situate desire (the object, the other) becomes instead the remainder, left over from the expression of desire as the relation between the self and its projections. At that point, the relationship is between the self and the imagined other, the projections of one's own desire onto the other. Because of the gap between the imagined other and the other as she or he is, there is a perpetual lag, a space desire cannot bound across. The body, the other as she or he is, becomes a remainder in desire—the part that is left over *or* the part that is yet to come—not its centre. Despite our tendency to narrate love stories with the other (the beloved, the damsel in distress) at their centre, Lacan's psychoanalysis contends that this is a mask that covers up the narcissism of the imaginary. The demands it makes are unsatisfiable because they are demands on an other who does not exist; we undergo a misrecognition of the other that stems from our individual need to construct a sense of the other's 'reality'. Films and novels may offer a romantic portrait of the 'One', but the "One everyone talks about all the time is, first of all, a kind of mirage of the One you believe yourself to be".⁹⁵ Relation to the other is a relation to the self—to one's own projections and to the loss and lack that the difference between these projections and reality constitute.

92 Lacan 1998, p. 144.

93 Lacan 1988, p. 221.

94 Lacan 1998, p. 6.

95 Ibid, p. 47.

An understanding of the idea of love through a 20th-century theoretical lens cannot ignore Lacan and Freud's interpretations of the relation between the lover and *herself*. Psychoanalytical perspectives on love help to complicate traditional understandings of love, showing the ways in which love is self-love. In the chapter on Rilke later in this dissertation the idea of distance or separation—a preserved solitude—will be discussed. Lacan and Freud's understanding of love can help explain this separation and perhaps underscore Rilke's assertion of its necessity to love: self-love both concretises the self (establishing a self who might be able to demand solitude) and establishes, as Rilke does, the impossibility of truly approaching the other without overwhelming them with one's own projections and expectations—allowing an expression of the necessary distance between ones who love.

Obviously, despite my treatment so far, love is not exclusively an intellectual phenomenon; it takes place in the body as well. It therefore requires a thought that takes the body into consideration, one that reads not only the words a body produces with its hand or its mouth, but the language the body itself speaks, which is not always in words. Since this dissertation will consider the ways in which humans interact with nonhuman objects (texts), it asks for theories which deal with the relationship not only between humans but between humans and nonhumans (which, depending on when we are, could include not only obviously nonhuman objects such as texts but subjects whom we would now think of as human—women, non-white people, people with disabilities, people who identify with a gender other than the one they were born with...). Two related areas of late-20th century thinking complement this consideration: they are affect theory and *écriture féminine*—specifically the work of Hélène Cixous. I will first address affect theory, which this dissertation will approach as a way among ways of imagining relations, rather than as a single and fixed path to understanding them.

Affect theory refers to a movement toward the inclusion of the body (whether human, animal, other, or hybrid) and its sensations in scholarship. The idea of affect has arisen over the past few decades within contemporary scholarship spanning political philosophy, neuroscience, psychology (out of the work of Silvan Tomkins, which is generally acknowledged as the origin point of current thinking on affect, despite the divergences in how it is now used and made), history, social theory (including queer theory, developed at first in the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick), film studies, ethics, and aesthetics. In the area delineated by the amorphous title of 'critical theory', which includes considerations of many of these areas, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's considerations of the philosophy of Spinoza and Bergson signaled the emergence of the field; writers such as Brian

Massumi, Patricia Clough, Teresa Brennan, Michael Hardt, and Sara Ahmed, among others, all have used or attempted to define ideas of affect in their work. Among others, Clare Hemmings and Ruth Leys have offered critiques of affect theory, especially as Massumi uses it and with regard to the appropriation by writers and scholars in the humanities of work on emotions done in the sciences. Two edited volumes, *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010) and *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (2007), a dedicated special issue of the journal *Parrhesia* (2011), and a roundtable at the 2012 MLA Conference attest to current scholarly interest in affect and to the seriousness with which it is taken as a subject of inquiry across many areas of study.

The word 'affect' originally referred to the relation between emotion or desire and behaviour or action—to the idea the one might be compelled to do something not as the result of an intellectual procedure but by other forces at work within and upon the body. In Gilles Deleuze's lectures on Spinoza, affect (Spinoza's *affectus*) is first defined as "any mode of thought which doesn't represent anything", "constituted by the lived transition or lived passage from one degree of perfection to another".⁹⁶ The use of this word in other contemporary theorizations of affect is likewise not limited to emotion or desire, moving past 'affect as synonym or descriptor for feeling' and into the territory of 'affect as affect', differentiated as a term within the range of terms for the receipt and sensing of information by human and other bodies. 'Affect' is variously understood to be "synonymous with *force* or *forces of encounter*" or "a body's *capability* to affect and to be affected";⁹⁷ or something that places an individual "in a *circuit* of feeling and response";⁹⁸ or an attention to the textures of intersubjective experience to replace or supplement an attention to structures of truth, a way to shift "the emphasis of some interdisciplinary conversations away from the recent fixation on epistemology";⁹⁹ or, in fact, almost as many other things as there are people who write about it. What, precisely, affect 'is' and how it works is not agreed upon by the many writers who use the term or think through it. Because the field is enormously broad—ranging from neuroscience to cultural theory—this section will focus primarily on affect theory as it relates to cultural theory, as exemplified by the work of Deleuze and Massumi, as well as on Ruth Leys' critique of affect as adopted by scholars in the humanities. A later chapter will introduce the work of Teresa Brennan.

96 Deleuze, Gilles. "Lecture Transcripts on Spinoza's Concept of Affect." Trans. Émilie and Julien Deleuze. Accessed 28 August 2012. <<http://www.webdeleuze.com/php/sommaire.html>>

97 Gregg, Melissa, and Gregory J. Seigworth. "An Inventory of Shimmers", *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Gregg and Seigworth. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010, p. 2.

98 Hemmings, Clare. "Invoking Affect: Cultural Theory and the Ontological Turn". *Cultural Studies* Vol. 19, No. 5 September 2005, pp. 548-567, p. 552.

99 Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003, p. 17.

Western philosophy admits the transfer of information from mind to mind—we see this in the foundational texts of the discipline; look at Socrates—and the image of the teacher or the philosopher-as-teacher is the image of this transfer from mind to mind. However, the subject has been understood to be bounded in other ways when it comes to what is felt, sensed. While the life of the mind might be open, the life of the body, the heart, the nerves, the vapours, the spirit are private and circumscribed. Or so we have believed, and so we often behave. Affect theory tells us, rightly or wrongly, that there are communications which go on without our consent or even our knowledge; that things are transmitted to us across the boundaries which we believe are there. In other words, it attempts to address “the singularly and intimately impersonal—even sub-personal or pre-personal—folds of belonging (or non-belonging) to a world”.¹⁰⁰ The feeling, sensing, affect-ive and affect-ed subject is not singular, but composed. How is this pertinent to a dissertation on love and on love as a means of approaching an other—specifically a textual other? If there are things we receive without knowing; if our human subject is not bounded as we believe (in the ways we believe), then those other ways of knowing or of being passed-on-to might also make for fruitful approaches to study. The ways in which affect is understood to cross boundaries otherwise thought of as stable suggests an analogy for the ways in which nonhuman agents, such as texts, might also relate and be related to by humans. The incorporation of the body into affect theory is a welcome contrast to parts of the tradition of critique which avoid or disallow knowledge that takes place in terms of feeling and sensing rather than observing. Moreover, as Gregg and Seigworth write, there is no one theory of affect, unifying and codifying what affect might mean; instead there are “infinitely multiple iterations of affect and theories of affect: theories as diverse and singularly delineated as their own highly particular encounters with bodies, affects, worlds”. This awareness of multiplicity as a native function of affect theory offers the possibility of operating “with a certain modest methodological vitality rather than impressing [a theory] upon a wiggling world like a snap-on grid of shape-setting interpretability”.¹⁰¹ In this way, affect theory, despite its imperfections, helps to make a space into which this dissertation might come.

Massumi writes that we should “[reserve] the term ‘emotion’ for the personalised content, and affect for the continuation. Emotion is contextual. Affect is situational: eventfully ingressive to context. Serially so: affect is trans-situational”.¹⁰² Massumi’s idea of emotion being contextual and personalised falls along the line of Eric Shouse’s definition of feeling as personal and biographical; as

100 Gregg and Seigworth, p. 3.

101 Ibid.

102 Massumi, Brian. *Parables for the Virtual*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002, p. 217.

“a sensation that has been checked against previous experiences and labelled”.¹⁰³ All three descriptors—personal, contextual, biographical—conceive of the felt or the emotional¹⁰⁴ as something that happens within the context of time and space, with reference to what has already been undergone. Emotion as personal means that it is non-transferable. It does not extend. It is, instead, the acting-out of the individual within their individual context, moment to moment. By contrast, affect understood as situational and then as trans-situational must also be understood as not-personal. The situational has nothing to do with the individual, insofar as it is not generated by the individual and does not pertain, as emotion does, to a sense of how *I react* or how *I behave* in a given context. The affect *is* the context, and as such is greater than individual experience or expression. Context is an influence: we know this. We know that a foetus in utero absorbs whatever its mother consumes. In the same way, affect as context tinges and forms our perceptions and emotions.

The idea of extension as a way of understanding relation is not unique to Massumi. It also appears in the work of Deleuze and Guattari, specifically in their conception of the rhizome. A rhizome, unlike a root system, which “plots a point, fixes an order”,¹⁰⁵ has no identifiable origin point. It is not linear in that way. Instead, “any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything else, and must be”.¹⁰⁶ The rhizome as a metaphor for the production and understanding of knowledge is an argument in favour of connection and difference. It is, moreover, an argument in terms of relation which is multi-directional and assembled, rather than homogenous. Deleuze and Guattari identify ‘tree logic’ as “a logic of tracing and reproduction” whose “goal is to describe a de facto state, to maintain balance in intersubjective relations, or to explore an unconscious that is already there from the start” and which “consists of tracing [...] something that comes ready-made”.¹⁰⁷ This ‘tree logic’ is associated by Deleuze and Guattari with linguistics and with psychoanalysis they call it a “variation on the oldest form of thought”.¹⁰⁸ (In its place, they propose ‘schizoanalysis’, which “treats the unconscious as an acented system [...] and thus arrives at an entirely different state of the unconscious”,¹⁰⁹ aiming at the production, rather than description thereof.) Instead of tracing, Deleuze and Guattari argue for

103 Shouse, Eric. “Feeling, Emotion, Affect”, *The Journal of Media and Culture*, Volume 8, Issue 6, December 2005. Accessed 28 August 2012. <<http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0512/03-shouse.php>>

104 Shouse differentiates between ‘feeling’ (sensation in biographical context) and ‘emotion’ (projection or display of a feeling). Massumi does not address this difference. However, the overlap in terminology (‘personal’) provides a way to look at both as compared to the way Massumi uses the word ‘affect’.

105 Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari, trans. Brian Massumi. *A Thousand Plateaus* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), p.13.

106 Ibid.

107 Ibid, p. 12.

108 Ibid.

109 Ibid, p. 18

mapping, “oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real”.¹¹⁰ What might that mean? In contrast to the tracing of something ‘ready-made’ (a story generalisable to each patient, such as the Oedipal one, for example), experimentation-oriented mapping implies responsiveness to what is there—perceived or sensed—in the unexpected moment. Furthermore, the rhizome and its mapping tendency foster “connections between fields”; the map is “open and connectable in all of its dimensions, [...] susceptible to constant modification”.¹¹¹ Where ‘tree logic’ is uni-directional (down; out) and linear (from this point to that), that of the rhizome is to cross and recross, to decentre itself, to be revised, to be entered from multiple points. Deleuze and Guattari are careful, however, to note that the rhizome is not purely itself; that there are “knots of arborescence in rhizomes, and rhizomatic offshoots in roots” just as there are “despotic forms of immanence and channelization specific to rhizomes” and “anarchic deformations in the transcendent system of trees”.¹¹² Their argument seems to be in favour of a mixed or hybrid understanding, against the idea of purity, rather than simply against to one construction of knowledge and for another. “The important point,” they write, “is that the root-tree and canal-rhizome are not two opposed models [...]. It is not a question of this or that place on earth, or of a given moment in history, still less of this or that category of thought. It is a question of a model that is perpetually in construction or collapsing”.¹¹³ The model of thought which is perpetually in construction is a model of expansion. Expansion *can* of course be colonial, imperial, taking over what does not belong to it and assimilating it. But it *might* also be inclusive, open, and humble, offering space at a table no longer reserved only for one kind of person or way of thinking. Within the context of thinking about affect, Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the rhizome—a plant form whose generative nodes are networked and extensive rather than linear and intensive—expresses the non-centrality or trans-locating tendencies of affect itself. The undecidability of what is meant by—or experienced or communicated as—*affect* is an expression of an understanding of the world that eludes polarities for their own sake (things are more connected than we know) but that at the same time resists consolidation (there is yet more we do not know/there are places we do not connect).

There are several ways in which, despite some differences which I will address a bit later in this section, Massumi’s work follows on from Deleuze and Guattari’s. For one, Massumi writes that intensity (a word he sometimes uses in place of affect) is “embodied in purely autonomic reactions most directly manifested in the skin—at the surface of the body, *at its interface with things*” (my

110 Ibid, p. 12.

111 Ibid.

112 Ibid, p. 20.

113 Ibid.

emphasis).¹¹⁴ The image of the body—the skin—interfacing with other things owes a clear debt at least of representation to Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome; the 'interfacing' of a wasp and an orchid in their work is analogous to the interface between the skin and 'other things' here in Massumi's. Massumi's description of the event taking place "on both levels [the superlinear and linear, which are also two orders of language for Massumi]—and between both levels, as they resonate together to form a larger system composed of two interacting subsystems following entirely different rules of formation" contains echoes of Deleuze and Guattari's assertion that a semiotic chain understood rhizomatically "is like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive".¹¹⁵ This makes sense, of course, since Massumi is consciously working in and deviating from the path trod by Deleuze and Guattari. He wrote the introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus*; his first monograph was in part entitled *Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, and later edited the collection *A Shock to Thought: Expression After Deleuze and Guattari*. Despite this relationship (or perhaps unsurprisingly, since Deleuze and Guattari's work itself deals with the integrity of divergence and difference within a rhizomatic system), Massumi attends to his own concerns which fall nevertheless within the field of approach into which Deleuze and Guattari's thinking on rhizome and on affect also fall. Massumi's concept of affect as "a way of talking about that margin of manoeuvrability, the 'where we might be able to go and what we might be able to do' in every present situation" contains echoes of the rhizome.¹¹⁶

Massumi's concern for 'every present situation,' "being right where you are—more intensely",¹¹⁷ helps to define his understanding of affect as it is linked to intensity. The density of 'everyness' and of 'presentness': the awareness of an infolded present which bears more than what is perceived or recognized gives us affect as something other than one's own feeling: like Spinoza, Massumi is thinking of the body in its capability to affect and to be affected, and these "are not two different capacities—they always go together. When you affect something, you are at the same time opening yourself up to being affected in turn, and in a slightly different way than you might have been the moment before. You have made a transition, however slight".¹¹⁸ For Massumi, this transition represents a change in capacity. Intensity is brought about through the interfacing of one thing with another, of two things which respond or communicate, and especially, it seems through the interfacing of two things, one of which (the human) does not 'understand' the action of the interface

114 Massumi, p. 25.

115 Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 7.

116 Zournazi, Mary. "An Interview with Brian Massumi", <<http://www.international-festival.org/node/111>>, accessed January 8 2013.

117 Ibid.

118 Ibid.

in any usual way, because, according to Massumi, the information which passes is embodied not in cognitive responsiveness (decision, desire) but in something which precedes even that—the autonomic. Autonomy, of course, means self-government; freedom from outside control.¹¹⁹ But in terms of the body, it also refers to physical, anatomical systems which are self-regulating: the breath, the hair that rises, the reflexes, the heartbeat. And at the point of the autonomic, affect theory crosses from the humanities into the sciences.¹²⁰

One side effect of Massumi's approach in *Parables for the Virtual* is placing affect not only in terms of its history and treatment within cultural studies (Spinoza's affectus/affectio, for example) but in terms of cross-disciplinary research being done contemporaneously with his own. Ruth Leys writes that affect theorists like Massumi and some neuroscientists share “a commitment to the idea that there is a gap between the subject's affects and its cognition or appraisal of the affective situation or object, such that cognition or thinking comes 'too late' for reasons, beliefs, intentions, and meanings to play the role in behavior usually accorded to them”. The result of this commitment, Leys goes on to say, is that “action and behavior are held to be determined by affective dispositions”¹²¹ which are outside of the control of the mind, outside of consciousness. Her critique of Massumi's work specifically and that of affect theorists more generally rests on their adoption of this thesis, as well as on what she sees as the misappropriation of neuroscience of the emotions for the purposes of humanities scholarship. Leys' argument is not that every experience is cognitive or that a pre-cognitive affect would have no place in the study of emotion (from a neuroscientific point of view) or that of affect as it has come to be understood in the humanities. But she does take issue with Massumi's interpretations of scientific data. Unlike Deleuze and Guattari, who propose a theory which is addressed to text to some extent and to a further extent on a critique of psychoanalysis, Leys takes Massumi's understanding of affect as resting in part on empirical data he takes from a pair of studies done by media researchers in Germany in the 1980s. Insofar as this kind of data purports to scientificity and therefore to some kind of 'truth' or reliability or solidity, the interpretation of the data matters. It especially matters if, as Leys writes, Massumi's theoretical moves are “seemingly unwarranted by the experimental results”.¹²² However, Massumi is working within the field of “philosophically inflected cultural studies”;¹²³ Leys is *reading* him as though he is working in

119 And to Kant it meant the freedom to act without the influence of desires. Perhaps replacing 'without' by 'beyond' or 'before' would bring the Kantian understanding of 'autonomy' closer to an affective one?

120 This is a point that the work of Teresa Brennan interrogates; her investigation of affect as it relates to pheromones takes into account the possibility (and meaningfulness) of autonomic responses to the presence of others.

121 Leys, Ruth. “The Turn to Affect: A Critique”. *Critical Inquiry*, 37 (Spring 2011), pp. 434–472, p. 443.

122 Ibid, p. 448.

123 Gregg and Seigworth, p.7.

quantum-/neuro-/cognitive sciences. ("I for one don't count my way around town",¹²⁴ writes Massumi, exemplifying his leanings toward a qualitative rather than quantitative approach to understanding what surrounds him.) Because it interprets the German researchers' findings, perhaps Massumi's work can be seen as open to Leys' critique. But what if we consider it not from the point of view of those scientific disciplines which are interested in the study of affect but from the point of view of the humanities disciplines that are? This is not to say that a *connection* between these disciplines would be severed, but it might suggest a way to conceptualise different approaches to the same data. Without advocating for "abandon[ing] the social sciences entirely", it is possible to aim for "a new academic attitude rather than a new method".¹²⁵

Is our role, or one of our roles, as humanities researchers to bring the sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities closer together? If or when we think it is, then how are we to go about that? Is it useful in terms of this purpose to interpret data for our own (humanities) uses, even if the interpretations we come up with do not in actuality follow the norm of interpretation for such data in the (social) sciences? Without denying the potential that information, data, research and scholarship from the social sciences and sciences holds for the humanities, I do wonder why methodologies like Massumi's are understood as adapting to a 'scientific' mode of revealed or observed truth (which is where Leys' criticism lies), instead of as approaching the whole of it as story, anecdote, analogy, and metaphor. Social science data interpreted by social scientists (or humanities scholars, or scientists) *as* data can produce one kind of meaning; the same data as an allegory can produce another. Without a necessary debt to the empirical, positive, or absolute, story and metaphor do what Massumi and Deleuze and Guattari talk about: they resonate. In the spaces of their resonance we become responsible for finding new ways of speaking about and to them. I am not denying that there is value in work that would join or approximate the sciences and the humanities. There is, and no dispensation is needed for that work to continue. But what this dissertation intends to show, in part, is that for a very long time philosophy in particular has felt the weight of the scientific (meaning the provable, positivist, empirical) as an ideal approach, even in those occasional situations (such as, for example, the study of love) when *as* an approach it is incomplete or insufficient. Scientific approaches have their use; so do non-scientific approaches. It is not an either-or question, but one of balance. The remedy in the case of this dissertation may be in more figuration, more access to the poetic, not a restriction thereof.

124 Massumi, p. 181.

125 Hemmings, p. 563.

Enter Hélène Cixous.

If affect theory provides this dissertation a model for unbounded relation—for the possibility of being touched, moved, without one's consent, or even without one's (fore)knowledge, Hélène Cixous's writing provides a model for the approach of an open, an unbounded, reader to the text. Both in her writings about writing itself and in writings through which she approaches other work—in particular the writings of Clarice Lispector—Cixous engages in a reading which attempts to "find the apple by feeling [her] way along in the dark",¹²⁶ which, she writes, is a condition both of discovery and of love. What is a reading that tries to find without looking, or to find in a place where looking is not possible? It is a reading that is not at its strongest or easiest, a reading without its most available and accustomed sense (sight). A reading which therefore takes its own vulnerability and questionability as a first principle. It is also a reading which 'feels' its way along: feels, as in touch; feels, as in intuition. Feels, as in receives signals even when those signals are not codified into language. Feeling not in opposition to understanding or knowing, but as a way of knowing: Cixous writes of this kind of reading that it "is not a question of not having understood [...] but of not letting oneself get locked into comprehension".¹²⁷ Standing in the middle of the translated text, I must feel my way into the multiplicity of meanings that run through its languages; I am responsible for unlocking my singular mode of comprehension and moving into the space of "the parentheses in which our 'why-nots' live",¹²⁸ where many voices make more than one thing possible.

Cixous's way of reading requires in me "this lightness, this active passivity, this capacity to let things come through, this submission to the process"¹²⁹ of reading, of meaning-creation by the text/by the reader/in the text/in the reader. She writes often of something like 'lightness' in her approach to the texts she loves, calling writing "touching the mystery, delicately, with the tips of the words, trying not to crush it",¹³⁰ and the texts she loves (actively, loving them by reading them and being read by them), she describes as for example "an immense *book of respect. Book of the right distance*".¹³¹ Distance is what one attains by a "relentless process of de-selfing, de-egoization".¹³² Distance, respect—these are forms of not-being-close to what one approaches. One might read across such a distance: too

126 Cixous, Hélène. *"Coming to Writing" and Other Essays*, ed. Deborah Jenson, with an introductory essay by Susan Rubin Saleiman. Trans. Sarah Cornell, Deborah Jenson, Ann Liddle, Susan Sellers. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1991, p. 161.

127 Ibid.

128 Ibid, p. 179.

129 Ibid, pp. 113-114.

130 Ibid., p. 134.

131 Ibid., p. 156.

132 Ibid.

near, and the letters become invisible. The book assimilates into the blur of the reader's periphery. To read as Cixous reads requires distance. It therefore also requires some detachment from the centrality and the correctness and even the activeness of the self. An entry into the active passivity of the reader who is read by her text, who "stages the having, makes it palpitate, move slightly, vibrate, she does not consume it, she does not devour it".¹³³ With distance between the reader and the read, there is safety for both—safety from immolation, assimilation. Detachment from readerly ego allows the preservation of both reader and read, and allows for a patient reading; one that "pay[s] attention: doing nothing, not upsetting, filling, replacing, taking up the space. Leaving the space alone. Thinking delicately of".¹³⁴ Paying attention, in Cixous's terminology, means the smallest of movements, and awareness of the effects of those movements on one's surroundings, on one's others. It is directed toward the other not as a searchlight (which reveals), but as a "look that recognizes, [...] that respects, doesn't take, doesn't claw" and instead "contemplates and reads, caresses, bathes, makes the other gleam".¹³⁵ What Cixous calls a "practice of the greatest passivity" is a way of reading through which one *opens* the self, rather than opening the text; or they are co-opened. A way in which one allows things to pass through oneself, of "getting to know things by letting ourselves be known by them" which does not "seek to master. To demonstrate, explain, grasp. And then to lock away in a strongbox" but instead aims to "transmit: to make things loved by making them known".¹³⁶ This is a reading which loosens.

Reading, if I am to follow Cixous as she reads (as she is read), is seeking what is *felt* primarily: primarily in the sense of ordinally first, and in the sense of the felt as a point of origin for other kinds of thinking, such as writing. Writing about painting, Cixous says that she loves it "the way the blind love the sun".¹³⁷ Without seeing, that is. With an attention to what sensations it causes in the body: "feeling it, breathing it in, [...] knowing it through the skin".¹³⁸ With my eyes closed, the world is immersive. The separation between my body and what surrounds it is less immediately knowable. What I do know surrounds and penetrates me: sound seems to occur within my body itself, rather than to emerge from something outside of me and to remain there. Currents of air are warm or cool and affect my body's response (I relax; I tense; hair rises). "[T]his thing' that is the book", writes Cixous, "is I".¹³⁹ The book is the writer, the book is the reader; or at least the boundary is more

133 Ibid, p. 160.

134 Ibid, p. 66.

135 Ibid, p. 51.

136 Ibid, p. 57.

137 Ibid, p. 106.

138 Ibid.

139 Ibid, p. 157.

delicate and porous than we might imagine.

I want to return for one moment to the non-exclusive pairing of allegorical and scientific interpretation of data that was brought up toward the end of the discussion of affect theory, in order to clarify, with reference to Cixous, the possibilities that affect as a metaphor holds for this dissertation. At one point, Cixous refers specifically to a moment in a text by Lispector where she (Lispector) writes about the positive potential in becoming an *object* in her own story—a vine, rather than, say, a narrator. Cixous points to this transformation and acknowledges that we “might say that this is *only* metaphor”.¹⁴⁰ *Only* metaphor, meaning not ‘real’; meaning an illustration to direct us toward something but not the thing itself. But, Cixous goes on, “it is the dream of every author to arrive at such a transfiguration of the self, such a remove that I become the vine”. The distance is not only between the reader and the reading-self, but between the writer and her writing-self; the ego to be done away with is likewise not exclusively that of the reader. In a metaphor, the verb makes an = sign. The quantity on one side becomes the one on the other, becomes its equal. There might the writer might also enter into a communion with the objects of her writing so close, so detached from the necessity of being—being human, being central, being the one doing the determining—that she might become those objects, even momentarily, even as ‘only metaphor’. Cixous calls this a “way of remembering that my self is only one of the elements of the immense material universe” which is “haunted by the imaginary”.¹⁴¹ It is one way to look at metaphor, and it is something that metaphor provides for writing—the sense of being involved with other things, of being integrally bound to them, and of being transversed by them, which is why affect as a metaphor is appropriate. We can enact the kind of reading for which Cixous advocates (reading with a patience that “pays attention”, that is “terse, active, discreet, warm, almost imperceptible”)¹⁴² *with or without* a neuroscientific basis for it. It is not that finding out whether or not there *is* such a basis on which humanities scholarship might be built doesn’t matter; again, as Cixous writes and as I quoted above, it is a question of “not letting oneself get locked into comprehension”.¹⁴³ The metaphor is functional. Whether humanities scholarship can adequately or appropriately reflect and extend the work on affect done in scientific communities matters, but it isn’t the *only* thing that matters. When Cixous lets herself be read by Lispector’s text, she performs an affective relation—a relation based on attention, be-touchedness, feeling or felt perception—without looking to a scientific (or other) discourse to shore up her

140 Ibid, p. 106, emphasis mine.

141 Ibid.

142 Ibid, p. 66.

143 Ibid, p. 161.

reading and her being-read.¹⁴⁴ Cixous' writing, and the writing of others (such as Luce Irigaray, whose work appears later in this dissertation) provide both justification and precedent for the conceptual, scholarly articulation of emotional experience. It is the experience writing in this way, of being in relation via the body, which *makes it mean*: "Life becomes text starting out from my body".¹⁴⁵ From this point—the point at which the body is entered by text, or transversed by them, the point at which the body is within the text, the point at which the body is a text-generative organ—I will try to make inroads towards an ethics of reading, a way of reading which considers texts as others, and which asks how one might love them.

H. Route map

To recapitulate: this dissertation concerns itself with love as a way of approaching texts; it proposes ways of being with texts which consider them as others, collapsing the boundary between subject and object which is tacitly observed in much literary theory and criticism, and which has its roots in a scientific neglect of the relation between the two. The dissertation began with an exemplary reading of Cy Twombly's painting *The Ceiling*, demonstrating both the tone and the mode of approach that characterise its further investigation. This introduction and literature review offer particular points of access or collision or contingency that are of use in understanding the roots of the questions the dissertation poses about love.

Chapter 1 will examine the relation between science and poetry, between philosophy and love, and go on to offer a reading of W. J. T. Mitchell's 'delicate critical method', which is figured as a sounding of icons, rather than a smashing of them. Mitchell's question, 'What do pictures want?', may seem outlandish in a traditional subject-views-object sense, but in terms of an approach which acknowledges the ways in which pictures (or texts) may work upon or actually construct their viewers (readers), or an approach which acknowledges the otherness of the other who is gazed upon, this question is integral. In this dissertation, the approach being developed is a textual one; therefore in most cases the 'other' is a textual other. Mitchell's consideration of pictures' desire gives precedent for considering the 'desires' of non-living others. Because the textual or pictorial other cannot speak (in language, in response to questions, the way people can), its being epitomises the unknowable as a

144 In fact, Cixous explicitly counterposes "knowing how to live" and "scholarly knowledge" (p. 161). Which is not to say scientific scholarly knowledge alone.

145 Cixous, 1991, p. 51.

quality of any other.

The unknowable itself is, as discussed in Chapter 2, characteristic of texts (understood via Barthes) as things that are continually in production or ongoing creation. The text in its state of becoming is erotic—the erotic being a state of not-yet-achieved bliss (or total knowledge). Resistance in the text to being-known is an indication of its erotics, and of its tendency to continually generate meaning, i.e. itself. Love is, therefore, a figure in the approach to a text which allows for this unknown quality to be, unharassed. The centrality of the text as what is approached in terms of this dissertation demands an examination of other modes of textual study, philosophies with the text also at their centre, in order to see where this approach fits and what its precedents might be.

Chapter 3 is occupied with a reading of deconstruction. Deconstruction is perhaps the closest—or fullest—articulation of this approach which exists in the literature, in that Derrida insisted that deconstruction was *not* a method or system, and that it was based on respect for the otherness of the other, which he termed 'the love in deconstruction'. However, in practice deconstruction has been used methodologically. Deconstruction alone is not enough, insofar as deconstruction as a practice of reading has generally focused on the *application* of Derrida's ideas to texts. Derrida's insistence on the unnameability of deconstruction, and on the 'love in deconstruction' are an indication that deconstruction itself can be read against a Cartesian split self that privileges absolute knowledge. The dissertation argues that deconstruction can be approached (and approaches others—other texts) lovingly; that the respect for the otherness of the other which is fundamental to deconstruction is an overturning of methods whose primary goal is to know all.

Chapter 4 introduces the work of Lévinas, both as the origin of Derrida's 'yes' and in terms of his attempts to define love, both as what it is not (grasping, possessing, knowing) and what it is (responsibility to the other). The first section revisits the Franciscanism or poverty—space of all possibility—that is first discussed in Chapter 2. Following Lévinas is a continuation of the reading of Teresa Brennan's writing (introduced in the 'opening foray'), whose work on affect argues that the body and its ability to feel (and create knowledge) are not limited, as in the Western concept of the singular subject, but shared. This suggests that connections are being made continuously and often without our rational 'approval'. Brennan goes on to argue for feeling and sensing (especially gaining knowledge with senses other than sight) as methodological tools that constitute a connection with the object of study, instead of a separation between scholar-subject and specimen-object as is indicated in a relationship based on sight and cognition. The affective non-containment of the

individual allows for the possibility of knowledge via the body and for a relation not only between thinking and feeling, but between subject and object (or other subject). In both Brennan's writing and Lévinas', thinking is not subjugated to feeling; instead, both reconsider feeling as another route to wisdom. The extension of the self into the world is figured as part of a loving approach by nature of its relation to tenderness; this concept is explored via the work of Richard Rorty, Roland Barthes, and Derrida. The section concludes with a gloss of tenderness as the possibility of extension outside oneself so as to be nearer to others—imaginatively speaking—and to still respect the ungraspability of the other. Here, the section moves into a consideration of philosophy in terms of its (linguistic) roots in both love and wisdom, which brings it to *écriture féminine*, and then to a longer consideration of Luce Irigaray's writing on love, particularly in her book *The Way of Love*. The last two sections of the chapter look at Irigaray's and Barthes' work for the way they construe love as a way of being-with the other, of speaking (or revising speech as it stands—communicating with voice, gesture, touch), and of creating space. Both Barthes and Irigaray, in writing about love in terms of space, make distance between the one and the other an integral part of a loving relation or communication. This provides a figure for Derrida's insistence on the primacy of the other's otherness, and signposts the figures of separation, space, and distance in Chapter 5. The chapter ends with a meditation on the word 'yes' as an exorbitant answer, which takes its place as part of a loving approach because such an approach welcomes what it 'should not', or what is otherwise exorbitant: wisdom from the body; love in philosophy; relations between subject and 'object'. The approach that is exorbitant realises the impossibility of grasping and therefore comes toward the other with tenderness—with an extension of the self that never actually reaches full knowledge of the other.

Chapter 5 is an engagement with texts by Rainer Maria Rilke and E. E. Cummings that are at once performative of love as an approach to texts and contribute to the theorisation of such an approach. Their authorial approaches to texts can be a model for a readerly approach as well—and not only to texts about love (which these happen to be), but to any texts. Reading Rilke and Cummings, I continue to delineate the possibility for approaching the other; the presence of these authors here also signifies that such an approach is not only the province of one 'kind' of writing, but crosses disciplinary and generic boundaries. Their inclusion supports Barthes' assertion of the endlessly created text—the dissertation does not draw only on one 'kind' of text because *all* kinds of texts make up text itself. However, by virtue of their disciplinary distance from scientificity, Rilke's essay and Cummings' poems are free to enact what Irigaray refers to as a 'more musical, artistic, touchful way of speaking'. This is their further contribution.

Following Chapter 5, I offer a second exemplary reading: a coda to echo the prelude in which I wrote about Cy Twombly's *The Ceiling*. In this coda, I read the story of Moses and the burning bush in the book of Exodus in order to find suggestions of the copresence of the unorthodox and the orthodox, the ordered and the disorderly, within even a very fundamental text such as this one. My reading of the burning bush story attempts to find a gap in which the unknown, the affective, the intuitive can make its home. It is my hope that by refusing to close down and pin the being of the (textual) other, in insisting on continual difference and distance, my approach will help make that gap visible, and, across that gap, affirm—lovingly—the otherness of that other.

Chapter 1/

Between science and poetry | philosophy and love:

A brief genealogy of repression

"[To] understand our situation in reality is not to define it, but to be in an affective state."

Emmanuel Lévinas

"we shall have to obliterate many obnoxious passages, beginning with the verses"

Plato, *Republic*, III

"[The] imitative poet implants an evil constitution, for he indulges the irrational nature which has no discernment of greater and less, but thinks the same thing at one time great and at another small-he is a manufacturer of images and is very far removed from the truth."

"And now since we have reverted to the subject of poetry, let this our defence serve to show the reasonableness of our former judgment in sending away out of our State an art having the tendencies which we have described; for reason constrained us."

Plato, *Republic*, X

A. Couplets

This section begins with a pair of couplets: science and poetry, and philosophy and love. Despite the potential in pairs such as these for the blurring of boundaries, and despite their unintuitive pairings (more likely pairs: science and myth, poetry and prose), in the contexts in which this dissertation will consider them, the two couplets function like binaries. A binary, of course, is any unit composed of two parts—which their coupling here accomplishes. And although poetry and *prose*, or science and myth might most obviously be defined as a binary in a structuralist sense, the way that poetry (as a metonym for creative, subject-acknowledging activity) is excluded by science, and the way that philosophy traditionally, to some extent, ignores love (as a way of knowing via the body, as a way of being with the other/the object) means that each of these defines itself in part by what it is not. They can, therefore, function as binaries, if unconventional ones. The exclusion of poetry from science and love from philosophy is in question in this chapter.

However, despite the significance of these couplets to this dissertation, of course they do not originate with it. They are already in action, despite some theorists' (and others') desires to work against them; for instance, in the way in which affect-based readings are discriminated against in the humanities, not to mention the almost laughably obvious incompatibility of the way poets know (observation of the world inflected by the interior life of the individual) and the way scientists know (observation of the world supposedly uninflected by the interior life of the individual). Of *course* these binaries, and the example just provided, do not hold. This section will deal with these questionable binaries, demonstrate their presence in the context that surrounds this dissertation, and present support from that context for questioning them in the first place. A brief note on items of vocabulary here: although it is clear that the lexical items 'poetry' and 'love', and 'science' and 'philosophy' are distinct, in this section I will to some extent be using them interchangeably, because of the way that, in the history of science and philosophy, the latter two are intertwined (as well as the pseudo-scientific attitudes of philosophers aiming to authorise their writings); additional support for this use comes from Luce Irigaray's identification of love and poetic language in her revisions of philosophy (discussion later in this section).

My question when binaries such as these are brought into consideration is *how*. How is science at odds with poetry? How should philosophy be forgetful of the part of its name that means love? And how do we continue to pretend, if we acknowledge that these binaries are in fact false fronts, that feeling and thinking are two separate things or share no common ground, or cannot teach one

another? The answer to these questions is a simple one, but one with roots that go back to the foundations of the ways we think and think about thinking: science represses poetry because poetry is its other, the thing which, if acknowledged, would make it less *itself*. The scientificity of science is maintained by this repression, and we call it objectivity. Likewise, philosophy maintains its authority to speak on thought and thinking by repressing what is called 'irrational'—feeling. The work of Mary Midgley on the historical and contemporary relationship between science and poetry, and that of Luce Irigaray on the place of love in philosophy informs the work that will be done here.

Although this section does begin with the idea of binaries, it also begins with an example of these binaries in action, a section from Plato's *Republic* that comes from its tenth section, in which Socrates discusses the banishment of poets from his just city. Although poetry and its makers may be "sweet and holy and wonderful",¹ in the just city they "are not permitted to exist; the law will not allow them"² because the poet creates imitations of knowledge without possessing knowledge, "will make a likeness of a cobbler though he understands nothing of cobbling".³ Here, at the beginning of philosophy and of the pedagogy of philosophy, is the separation between ways of knowing. The knowledge that belongs in the just city is a knowledge not based in imitation (as poetry is for Socrates). Therefore, if "all poetical imitations are ruinous to the understanding of the hearers", then "knowledge of their true nature is the only antidote to them".⁴ The opposition of 'poetical imitations' and 'knowledge of ... true nature' within the city that represents the project of philosophy means that almost from its inception this project has contained the idea of such a separation as, if not natural, then necessary.

B. Science and poetry

Just as the separation between poetry and philosophy can be traced at least to Plato's city, the history of separation between poetry and science—or even love and science—has a similarly lengthy genealogy. Midgley locates the moment that love as a discourse evaporates from scientific (and, we may extrapolate, academic and scholarly) thought in the Renaissance. In its last appearance in scientific literature, Johannes Kepler uses the word 'love' to describe gravitational forces. While Kepler's ideas were rejected by Galileo, the idea of attraction between bodies that he proposed structured Newton's theory of gravitational attraction—but, unlike Kepler's figure of attraction

1 Plato, *Republic* III. <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html>, accessed 11 August 2011.

2 Ibid.

3 Plato *Republic* X. <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html>, accessed 11 August 2011.

4 Ibid.

within bodies, "what made [Newton's] mysterious attraction possible was a divine miracle".⁵ Newton's ideas proposed underlying and originary external forces of compulsion fundamentally different to Kepler's ideas of attractions among bodies. Of course, neither Newton nor the spurned Kepler was talking about *actual* love or actual attraction; these are figures used to describe the behaviour of non-human bodies. Regardless, the disappearance of love as a figure and as a legitimate way of describing scientific phenomena has implications for the way that figure is present (or not) in disciplines that aim or have a history of aiming at a 'scientific' mode of inquiry, which in the terms of this dissertation includes literary theory and philosophy more broadly. Because of the ways in which history of science entwines itself with philosophy, when she writes about what she calls 'science and poetry', Midgley is also writing about the attitudes and assumptions that thinkers in the tradition of Western philosophy have been conditioned to make.

Donna Haraway identifies these assumptions (about objectivity, separation, and non-contamination) as "a founding gesture of what we call modernity".⁶ This gesture requires the "separation of expert knowledge from mere opinion as the legitimating knowledge for ways of life, without appeal to [...] abstract certainty of any kind".⁷ It manifests itself in part in a rhetorical style which is divorced from the personal, the anecdotal, the unempirical, and the unprovable: this "rhetoric of the modest witness" requires an "unadorned, factual" manner of writing—unblemished by the presence of the human who writes (whose 'modesty' permits him to witness without influencing; i.e. to remove the consideration of subjectivity from the practice of observation). The "facts and the witnesses inhabit the privileged zones of 'objective' reality through a powerful writing technology".⁸ This 'founding gesture' precludes the involvement of the senses (except sight) and situates knowledge production only in terms of what can be reiterated and demonstrated to be untarnished even by figurative emotional, affective, or sensuous information. It is not unlike what Jean-Luc Marion identifies when he writes about the "*I* of philosophers, that *I* who is supposed to be universal, a disengaged spectator".⁹

If statements about love, figurative or not, have been traditionally impermissible in science, they will have no place in a philosophy that models itself on such a method. Which is why, in the end, love

⁵ Midgley, 58-59.

⁶ Donna J. Haraway. *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium. FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse*: Feminism and Technoscience* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), p. 24.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁹ Marion, Jean-Luc. *The Erotic Phenomenon*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 9. For further discussion, please see Chapter 4, Section C.

figurative or actual *does* have a place in an approach that challenges the received method of understanding the world, or the idea of a method at all.¹⁰ Such an approach, in splitting from its lineage, is responsible for finding a way of being that reflects that split.

A philosophy that does not repress its roots in love (*philios*) requires a mode of speech that reflects that. In the place of the “closed word” which “must convey a meaning in some way closed, in which the speaking subject converses above all with their own self and with speech” and “which is always already a testamentary legacy”,¹¹ established and fixed, a philosophy which acknowledges the place of love within it establishes a conversation between subjects (I no longer discourse about something *to* another; I talk *with* her about it). And in place of empiricism or empirical curiosity which by nature of its observational stance divorces itself from its ‘object’, this “knowledge of the other also demands sympathy or love, ways of being that are different from impassive contemplation”.¹²

Let us return to the separation between poetry and science by way of Midgley again. Her choice of terms here is not accidental: what is poetic is imaginative, emotional, and strictly divided from what is understood to be scientific by the boundaries of imaginative and emotional experience. The divide of love from science, or poetry from science—or any feeling knowledge from empirical knowledge—is defended by science’s ‘triumphant opposition’ to “both feeling and fancy...[which are] dramatised in terms of gender...making reason the exclusive mark of Man and stigmatising feeling as a female weakness”.¹³ The hallmark of science (or a scientific philosophy) is its objectivity, which is to say its detachment from its other. Feeling is objectivity’s antithesis. It cannot be proven, it cannot be relied upon. Therefore, in a philosophy or a science that takes a verifiable truth as its foundation, feeling has no place. What this syllogism ignores, however, is the problematic assumption that ‘objectivity’ is an absolute term. In fact, “the notion that the objective is somehow free of affect”¹⁴ is a way of thinking that “conceives of minds [...] unrealistically as self-contained, isolated both from each other and from the world around them”.¹⁵ Midgley argues that we must be “*objective*—that is, fair, honest and methodical—about the whole range of the subjective...the whole range where subjective experience affects objective facts”.¹⁶ Of course, the effacement of subjectivity from the ‘hard’ sciences extends literally into any discourses that attempt to imitate this objectivity.

10 An assertion which will be addressed later in this section (via Irigaray) as well as in Chapter 2.

11 Irigaray, 24-25.

12 Lévinas, 1998: 5.

13 Midgley, 67.

14 Brennan, 19.

15 Midgley, 117.

16 Midgley, 172-173 (emphasis in original).

The most pronounced scientific attitude in discourses that are not, strictly speaking, scientific—that is, discourses like philosophy, theory, and criticism—is that of objectivity. One need go no further than the famous article by William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, “The Affective Fallacy”, to find arguments against “deriv[ing] the standards of criticism from the psychological effects of the poem”, the effects of which, they insist, cause “the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgment [...] to disappear”.¹⁷ Note that in Wimsatt and Beardsley’s analysis the poem is the *object* of criticism, of *judgment*. Judgment, in either the sense of the ability to make considered decisions (my dictionary also emphasises the ability to come to ‘sensible conclusions’, a wording that hearkens interestingly to older meanings of ‘sensible’, still retained in French, which denote sensitivity, i.e. emotional attention, rather than reason, or intellectual attention) or in the sense of a decision handed down from an authority (judge, God, expert), is about standing *outside* of the thing one looks at and pronouncing upon it. It is a matter of what Stanley Fish calls “[exclusion] by legislation”,¹⁸ the official effacement of, in this case, the reader from the act of reading—the exclusion of subjectivity from the experience of criticism. What is effaced in the sciences, beginning with Kepler in the Renaissance, is the place of feeling, which extends to the place of the subject(ive). As instances such as the Wimsatt/Beardsley article show, such effacement is however not limited to science.

Instead of acknowledging that it is made by and for and within a system that includes the subject and subjectivity, the discourse of objectivity that surrounds scientific examinations of the world imagines itself to be *removed* from that world and therefore untouched by it. The model of the scientist in the empirical tradition is formed by the constraints of that tradition, which is to say, is constrained to understanding the world only through what can be seen, observed, and verified by observation and experience. The position of the empiricist (literally speaking as well as figuratively) is above or outside that which is observed, a position which seems to denote a separation between the one and the other, and a removal of the person doing the observing from a relationship on an equal footing, as it were, with what is observed. Scientificity, in imagining itself removed from and untouched by the world, builds a denial of subjective experience into its framework. If removal or detachment is the aim, then a rejection of “feeling and sensing [...] as methodological tools for studying the object

¹⁷ Wimsatt, William Kurtz, in collaboration with Monroe C. Beardsley. “The Affective Fallacy” in *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), p. 21. The article is famously responded to by Stanley Fish in his essay “Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics” (Fish, Stanley. “Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics”. *New Literary History*, Vol. 2, No. 1, A Symposium on Literary History (Autumn, 1970), pp. 123-162), which presents the ‘affective fallacy fallacy’ and falls in line with Midgley’s concept of an objectivity that is objective about ‘the whole range of the subjective’ rather than dismissive or wilfully ignorant of it.

¹⁸ Fish, 123..

[...] because they constitute a connection with the object”¹⁹ makes sense. But it does not make sense if the aim is to be with others (whether texts or humans or other others) on their terms as well as one’s own, or if the aim is a deeper connection to the world, because such a detachment is explicitly not concerned with connection; the two terms are incompatible.

The copresence of the binaries on which this section hinges brings modes of expression (science, philosophy, poetry) as well as modes of perception (wisdom, knowledge, emotion) into relation with one another. And while of course such absolute distinctions can’t be drawn between the expression of knowing and the mode by which one arrives at it, we might employ a kind of double-belief,²⁰ a position in which we both know the falsity of this distinction and acknowledge the ways in which it is made real in the world. Questions of mode entail thinking about how information is received or put into the world, and the difference between how answers to questions are permitted to be arrived at in science or philosophy as opposed to how they are permitted to emerge in poetry is pertinent to the question of approach. If we are to understand ‘method’ as it is generally used in the humanities as a pseudo-scientific way of engaging with texts and others from a disengaged and distant standpoint, then the figure for that engagement continues to be, as it is in the scientific tradition of empiricism, the figure of sight (observable, verifiable phenomena enter into the ranks of what is known). ‘Approach’, by contrast, cannot depend solely on tropes of vision. It cannot depend solely on sight, individualism, and cognition, which are “associated with the subject/object distinction, with thinking in terms of subject and object”,²¹ because it is to some extent involved in a being-with that includes the ‘object of study’, where observation loses its connotations of unilateral affect. An approach that represses neither its poetics nor its tendency (which still may not disappear) to separate itself from and to observe its subject has to take subjectivity into account, and rely also on “knowledge gleaned precisely by feeling or sensing”.²² That is to say, because the barriers erected by empiricism do not hold exclusively once a relationship with the text or the other is undertaken, it becomes necessary to “[study] what one has experienced oneself and [value] it, or [value] the subjective side of one’s interactions with the object studied”²³ and to reject the notion that to think or study well the “individual has to be severed from affective connections with the surrounding environment and others in it”.²⁴

19 Brennan, 19.

20 I’m indebted to W. J. T. Mitchell for the idea of double-belief, on which the last section of this chapter focuses.

21 Brennan, 19.

22 Brennan, 23.

23 Brennan, 19.

24 Brennan, 19.

The tradition of empiricism is not entirely suited for use as a figure in a discussion of philosophy, however. Philosophy, after all, is about wisdom, not just fact—and so cannot be verified in the way that empiricism demands. Moreover, the uses and expressions of both scientific and philosophical knowledges have different uses and positions in the academy and in public life. The pairing in this chapter of the two has a dual rationale: first, to show the ways in which the modern Western tradition of philosophy is rooted in an understanding of its practices as to some extent figuratively scientific; and second, to demonstrate the already understood dynamic in which a weaker or feminised discourse will take on attributes of a stronger or masculinised one in order to claim some kind of authority. And so, to return to the beginning of this section with a reminder that there are in fact two binaries being examined and brought forward in this chapter: not only poetry/science, but also philosophy/love. Where science represses its poetics (as well, literally, as its recourse to the word 'love' and amorous figuration) in order to maintain a distance from the world it observes 'objectively', philosophy maintains its authority by repressing its roots in love. This repression in philosophy mirrors and to some extent imitates the repression of poetics in science; as discussed above, philosophy as a 'soft' science resorts to the language and figures of 'harder' empirical sciences in order to give credence to its positions and concerns. Given that language is not a neutral medium, and that certain discourses therefore are either centralised or othered by result of their relation to the mastery of language, there can be understood to be a hierarchy or structure of less dominant/more dominant language such as that proposed by the poststructuralist theoretical feminists who wrote what is now widely called *écriture féminine* who opposed "women's bodily experience [...] to the phallic/symbolic patterns embedded in Western thought".²⁵ Likewise, given that it is the dominant position in a discourse that confers authority (i.e. which centralises an utterance or a position), non-dominant discourses that see this will tend to adopt the attitudes, styles, or lexica of dominant ones as one way of gaining mastery. A famous example is Northrup Frye's "Polemical Introduction" to his *Anatomy of Criticism*, which argues for "naturalistic and scientific analogies of criticism"²⁶ and literature. Despite contemporary discrediting of work like Frye's, the struggle for mastery of discourse serves to explain the adoption by philosophical, theoretical, or other 'soft' disciplines of terminology with its roots in the empiricism and authority of the 'hard' sciences.

Where the occurrence of the 'scientific' term 'method' even in humanities work explicitly identifies the two, Luce Irigaray's examination of the withering of love in philosophy demonstrates that even

25 Jones, Ann Rosalind. "Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of l'Écriture Féminine", in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (London: Pantheon, 1985), p. 366.

26 Mitchell, W. J. T. *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 82.

without such identification the softer root of the discipline is neglected, even forgotten. The word 'philosophy', divisible into two morphemes of equal length denoting 'love' and 'wisdom', now implies primarily the latter—a search for wisdom which ignores its roots outside the domain of the rational. What happens when love disappears from a discourse, when philosophy forgets its roots in the wisdom to be had in loving, which in Irigaray's terminology is to speak (also) through making art, making music, sensing with all the parts of the body that can create meaning? Ironically, without the repression of love from philosophical discourse, the place for rethinking philosophy and theory via love that this dissertation occupies would not exist.

One result of repression is the emergence around the margins of the repressed thing. In the terms by which post-structuralism approaches the world, it is necessary to take into account the instability of binaries previously taken as absolute. By this approach, what is central can be called into question, making room for the marginalised (which in turn may become authorised, further expelling something else to its margin). Without the repression of love in philosophy (or poetry in science), love could not be part of the approach that this dissertation proposes as a complement to other approaches to wisdom and to being-together. Likewise, it is from the site of a philosophy which has effaced or overlooks love that Irigaray and other post-structuralist theoretical feminists can begin not only to name that effacement, but to theorise new ways of being-together, in language which "does not contain, it carries; it does not hold back, it makes possible".²⁷ These writers' work will appear in a more central role in Chapter 3, but they are introduced here because Irigaray explicitly takes on the invisibility of 'philos' in philosophy, and, in so doing, prepares the way for the approach this dissertation proposes.

It is the repression of love, its invisibility in philosophical practice and discourse, which is the force behind Irigaray's assertion in *The Way of Love* that philosophy has forgotten love, and, in so doing, has cut itself off from the specific wisdoms that are made possible through love. First of all, to gloss 'love', or to give nuance to its use, both in Irigaray and in this section: the word here does not only refer to deep affection or a romantic or sexual attachment. As the neglected half of philosophy, 'love' as a term is defined in relation to philosophy's connotations of rationality. 'Love', then, represents the presence and input and knowledge of the body, not only the rational mind. It represents a gesture towards a "language that is more communicative and less subjected to information",²⁸ that is, a language which is not about mastering the other or overpowering the listener. Love as a way of being

27 Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa". (*Signs* Vol. 1. No. 4, Summer 1976) p. 889.

28 Irigaray, 2002: 42.

is “a matter of being attentive to what is proper to the other without wanting to appropriate it”,²⁹ or, in other words, a matter of letting “beings be, [understanding] them as independent of the perception that discovers and grasps them”.³⁰ The loss of love (i.e. consideration for the other as other, and communication and knowledge that comes from the body and its ‘irrational’ senses, not only via the mind) in philosophy means a devaluing of those kinds of knowledge and of that kind of consideration. Philosophy without love becomes “formal knowledge [...] reduced to a mental exercise, passed on from a master to disciples, of use in populating universities and in having discussions among the uninitiated but without the impact on our lives that a wisdom presupposes”³¹ because it pretends or assumes a divide between experience thought by a mind removed from other beings and the physical world and experience thought by an (irrational) body.

In the place of information, Irigaray proposes “an artistic, musical, touchful way of speaking or saying and of listening able to be perceived in a written text [...] not reduced to a simple assistance for remembering meaning or to some code to be respected”.³² That philosophy without love is to be replaced by a way of speaking that incorporates not only the mind but also the voice, the senses, and the body implies that philosophy leaves those things out in the first place. Irigaray’s inclusion of the voice/body/senses in her renewal of philosophy is a turn towards ‘whole body’ thinking, and shows that philosophy does not take account of all the ways in which thought is created. Therefore, loveless philosophy is an incomplete view of the world and has no claim on the objectivity ‘philosophy’ avows—it either takes no notice of or deliberately turns a blind eye to the fact that objectivity is simply a subjectivity which ignores the subject’s role in its creation. A philosophy that did not repress its roots in love would be able to gather information through *all* of its channels, *all* of which would be valid and valuable. It would, in other words, be “*objective*—that is, fair, honest and methodical—about the whole range of the subjective...the whole range where subjective experience affects objective facts”.³³

But it is not that science absolutely represses its poetics; not that philosophy completely forgets its roots in love. Few scientists or theorists would probably renounce either in absolute terms; as Paul Feyerabend writes, “there are many ways of ordering the world around us [...] the hated constraints

29 Irigaray, 2002: 37.

30 Lévinas, 1998: 6.

31 Irigaray, 2002: 3.

32 Irigaray, 2002: xx.

33 Midgley, 172-73, her emphasis.

of one set of standards may be broken by freely accepting standards of a different kind".³⁴ And certainly within the specific academic contexts of this dissertation (humanities departments, English departments, comparative literature departments) there are people who affirm the relationships between science and poetry, philosophy and love, thinking and feeling. However, in practice, in the context within which this dissertation is written, the separation between thinking and feeling is a matter of daily, if seemingly inconsequential, fact. The very fact that dissertations (expressions of authority-in-training) in these fields adopt as though natural jargon linking their practice to a scientific one, rather than a creative one (we typically use methods rather than develop or perform a practice) places authority with language that expresses facticity, objectivity. Consider the actual discrepancy, no matter how often wished or pretended away, that exists between practitioners of creative writing and their scholarly counterparts in English departments.³⁵ For one example, in the literature for the 2008 RAE (Research Excellence Exercise; the device by which academic departments in the UK are evaluated for the quality of their research), while 'creative writing' is included on relatively equal footing with other forms of "output" (specifically, "Books, including scholarly editions and translations [...] edited collections of archival and other similar material, and creative writing"³⁶), it is the only category for which a supplementary text must be produced *to specific terms*. This text, "a factual statement of no more than 200 words" should outline the faculty member's "research contribution in terms of the key criteria of originality, significance and rigour". The guidelines conclude with the warning that the "sub-panel will disregard unsubstantiated assertions or opinions on the quality of research".³⁷ Translations, the only other "output" with a caveat, require only "a succinct description of how the output meets the RAE definition of

34 Feyerabend, Paul. *Against Method* (London: Verso, 1993), p. 162.

35 Obviously, the very distinction between 'scholarly' writing and 'creative' writing begs a deconstruction: understanding or taking part in either makes it clear that both do complementary, and sometimes overlapping, work. But the fact remains that in practice these two kinds of cultural production are *not* regarded in the same way within the academic field. If they were, assertions such as Ron McFarland's that though "*regarded with jaundiced eye by some traditionalists* in English departments, the poets and authors who teach creative writing have in the past ten or twenty years *won* general though *sometimes grudging acceptance*" ("An Apologia for Creative Writing", 29; my emphasis), or Michael McIrvine's that, in an "unscientific poll of colleagues around the country who teach contemporary American literature was not very surprising, although certainly disheartening. Many admit that they do not teach poetry at all" ("Why Contemporary Poetry Is Not Taught in the Academy", 89), would not need to be made. For further buttressing of the different value placed on 'scholarly' work to the detriment of 'creative' work, see Hutner et al, "The Situation of American Writing, 1999".

However, definitions of advanced 'creative' writing which lean on "the writer's personal resources of memory, emotion and passion [...] [his or her] subconscious urges" and locate the 'creative' writer's energy as coming "from the aquifers of the self" (Lancaster University Department of English and Creative Writing, 'Framework for PhD Supervision in Creative Writing'; http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/projects/graham_mort/crew/phd_crew_framework.htm, accessed 11 August 2011) , with their inward focus and lack of explicit understanding of the process of 'creative' writing as an intense, involved, and serious approach to the world not far removed from the practice of 'scholarly' writing, do as much to perpetuate divisions in actual, academic fact as any theoretical or actual repression of poetry from science and love from philosophy.

36 M57-1, p. 3, §16.b.

37 M57-1, p. 84, §22.

research".³⁸ Although both translations and 'creative' work require extra support in order to fill the requirement for knowledge-production, only 'creative writing' requires an explicitly "factual" statement, its authorisation as 'excellent' depending on justification in terms that resound with the similarly 'factual' other kinds of writing ("scholarly editions", etc.). This 'double belief', whereby the field both affirms and negates the equal value of modes of perception, of kinds of knowledge, and of means of production of that knowledge, is a characteristic of a philosophy which represses love, or a science that represses poetry: since these binaries are in effect false, the impulse for both will float to the surface over and over. So why not an approach that acknowledges both?

C. For example: W. J. T. Mitchell and *What Do Pictures Want?*

This section explores the possibilities of developing an approach to texts via an approach to paintings proposed by the art, media, and literary theorist W. J. T. Mitchell in his book *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*. Mitchell proposes a rethinking of the ways in which we consider the objects around us, and in particular those object he calls 'pictures'—an appellation he extends to things far beyond paintings, photographs, and films, to include such things as the World Trade Center towers. Mitchell's methodology has at its heart an acknowledgement of the otherness inherent in objects, and a desire to address those objects in terms of their otherness in such a way as to allow them to 'speak'. In thinking of a way to allow objects to speak, Mitchell does accede to the potential such an approach holds for problematic relationships with objects (such as idolatry) but proposes that in fact our 'double consciousness' already holds images and object sacred—and that what he calls a 'critical iconoclasm' would allow us to recognise the importance of images as well as to think about what they mean, do, and want.

I adopt and adapt Mitchell's approach in the spirit of Bill Brown's statement that "history can unabashedly begin with things and *with the senses by which we apprehend them*"³⁹ in order to provide a base for the approach I will make to texts in the rest of this dissertation. Mitchell's 'delicate critical method' and Brown's unabashed centralising of objects and the senses we use to apprehend them work together with Teresa Brennan's ideas of living attention and Roland Barthes' understanding of texts as signifying practices throughout this project and the development or constellation of a delicate and loving approach to texts and others.

³⁸ M57-1, p. 83 §20.

³⁹ Brown, Bill. "Thing Theory". *Critical Inquiry* 28, 1 (Fall 2001), p. 2; my emphasis.

Briefly, this section examines Mitchell's approach and its components (pictures, desire), and expands on that approach in preparation for the chapters that will follow this one.

C. 1: Objects that desire

"The conversation in cultural studies has turned, in recent years, toward material culture, objecthood, and physical things [...]the more closely we look at both Romanticism and the physical world, the more difficult it becomes to sustain [the illusion of the physical as "an escape from old-fashioned 'Romantic idealism'"]. The physical is a thoroughly metaphysical concept; [...] objects only make sense in relation to thinking, speaking subjects [...]. The slogan for our times, then, is not 'things fall apart', but 'things come alive'".⁴⁰

"These days, history can unabashedly begin with things and with the senses by which we apprehend them".⁴¹

Recent movements in cultural and critical production⁴² have centred themselves on the subject—and not only the human subject, but the posthuman subject, the non-human subject, and the consideration of objects as subjects or quasi-subjects, not to mention considerations of the structures (social, psychological) that subjects create. Bill Brown's statement that history can now begin "unabashedly" with objects and with our senses could serve as a manifesto for this movement away from the historically bounded subject⁴³. That scholarship can now 'unabashedly' make history that looks at the objects that surround us via the many senses by which we perceive them offers the possibility of liberation from the kind of history-making which would have dealt with those things only bashfully, if at all. Out of the closet, as it were, and unabashed about integrating the kinds of information offered to us by our sense and by the objects which surround us and with which we have relationships, this scholarship is in a position to make a kind of history which takes into account much more than a single, linear story (although perhaps it loses the stability and reassurance that such a story creates). *What Do Pictures Want?*—the question itself, as well as the book which is so titled—offers a new mode for making (art) theory with the 'objects' of that theory in mind.

As in W. J. T. Mitchell's argument, the consideration of things as somehow 'alive' or 'living' is tied to an understanding of relation between 'objects' and subjects. When the question "What do pictures

40 Mitchell, W. J. T. *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*. (New York: University Of Chicago Press, 2006), pp. 170-172.

41 Brown, 2.

42 The scope of my survey here is discourses from the last 30 years of the 20th century and from the beginning of this one, especially discourses that have come out of postcolonial studies or feminist studies and that have focused on a rethinking of what, how, and who a subject is.

43 A more complete discussion of this subject (whose taxonomy I borrow from Brennan) follows later.

want?" is broached, any consideration of the subject and the object must also take into consideration the question of their relation. This consideration includes how relation happens, how it is, and what it means for the way we understand subjectivity and objectivity. If objects such as pictures really "only make sense in relation to thinking, speaking subjects",⁴⁴ they are implicated in our discourse, which could not happen without them. Within a system that takes the relationality of objects as a serious question, objects such as pictures can be thought of in terms that make them "not merely signs *for* living things, but signs *as* living things".⁴⁵ Thinking relation when thinking about our relation to *things* means thinking bidirectionally, conceiving a relation where things, too, can transmit affect—not just humans, the traditional makers (and masters) of things⁴⁶—and where that affect acts as a sort of guarantee or proof of the relation, and relation as a proof of the subject-likeness of the object.

Before I undertake a more detailed exploration of Mitchell's concepts of relation as it applies to pictures and the people who look at them, I would like to outline briefly some origins of this idea in the philosophy of the 20th century. The question of the subject in the world of objects can of course be traced much further than any recent concern; Heideggerian *Dasein* is fundamentally a question of how the subject *is* in the world, an idea that necessitates relational thinking. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* laid out (in 1945) the idea that there might be a sort of conversation between ourselves and our things, writing that "our senses question things, and things reply to them".⁴⁷ Though Merleau-Ponty has been criticised⁴⁸ for the way his phenomenology initially preserved a subject-centred ontology and thereby an idea of inherent division or hierarchy between the perceiver and the perceived, his later work develops the idea of all things as one *chair*, or *flesh*, of the world,⁴⁹ thereby proposing a transformation of the relation between a subject and a perceived object into a fluctuating space of relation where perception is a shifting, shimmering connection between and among things. The study of culture in terms of its material aspects which emerged in the 1980s and was further developed by work such as Thomas Schlereth's *Cultural History and Material Culture* (1991) is another locus of the consideration of the relation between

44 Mitchell, 171.

45 Mitchell, 6.

46 Although I will not discuss this point in detail, I want to clarify my nomination of humans as the 'traditional' makers of things here because in the consideration of things as potentially relational and affective, it might be worth acknowledging that there are makers of things which are exclusively non-living (computers constructing their own scripts; automated devices in factories).

47 Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), p. 319.

48 See for example the conclusion of Monica Langer's *Merleau-Ponty's 'Phenomenology of Perception'* (New York: Macmillan, 1989). Merleau-Ponty himself criticises this in *The Visible and the Invisible* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1968).

49 The idea of a unity in one flesh is, of course, not a new one in Western thought, being as it is one cornerstone of Christian thought.

subjects and objects as they have traditionally been conceived, as well as of how objects might be subject-like; that is, how things might act on us, manifest their desires, or speak. In the last ten years or so, a number of new works that consider the (inter)relation between subjects and objects, or the lives of objects themselves, have been published.⁵⁰

If architecture can have (a) sex or have a life,⁵¹ be raped or killed or tell stories; and if pictures can want; and if melancholy can be made manifest by objects and pictures can make us cry; can we not logically extend the possibility of desire to the objects we call texts? This question is operational at this point because, of course, this dissertation considers texts and is active in a field that considers them. The answer the dissertation gives is obviously affirmative, but not only tautologically so (the answer is not yes because the answer is yes): the dissertation extends the possibility of desire and agency to texts as others in contiguity with other practitioners of textual study, and in order to move toward an approach to texts which takes their otherness and the possibility of their agency/desire seriously. The end result of this would be a practice which actively challenges the boundary between the subject (capable of feeling, acting) and object (incapable of such) and thereby extends to the 'object' the possibility of relation and agency.

Extending the possibility of desire to texts does not collapse the differences between texts and other objects, but provides a possible model for thinking about texts on their own terms, as acting on their readers, as desiring, as speaking. As such, this model does pose the questions 'What is a text?' and 'How are texts?' As a category among the many categories of things humans create, verbal, literary texts are in some ways the most homely and intimate: the written word is a picture of the things we say, the vibrations our bodies make into and receive as sound. But text is also strange, unfamiliar, and

50 James Elkins' *Pictures and Tears* (New York: Routledge, 2004) is an extended study of affect and painting, in which works of art 'make' their viewers cry (see Chapter 6 of this dissertation for more). Peter Schwenger examines the melancholy we attribute to objects in *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); however, his thesis is not that objects feel, but that we imbue them with a melancholy that comes from our awareness of an absence at the core of objecthood. Nevertheless he presents this thesis in terms that do place things in the (grammatical) category of 'subject' as well as attribute to those things qualities of feeling, like melancholy, that complement Mitchell's idea of a picture's desire as its 'lack' (Mitchell, 25). Indeed, for Mitchell, images' "main function is to awaken desire [...] to provoke a sense of lack and craving by giving us the apparent presence of something and taking it away in the same gesture" (80).

Things that Talk: Object Lessons from Art and Science (ed. Lorraine Daston; New York: Zone Books, 2007) is a collection of essays exploring the ways the objects 'speak'. And it is not only 'things'-general which speak to or act on their human counterparts; nor are studies of such relationship confined to the general. In the essay "Battle Lines: E1027", in *The Sex of Architecture* (Agrest, Conway, and Weisman, editors. New York: Henry N. Abrams, 1996), Beatriz Colomina presents the anecdote of the architect Le Corbusier making murals on the walls of Ellen Gray's house, "killing architecture" in order to "[pursue] another task, that of telling stories" (174). Mitchell himself discusses the anthropomorphisation of architecture in terms of the "analogy between the living human body and the building". In the story Colomina tells, Gray's house stands in for her own body; she compares the desecration of her house to a "rape".

51 Mitchell, 14.

uncontrollable: slippery, unfixable. It is texts in this slippery state that are at their liveliest, that seem most “vital”—turned into things that are “not merely signs for living things, but signs *as* living things”.⁵² Texts, in their unwillingness or incapacity to be pinned to a single way of being, present us, their readers, with a demand to be read for how they are and what they want. When Mitchell lays out his argument as to what pictures want in the beginning of the book *What Do Pictures Want? The lives and loves of images*, he writes that “the tropes of vitality and desire we apply to visual works of art are transferred and transferable to the domain of textuality. That doesn't mean they are transferrable without modification or translation”.⁵³ The fact that ‘how and what a picture is’ is not the same as ‘how and what a text is’ precipitates the question: what are texts? More importantly, how are they? What are the qualities of a text? What are its ways of being? In order to answer these questions with reference to Mitchell's argument, we first need an understanding of how (and, to some degree, what) pictures are, what Mitchell thinks they want, and what we can understand by the word ‘want’.

C. 2: What are pictures?

Mitchell divides pictures into two parts: the support, or physical being of the picture (the materials from which it was made, the sum of its physical parts, what we can see and touch; what can be hung on the wall), and the image, which “can be lifted off the picture, transferred to another medium” and “escapes the materiality of the picture when it is copied”.⁵⁴ For Mitchell, the “concreteness of the artwork” and the “immateriality of the image” make up a “dialectical relationship without which neither art history nor iconology would be possible”;⁵⁵ he identifies this immateriality as “the fundamental ontology of images”.⁵⁶

A picture's material qualities point to its physical origins: cadmium red paint on French canvas is an index of geography, geology, economics, chemistry, optics. And that physicality is specifying, fixing. A pigment can only be made of the elements which compose it; linen is only made from flax, which, depending on where the painting on it was painted (and when), could only have come from a few small regions in Europe; tempera is only made from egg; bronze is only ever an alloy of copper and tin, though the exact amounts vary. Although recognising the materiality of a picture limits it (an oil

⁵² Mitchell, 6.

⁵³ Mitchell, 55.

⁵⁴ Mitchell, 85.

⁵⁵ Although this dissertation will not engage with Heidegger in depth, there are obviously important relations between his work and Mitchell's.

⁵⁶ Mitchell, 97.

painting cannot be a watercolour), that recognition also puts the picture into relation with its elements, and with their production, and thereby with a whole history that is not overtly present in the picture but to which the materials make reference. Like humans themselves, pictures are not “separate entities detached from the natural world”,⁵⁷ and, like humans, it is in part the material systems by which pictures are constituted that indicate their relation to that world.

An image's immateriality, in contrast to the fixative power of its material support, means that it is moveable and even fragmentary, that any single representation is incomplete or points to other representations. While the material properties of a picture fix it in relation to the physical conditions of its production, the immaterial qualities of an image put it in a relation in the potential sense, freeing the image to be copied, moved from medium to medium, adapted, translated. The immateriality of images illustrates their transferability in very clear ways: we can see how the image of the Madonna moves from its earliest representations, through the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and up to present-day representations like Chris Ofili's *The Holy Virgin Mary* (1995). That the image is fluid means that it can occur over and over. And its recurrence calls for an understanding of image that takes relationality into consideration.⁵⁸

Both the materiality of the support and the immateriality of images foreground the way that pictures *are*, and both prescribe a way of understanding pictures implied by Mitchell's thesis. A picture that can 'want' is a picture whose desires can be fulfilled (or can go unfulfilled). If pictures' desires can be fulfilled (or be neglected), then there must be someone who can fulfil (or ignore) them. If there is someone to fulfil pictures' desires, then there must be some relation between that someone and pictures. Materially, *pictures* are made by people⁵⁹ (relation: maker-made) and made to be seen (relation: seer-seen); their material production and existence is one which is always already in relation. The immateriality of *images*, their slipperiness, puts them in a constantly shifting relation to other images—which exist in the personal or social imagination. If pictures are, by grace of both their material and immaterial properties, construed as always already in relation (or, in Mitchell's words, as things that are “always already addressing us”⁶⁰), it is because these properties are part of the

57 Midgley, 192-193.

58 A useful analogy for the ways the images are, immaterially, and pictures are, materially, might be to compare the latter to the “Saussurian perspective” in which “speech is above all what is emitted, drawn from language (and constituting it in return)” and the former to the idea of language as “the totalizing [sic] abstraction' of the messages emitted *and received*” (Barthes, Roland. “Rhetoric of the Image” in *The Responsibility of Forms*. Trans. Howard. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985) p. 36).

59 Or, sometimes, animals, as in ‘Jimmy’, the chimpanzee in a Rio de Janeiro zoo, who paints.

60 Mitchell, 49, fn.

“social field of the visual, the everyday processes of looking at others and being looked at”.⁶¹ As part of this social field, images are co-constitutive with our social reality, and their constitution is fundamentally relational. In their materiality, pictures exist as things that begin by being made by people, a relationship that begins with touch and extends into a wider network of relations, including the relation of a picture as an object that is seen, an object in a commodity system with other pictures, other commodities, and the humans who buy them. The material life of images points to a system in which pictures participate, which is ever more particular and expansive—for instance, the progression from picture to paint; to pigment and suspender; to workshop and workers; to the mine, animal, or plant from which elements are harvested—but in which the picture is not what grows, but the system around it. In their immateriality, on the other hand, images indicate and present themselves as part of a ‘text’ that is perpetually in the process of its own creation, a web of references, repetition, and re-representation. The image is added to, complicated by, its other representations—its lineage and descendants, if you want. The statement that the way images perpetuate and propagate themselves is also a proof of their relational nature may be tautological—images are related, and so they are related—but it is also true. And, just as knowing that someone grew up in the same house as their father can clarify aspects of their personality once you know their father, an awareness of the transference of images from medium to medium can tell us things not only about each image or picture but also about the way their relation plays out.

The material and immaterial qualities of images put them in relation to the humans who make and look at them. Mitchell asserts that the “life of images is not a private or individual matter”,⁶² and if it is not, then certainly this must be because the life of images is one which has its vitality in human imagination. It is *we* who transfer story to canvas to photograph; it is via human design that images receive their power. The idea that is an image is transferred from mouth to ear, from hand to eye. An image would not live alone because the life of images is in their life among people.

If for no other reason, pictures and images are neither private nor individual because they are seen. The basic premise of a pictorial image is its visibility, and inherent in the idea of visibility is the presence of a seeing other. If we can understand relation in its most basic sense as what happens when things are together, then vision, even disinterested vision, is a relationship that happens through the eye, linking what is seen with who sees. Seeing allows for categorisation—Mitchell calls

61 Mitchell, 47.

62 Mitchell, 93.

on the etymology of 'species' and 'specular' several times⁶³—and categorisation is a way of arranging things in terms of their relation. That beings 'look like' other beings (i.e. have a specular relation) is a function of genetics in living things. In the lives of images, Mitchell finds an analogous function: images' propagation (movement across supports, time) as an indication of their relationality *and* of their 'liveliness'.⁶⁴ He also acknowledges that the "idea of images as living species is a very disturbing one for art historians, not to mention ordinary people" anxious about "the way human creations take on 'lives of their own'".⁶⁵

Consider the image as a specular object. Its specularity pins it as an object to be acted on and viewed; its 'species-ness' disorders that fixity. The former is about maintaining control of an image; the latter is about allowing that such a thing is impossible. To be in relation with an image is to *help* construct it, but not to construct it completely. This relation requires the understanding that images are "ways of world *making*, not just world mirroring";⁶⁶ images *and* their viewers make something *together*. The creativity that is part of interactions with images, which calls us to see them as they are (in Heidegger's words, to accept an image "in its own constancy"⁶⁷) and to ask them what they want predicates the development of "a delicate critical practice that [strikes] images with just enough force to make them resonate, not enough to smash them",⁶⁸ or, in other words, an approach that values 'letting beings be'.⁶⁹

The 'delicate critical practice' of looking at images that Mitchell proposes, and to which Teresa Brennan's concept of discernment seems so readily allied, is not one to which assumption is suited, any more than it is suited to the practice of interaction with other humans. It takes seriously the idea that "what pictures want, in the last instance, is simply to be asked what they want"⁷⁰ and aims "to undermine the ready-made template for interpretive mastery [...] to put our relation to the work in question, to make the *relationality* of image and beholder the field of investigation".⁷¹ What this idea means for the critical practice of looking at things is that the looker is not exempt or removed from the equation, and that the effects things have on us cannot be discounted; it means that the 'we' who create, who move, and who mean may be a larger 'we' than 'we human beings'. It also means that 'we'

63 Mitchell, 13, 86, 92, 136, 325 [...]

64 Mitchell, 88-89.

65 Mitchell, 89.

66 Mitchell, xiv.

67 Heidegger, Martin. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. (New York: Perennial Classics, 2001), p. 26.

68 Mitchell, 9.

69 Lévinas, 1998: 6.

70 Mitchell, 48.

71 Mitchell, 49.

who create meaning by looking at objects do not make that meaning alone.

When the relation between the work and the beholder is foregrounded, iconoclasm (the 'smashing' of images) can be seen as just one way of expressing that relation, rather than the necessary function of the critic. Mitchell uses the term 'critical idolatry' to describe the part of this practice that foregrounds our relation to images and that recognises iconoclasm as "itself an act of creative destruction for which we must take responsibility".⁷² Mitchell's critical idolatry—and critical iconoclasm—recognise that at the centre of each the question of how pictures (or others) act on us is at stake. Both iconoclasm and idolatry can be seen as relational practices rather than unidirectional or necessary responses to pictures. Posing the question 'what do pictures want?', although not necessarily idolatrous, does "seem to be the kind of question that an idolater would ask"⁷³ because of the vitality it imparts to pictures. The 'critical' part of this critical idolatry is the part of our "double consciousness"⁷⁴ whereby we both believe and do not believe in the ('magical') life of images. This 'life', whether we think we believe it or not, is evidenced by "the passion with which we seek to destroy or kill" images.⁷⁵ Seeing pictures and things in terms of their relation to us (and ours to them) opens the field for other approaches than the binary of iconoclasm and veneration. It forces the scholar to ask how she is implicated in her beliefs about images, and how she is responsible to them.

C.3 What does it mean 'to want'?

This section will briefly revisit a key concept in Mitchell's thesis: the question of 'wanting'. It will not explore a more general definition or genealogy of the concept of desire, focussing instead on Mitchell's use of the word 'want' in order to understand his central question.

'To want', in Mitchell's use, refers to the "claim [pictures] make upon us, and how we re to respond";⁷⁶ it refers to what "they *lack*, that they are inviting us to fill in";⁷⁷ it refers to the desires we project on them and which are projected back at us, "making demands upon us, seducing us to feel

⁷² Mitchell, 26.

⁷³ Mitchell, 25.

⁷⁴ Mitchell, 11.

⁷⁵ Mitchell, 93.

⁷⁶ Mitchell, xv.

⁷⁷ Mitchell, 25.

and act in specific ways”.⁷⁸ About pictures, Mitchell writes that ultimately what they want is “mastery”, their “power manifested by lack, not possession”.⁷⁹ The desire Mitchell identifies in pictures is located *in* their lack, tying the two words together in the signifier ‘want’.

Both desire and lack indicate a deficiency or non-presence; the latter frames that absence in terms of impotence and the former in terms of potential presence. If images—and things—act on us by their lack or their desire, and if their power is “manifested as *lack*, not possession”,⁸⁰ then the question famously posed by Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak about the subaltern becomes all the more obviously appropriate. If things as others are telling us what they want, they are also telling us about how we could and do relate to them and to their desires. Letting things ‘speak’ for themselves attunes the critical reader (listener, viewer) to the places where lack occurs and what desires that lack projects.

The ‘delicate critical practice’ that Mitchell proposes hinges on a recognition of what pictures want, and therefore on what they might lack; instead of placing things under an interrogating light, it positions them as subalterns—others—and asks them to speak. As such, the picture or thing as subaltern can make an appeal or issue a demand “whose precise effect and power emerges in an intersubjective encounter compounded of signs of positive desire and traces of lack or impotence”.⁸¹

C.4 What do pictures want?

The idea of drawing itself carries in one word two meanings, with opposite directional forces: drawing with a pencil, one pushes the pencil away from oneself along the paper; drawing something toward oneself (physically), or drawing a conclusion (figuratively), one pulls something, whether an object or an idea, nearer to oneself. Drawing is thus both an approach and a distancing, something that can be held and something that escapes holding. It is also the sense of capturing something (as in on paper) or of opening something (as in drawing curtains either open to light, or closed, by loosening them). For Mitchell, drawing is the trace of the force of desire pulling in a picture.⁸² Drawing is “figured by the ‘bounding line’—the drawn line that leaps across a boundary at the same time that it defines it, producing a ‘living form’”.⁸³ The pleasure in drawing is in its plenitude; it is

78 Ibid.

79 Mitchell, 35-36.

80 Mitchell, 36.

81 Mitchell, 39.

82 Mitchell, 59.

83 Mitchell, 61. The importance of bounding and unbounding is part of the question of exorbitance discussed by Jane Gallop in *Anecdotal Theory* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), as well as by Derrida in “Aphorism Countertime”

Deleuzian, “characterized by a joy founded in (but not disciplined by) ascesis”—or the dialectic of binding and unbinding.⁸⁴ Pictures’ desires are informed by the qualities of drawing, which pushes us and pulls us, provides us with the illusion of presence and substitutes melancholy when that appearance proves otherwise. Pictures want “an idea of viscosity adequate to their ontology”.⁸⁵ They want a seeing that fits in with *how* they are.

Although he does not address pictures as such, Roland Barthes’ statement that the text “demands to be rediscovered, ‘restored’”⁸⁶ traces this same bounding line between what is known and what is yet unknown; the familiar text still calls to be both rediscovered—made new, understood newly—and to be ‘restored’ in a return to how it was previously understood. The text or the picture, their production, and the production of understandings about them are part of “a signifying practice”, an on-going ‘productivity’⁸⁷ that continuously indicates and crosses the lines that define its objects. For Barthes, the theory of the text is “a science of becoming”.⁸⁸ Mitchell sees a similar practice in pictures or objects like Jeff Koons’ *The New* series, which are treated “as specimens of a form of life, rather than ‘lost objects’ or ‘part objects’”⁸⁹ and thus force the viewer to redraw the categories into which these objects can fall. ‘Pictures’ like Koons’ floor cleaners (which are not in fact ‘pictures’ at all but found objects in a Plexiglas vitrine) make it clear that objects are always objects in relation, while also both crossing and reinscribing the line that designates how ‘pictures’ (or ‘art’ more generally) are, as if “our virtual age were compelling us to start all over with the ontology of things”.⁹⁰

Works like *The New* consider not only what art objects can be like, but how we can consider them—how we think about what they are in relation to us, which also means how we understand what they want. The link between Mitchell and Barthes here is found in the idea of the theory of the text as something which is-becoming, which requires a continuous rediscovery of what it theorises. The text in continuous production requires rediscovery because its state indicates that it cannot be known simply by ways it may once have been understood⁹¹. Mitchell’s central question, similarly, is

(*Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge. (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 414-433) and more indirectly in “Ulysses Gramophone” (1992; 253-309). Exorbitance, while though to different ends, is for both writers the quality of something in the work which keeps on crossing over whatever circumference has been set.

84 Ibid.

85 Mitchell, 47.

86 Barthes, Roland. “Theory of the Text” in *Untying the Text*, Robert Young, ed. (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1981), 33.

87 Barthes, 1981: 36.

88 Ibid, 45.

89 Mitchell, 120.

90 Mitchell, 153.

91 Brennan identifies this with repression, which “involves fixing something in place” (38).

concerned with the idea of an unfixed or continuously redefining relation between ourselves and images, where we are able have an “encounter with the object as Other”.⁹² This encounter provides the very basic answer to Mitchell’s question, in fact—he asserts that “What pictures want, in the last instance, then, is simply to be asked what they want”.⁹³ The fact of relation (of observer to picture, or of person to other person) is one in which the responsibility to ask ‘what do you want’ is embedded. But this question can only be asked from a position that takes on what Wendell Berry’s editor Norman Wirzba calls “responsible thought”, which “while not restricted to the local or regional, depends on the clarity and precision that comes from sustained attention to the particular”.⁹⁴ Asking a continuously changing other what it is they want means that we must ask continually *and attend*⁹⁵ continually to the answer. Responsible thought is a “living attention”, which “directs positive feelings toward the other by attending to the specificity of the other”.⁹⁶ For Teresa Brennan, both love and reason are “names for aspects of living attention” which is “the condition of reasoning and the embodiment of its connective ability”.⁹⁷ The responsible thought which Wirzba attributes to Berry’s writing is not only a way of thinking, but an enactment of Mitchell’s question and Brennan’s living attention, an approach that makes the asking of questions like ‘What do pictures want?’ a central part of asking at all. The more clearly and precisely we sustain a particular attention, the more likely it is that we will begin to feel responsibility to the thing that has captivated us, whether that is a person, a book, or a painting.

Sustained attention, living attention that is not based on projecting onto the other the qualities we do not desire in ourselves—this kind of attention allows for the employment of discernment, of “information from the body’s divers systems [...] gleaned precisely by feeling or sensing”,⁹⁸ which does not rely on separating the self from the other via the projection of negative affect. For Mitchell, asking what pictures *want* rather than what they mean or do goes against the “usual way of sorting out” our cultural ‘double consciousness’ about images as ‘living’ things, wherein, in a move that exemplifies Brennan’s definition of projection, we “attribute one side of it (generally the naïve, magical, superstitious side) to someone else, and claim the hardheaded, critical, and skeptical

92 Mitchell, 149.

93 Mitchell, 48.

94 Berry, Wendell. *The Art of the Commonplace*, ed. Norman Wirzba. (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2002), p. 1.

95 It might be obvious, but again I want to point out the importance of the two meanings of ‘attend’ in this context—that it can mean both to wait for and to wait upon. The idea that to attend to something entails waiting for it fits in with Brennan’s idea of living attention as a means of redressing the problems caused by “projecting outside of ourselves unwanted affects [...] in a process commonly known as ‘othering’” (12). A non-projective attention would be an attention that waited for the other to present itself, rather than one that jumped to a conclusion about what the other is, how to help it, what it wants, how it lives.

96 Brennan, 32.

97 Brennan, 41.

98 Brennan, 23.

positions as [our] own".⁹⁹ Rather than severing us from "affective connections with the surrounding environment and others in it",¹⁰⁰ attention of the kind to which Wirzba, Brennan, and Mitchell allude returns the scholar to a connection with the circuits and currents that come to her from outside herself, and allows her to ask what these could mean, what desires they could indicate.

C.5 A delicate method

"It would be a delicate critical practice that struck images with just enough force to make them resonate, but not so much as to smash them".¹⁰¹

"Feeling and sensing [are] ruled out as methodological tools for studying the object [...] because they constitute a connection with the object".¹⁰²

"The most hardened materialist would agree that ultimately all differences registered through chemical as well as electrical means are differences in the rate of pulsation or vibration, registered in the heart".¹⁰³

"[Philosophy] is essentially about connections, so you cannot do it well if you insist on doing it in isolation".¹⁰⁴

Mitchell poses his question about the 'lives and loves of images' in the context of a book that maps the denigration of pictures as "marked persons" and "as women".¹⁰⁵ For Brennan, 'feminine beings' are "those who carry the negative affects for the other".¹⁰⁶ If pictures are similarly 'marked' by their blankness, their ability to receive projection, then they can live out our projections and become what we refuse to carry for ourselves. This creates a relationship that is at its base hierarchical, and it is this relationship that comes to the fore as vision attains an "objective status" in the 19th century,¹⁰⁷ predicated by the philosophical 'birth' of the individual subject in the 17th century.¹⁰⁸ The idea that "emotions such as sadness could circulate"¹⁰⁹ loses ground, and the bounded individual subject "has to be severed from affective connections" with what surrounds her.¹¹⁰ Thinking becomes objective, and, in this mode, to be objective is not "studying what one has experienced oneself and valuing it" (Brennan's definition of subjectivity) but to understand the objective as "in some way free from

⁹⁹ Mitchell, 7.

¹⁰⁰ Mitchell, 19.

¹⁰¹ Mitchell, 9.

¹⁰² Brennan, 19.

¹⁰³ Brennan, 96.

¹⁰⁴ Midgley, 199.

¹⁰⁵ Mitchell, 35.

¹⁰⁶ Brennan, 15.

¹⁰⁷ Brennan, 17.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Brennan, 16.

¹¹⁰ Brennan, 19.

affect".¹¹¹

This relationship is a product of "the split between thought and real feeling [...] of the same forces that bring you the subject/object distinction", a distinction which "deepens historically at the same time as the subject/object method captures the investigative high ground".¹¹² In Mitchell's terms, a method that normalises thinking of pictures as things about which we ask "what does it mean" rather than "what does it want" follows from this split between the subject and the object, the creation of the bounded subject that Brennan identifies as "a culturally specific idea" by which "modern psychiatry presupposes a self-contained individual".¹¹³ For Brennan, this individual is predicated by what she calls the 'foundational fantasy'. It is the foundational fantasy that "explains how it is that we come to think of ourselves as separate from others";¹¹⁴ it is formed in the binary pairs of *I am good/You are bad* and *You are good/I am bad*.¹¹⁵ The most dangerous thing about such a fantasy is that it "will limit thinking unless it is actively resisted. It also limits practice";¹¹⁶ that is, to explain what seems self-evident, if a practice is signified 'bad' in whatever the language of its field ('unprofessional', 'inappropriate', 'not done'), and if the field adheres to the binaries of the foundational fantasy, the possibilities inherent in practices which might contradict the 'best practices' of that field are discounted without taking into account what they might have to offer as complementary approaches to the field. The limits that the foundational fantasy places on thinking explain in part why questions like "What do pictures want?" are unusual. The foundational fantasy is the place from which the assumption that the self is separate from the other originates; from this sense comes the primacy of sight—which separates the subject from the object—and the devaluation of "sensing and feeling".¹¹⁷ The foundational fantasy devalues this kind of understanding by the assumption that one's emotions are self-contained; it represses the very displacement or projection of negative affect by which it is produced and instead asserts the singularity of the subject. It gives rise to and participates in a system of thought that maintains the separateness of the individual and the impermeability of the boundary between one and others.

As I have indicated, Brennan identifies a kind of thinking that from the Enlightenment onwards understands sight as scientific, empirical; by the 19th century, sight is objective. For Foucault, too,

111 Ibid.

112 Brennan, 23.

113 Brennan, 25.

114 Brennan, 14.

115 Brennan, 13.

116 Brennan, 14.

117 Brennan, 19.

sight is a fixative that comes into its own in the Victorian period, at the same time as an “interplay of prohibitions [...] muteness, which, by dint of saying nothing, imposed silence”.¹¹⁸ For Brennan, the importance of the primacy of sight is the power it is given to create divisions. Unlike other senses, sight is unidirectional. There is no penetration of one's own body when one looks at something, as there is when one hears something, tastes something, or smells something. There is no direct and physical union of the body with something other than the body, as when one touches something. This union is avoided via projection of negative affect onto the other, including the “deadening or confining” idea of fixity.¹¹⁹ Brennan identifies fixity not only with “the other's imprint” which “‘makes’ you feel confined”¹²⁰ but with any repression, which is produced by the self. For “the bounded individuals of the modern West”,¹²¹ the discourse of sight is part of “an ordered system of knowledge”¹²² wherein what is seen is “fixed [...] isolated and animated by [...] attention”.¹²³ In the system as it stands, this attention is a directed gaze. But for Brennan, the possibility of healing the subject lies in recovering the connection to the other and one's surroundings via other senses and via affect. Foucault is talking specifically about the possibility of subverting discourses around sexuality when he writes that discourse “also undermines and exposes [power], renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it”.¹²⁴ What Brennan proposes as a remedy to the bounded subject, and therefore to the subject/object split, depends on our familiarity and comfort with those boundaries in order to foreground the “historical aberration”¹²⁵ of such a subject, thus exposing it as constructed rather than natural. The bounded subject relies on the projection of negative affects in an “egoistic constellation” and seeks “knowledge as a means to control [...] aligned with discipline imposed from without, or objectification”.¹²⁶ Recognising the transmission of affect means recognising what one projects onto the other. It provides the possibility to transform and “reorder aggression”.¹²⁷ But this recognition “requires being in the world, rather than living the life of the mind [...] subjecting oneself to eddies or even torrents of affect, while somehow maintaining equilibrium”. The alternative to “the ego's status-bound boundaries” is “an identity based on discernment”.¹²⁸ Discernment is an “active yet receptive”

118 Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality I: The Will to Knowledge* (London: Pelican Books, 1998), 17. Henceforth Foucault, 1986a.

119 Brennan, 38.

120 Ibid.

121 Brennan, 25.

122 Foucault, 1986a: 69.

123 Foucault, 1986a: 45.

124 Foucault, 1986a: 101.

125 Brennan, 25.

126 Brennan, 106.

127 Brennan, 135.

128 Brennan, 134.

state,¹²⁹ related to the psychological concept of entrainment, or the transmission process by which people become alike (and, for Brennan, by which people “take up opposing positions in relation to a common affective thread” such as lover and beloved¹³⁰). Discernment cannot be based on the boundaries assumed to be present in the ‘healthy’ subject, because

[some of] these boundaries are formed by unconscious projection [...] Projecting is the opposite of discernment because projection directs affects outward without consciously (as a rule) acknowledging that it is doing so; discernment consciously examines them¹³¹.

Projection as a means to create boundaries is “only one route to self-containment”;¹³² Brennan proposes that codes of manners and courtesy, as well as religious and social moral codes constitute the affective boundaries of subject, while acknowledging that affect *is* transmitted and that that transmission effects real changes in its receivers. (This is why, Brennan argues, we have moral codes that tell us not to ‘blow up’ at people—virtues like forbearance cut off the circuit of negative affect.) When the subject is understood as unbounded or transmitting, discernment can take place. Recognising that affect flows between subjects means recognising that those subjects are not bounded as we might believe. If the subject is in fact not bounded, then sight, which can maintain separation between subjects, is no longer by necessity the only or primary way to understand the subject. Instead, all of the senses and all of the different kinds of sensory information can be used to construct understanding.

Important to Brennan’s theory is the understanding of the transmission of affect as a bodily and embodied process; affects are sensations, not just thoughts. Early theories of transmission, such as Adam Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, frame affective transmission as a kind of sympathy wherein one’s emotions ‘rise’ in response to the thought of another’s situation. In contrast to the physical transmission that Brennan posits, Smith’s theory reaffirms the self-contained subject.¹³³ There is no physical (molecular) change as there is for Brennan; the passions we experience are our own—responsive, but not transmitted as in Brennan’s understanding of transmission. Theories like Smith’s, founded on an understanding of the separateness of the subject, rely on what we see to change how we feel. Brennan’s theory, however, in foregrounding the possibility of the transgression of the body boundary (by pheromones, for example), demonstrates the way that the constitution of

129 Brennan, 135.

130 Brennan, 9.

131 Brennan, 11.

132 Brennan, 11.

133 It makes sense that Smith writes this theory this way, because he is writing it just as sight, empiricism, and the self-contained subject begin to come into being (1759).

the subject is not an entirely self-contained and autogenic process. If senses such as smell are penetrative, meaning that “a foreign body—something from without—can enter into one’s own”,¹³⁴ and if, in order to develop an understanding of affect *and* the subject that extends beyond the boundaries as much thinking has them we must rely on these penetrative senses, then we have to also understand our selves as penetrable. If we understand our selves this way, then how we understand others/the Other necessarily changes. And if we rely on senses other than vision (as well as vision) to tell us about the world around us, then “sensing and feeling”¹³⁵ come into prominence, with an emphasis on the conjunction.

Recalling—to begin to conclude this section—the history that “can unabashedly begin with things and with the senses by which we apprehend them”.¹³⁶ In one line, Brown connects Brennan and Mitchell’s work. The transmission of affect is a place from which a history concerned with sensing and feeling might begin; the question “What do pictures want?” is a way of beginning history with things themselves—not with projection or even perception, but with the thing (the other) asked about and speaking for itself. Reading Brennan and Mitchell together produces a discourse that values the intuition of a scholar who is working in detached but living attention to the objects around her. Asking the question “What do pictures want?” is a step away from the model of a separate, objective observer *and* toward a working method that acknowledges its own situatedness, rather than taking its position for granted.¹³⁷ The situatedness such an approach acknowledges is one which is always already in relation; it is “a profoundly social thing”.¹³⁸ The split between subject and object in Western thinking affects not only how we think of texts (or pictures, or one another), but what our philosophy then includes or ignores. In diagnosing the binaries that emerge from this split, this dissertation does not propose to render them defunct or even to address them in any ‘complete’ way; instead, beginning with the subject/object split and the binaries it engenders opens a space for an approach to thinking which includes love, feeling, and sensing with the body.

What do the subject/object divide, the use of senses other than sight, and the idea of discernment

¹³⁴ Brennan, 10.

¹³⁵ Brennan, 19.

¹³⁶ Brown, 2.

¹³⁷ This isn’t to say that the question ‘What does this picture mean?’ shouldn’t be asked, or that that question could not be part of a delicate critical method. The implications of Brennan and Mitchell’s positions for this kind of question are that these questions cannot be asked without a sense of their subjectivity. Following Mitchell, to ask what a picture wants is in some way to accord it a subjectivity. The question diverges from the diagonal relationship of a subject looking at an object. Asking ‘What does this mean?’ with an awareness of the subjective position of such a question brings it into the realm of questions like ‘What do pictures want?’, because both questions then acknowledge as a starting point the limitedness of the one posing the question.

¹³⁸ Mitchell, 68.

have to do with the question on which this section began—the question W. J. T. Mitchell proposes as a way of looking at pictures? Mitchell argues that most critiques of images in our time have been iconoclastic, subjecting images to a discipline that regulates value judgements, and figuring as their main question that of the *evaluation* of images. His proposal that we concern ourselves with *what* pictures might *want* offers critics a way into an approach that is more “yielding”, more “sympathetic”.¹³⁹ This ‘sym-pathetic’ mode of critique is one that etymologically emphasises the role that senses other than sight can play in criticism. While textual engagement is certainly a different matter to the idea of interpersonal engagement based on the transmission of affect, the transmission of affect is a useful figure in the construction of a new way of looking at texts. In the context of a discourse of reason that *has* historically been sight-driven, what happens when thinking is repositioned to be related to love? For Brennan, “thinking and loving are closely related in themselves”.¹⁴⁰ Both reason and love are

forms of resistance in the nonperpetuation of the negative affects, as it seems is any process of making or sustaining connections consistent with the known facts or the needs of others [...]. In short, the tendency to bind and bring together, to make things cohere, follows the logic of the life drive.¹⁴¹

The delicate critical practice that Mitchell identifies would ‘sound’ the icons, recognising that ‘smashing’ them is itself a way of icon-creating. Sounding the icons means making them resonate, letting them speak, seeing them as more than objects of an imposing vision. To love the other is to “remove oneself from the loop” of projection and negative affect.¹⁴² To sound the icons rather than smash them is to step, momentarily, outside of the critical norm and to “permit entry into a new idea”.¹⁴³ Thinking with our feelings—but not allowing ourselves to be dominated by them; that is, allowing them to take part in the discourse we create and which creates us—permits data we receive by means other than sight to enter into the circle of admissible ‘evidence’ and shows that the boundaries that seem to exist between what we think and how we feel are permeable. It also acknowledges that the objects of our study affect us—that our ‘objectivity’ is flavoured with traces of ourselves. Brennan’s concept of discernment follows closely along these lines. In arguing for the importance of a theory of the transmission of affect, Brennan is not arguing for the replacement of ‘thought’ with ‘feeling’ (where those terms stand falsely opposite one another), or for some theory of the personal in its selfish, ego-bound form. She is arguing for an understanding of ourselves and

139 Mitchell, 81-82.

140 Brennan, 132.

141 Ibid.

142 Brennan, 133.

143 Ibid.

others which takes into account both the way we see and the reasons we see how we see, an understanding based in “comparison, detachment and living attention”.¹⁴⁴ Discernment is objective in the way that Midgley means when she conceives of an objectivity that is “fair, honest and methodical” about “the whole range where subjective experience affects objective facts”.¹⁴⁵ In terms of holistic approaches to the other, whether as an art historian, a literary critic, or a customer in a grocery store dealing with a clerk, projection, the subjective disavowal of negative affect and the ‘donation’ of these affects to the other, cannot be objective because it hides the relation of the self to the other behind a cloak that gives the self little recourse but to ‘other’ the other and to close oneself off to it. Discernment, as “an openness to the distinct being who is sheltering behind the common ego, in oneself and others alike”,¹⁴⁶ is a strategy for meeting the other without ‘smashing’ them. As a way of understanding and putting into action Mitchell’s question about pictures and desires, it offers an example of a loving approach.

Above all, in the context of a consideration of the desire of visual texts, discernment opens a way for the consideration of the desires of literary ones. In so doing, it requires the contamination of the isolated, individual, and ‘objective’ subject, and the mute, passive object by one another. The result is a “sym-pathetic” subject who “feel[s] along with [the text or picture] as a thing that is like no other”¹⁴⁷, an ‘object’ which might speak, desire, or act on the ‘subject’, and the space of possibility between the two—which arises out of recognition of the unknowability of the other. A consideration of this space will take place over Chapters 2 through 5. Chapter 2 will deal expressly with the text *as* a becoming, a continual unfolding which indicates by this continuousness the unknown which always lies just out of sight.

144 Brennan, 122.

145 Midgley, 172-173.

146 Brennan, 134.

147 Steinberg, Leo. *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth Century Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 63, quoted in Mitchell, 82.

A. Introduction

In order to clarify and define what this dissertation means when it talks about 'text', this chapter will approach texts as relational objects. All objects are relational, but that this is true does not make the particular relationality of texts less meaningful: no single text exists; each 'text' is part of the "inter-text [...] the impossibility of living outside the infinite text".¹ That is, individual instances of text are always already part of something concentrically larger than themselves, to which they are related, beyond their relation to non-textual objects or beings. How texts are—how they are relational—is an ontological, rather than an ontic question. (The latter is descriptive; it answers the question 'what?', and fulfils what Heidegger refers to as 'thinghood'. The former is concerned with being, and answers the question 'how?'—the ontological is a question of the way things are, of their 'Being'.²) The question of the being of texts is a question of how they are and how their relation allows for the possibility of relation with the text that is not only descriptive, i.e. that does more than answer the question 'what is a text?'. To ask 'how' texts are is compatible with a loving approach in that it refuses to define the other in question. Later chapters of this dissertation when referring to text, will do so as it is imagined throughout this one.

The chapter situates itself in relation to Roland Barthes' discussion of how and what texts are in his book *The Pleasure of the Text*, especially focusing on the text of pleasure/the text of bliss/the erotic text. Here, I argue a link between relation and desire to show how desire is implicated in the being of texts, which are always already in relation among themselves and to their readers (and writers³). In addition, this chapter examines the connection between text and its physical-etymological counterparts, textile, stuff, and material. The chapter's second-to-last section uses mechanics to construct a figure for texts' resonance, which prepares the field for the reading of the "Envois" section of Derrida's *The Post Card* at the beginning of Chapter 3. By working toward an understanding of texts' desire/texts as desiring, Chapter 2 prepares a space for the discussion, in Chapter 3, of deconstruction understood as a loving approach to texts (as others with their own desires).

1 Barthes, 1975: 36.

2 Heidegger's definition of the two terms comes down to the difference between inquiry "concerned primarily with *Being*" (ontological) and that "concerned primarily with *entities* and the facts about them". Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. (New York: Wiley Blackwell, 1962), p. 31 *fn*.

3 Barthes (and others) would trouble this distinction; I leave it here for the time being, but will deal with it later in this chapter.

B. Why Barthes?

Given the predominance of theories of text, language, and the play that happens in both over many years and even more ‘-isms’—structural, post-structural, modern, postmodern, and so on—a chapter aiming to explore the ontology of texts could begin almost anywhere, with almost any theorist writing in the 20th century, and make its way from there. This dissertation engages the work of Roland Barthes because of his situation in relation to Reader Response criticism as well as to Structuralism and post-structuralism. His work is a thread that reflects those movements’ changing attitudes to text, and it consciously and unconsciously revises itself and complicates itself in their terms (in the terms it makes for them) even as it reflects them. In particular, beyond any identification of Barthes with Structuralism or post-structuralism, the ways in which his work attempts both to name and to enact a theory of reading which does not neglect the relationship between the text and the reader *as a bidirectional one* locates Barthes’ work within the practices, if not the canon, of Reader Response criticism. It is also this bidirectional and naming-enacting tendency that makes Barthes’ work appropriate to a dissertation that is searching for a way of reading that is aware of the text as other.

To begin with, however, I want to situate Barthes in terms of the relation of his work to reader-response criticism; to Wolfgang Iser in particular. Although the focus of this chapter will be on Barthes, Iser is a good companion to him; their approaches complement one another. Iser’s writing takes into consideration the gaps and holes in the text that invite and imply the presence and activity of the reader. These holes call for a criticism that would respond to the text in terms of “the fundamental question...what actually does take place between text and reader?”⁴ For Iser and other Reader Response critics, “whenever the reader bridges the gaps, communication begins”⁵—communication that is neither unidirectional nor authoritarian, but that is instead constructed by the play between two (or more) creators of meaning. Barthes also acknowledges this relationship, writing that the “text you write must prove to me *that it desires me*. This proof exists: it is writing.”⁶ The desire of the text for the reader and the desire of the reader for the text (the proof of which is reading) are bound together. The play Iser talks about is what “allows author-reader-text to be conceived as a dynamic interrelationship”,⁷ and the space in which play can happen is opened up by difference within the text. That is, such play requires space in which to happen; this space is what

4 Iser, Wolfgang, *Prospecting: from Reader Response to Literary Anthropology*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1989), p. 3.

5 Iser, 34.

6 Barthes, Roland. *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. R. Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p. 6.

7 Iser, 250.

occurs between something like 'intent' and something like 'reception' (for instance). It is the back-and-forth pinging echo of what meanings are possible in any given space (occupied by a word, an utterance, a sound, another communicative movement, or not). Difference here refers both to internal difference (how the text is different to itself) and to three areas in particular which Iser identifies as the extratextual, intratextual, and that between the text and reader.⁸ In all cases, the space of difference "triggers a to-and-fro movement that is basic to play...continual movement between the positions reveal [sic] their many different aspects",⁹ and it is this movement which continually opens further space for play and transformation which for Iser works to "discredit the traditional notion of representation"¹⁰ wherein the text has a direct correlation in the world to which it refers. The discrediting of representation for which the playful, continuously constructed text is responsible in Iser's work has clear parallels to the slipperiness of language in poststructuralism.

As far as Iser is concerned—and this goes back to the cocreation of meaning referenced above—the message or meaning in a literary work "is transmitted in two ways, in that the reader 'receives' it by composing it"¹¹ as well as by reading it 'passively'. The difference between the reader and the text mean that the composition of the text in Iser's terms is never an absolute state; it is in continuous progress because there is always a further difference in which to create meaning. Iser's writing is important to this dissertation because of the implications it holds for the reader in the particular and her involvement with the text. It is also important for the way that it refers specifically to puncturing a closed system of representation as a way to begin the process of worldmaking;¹² for Iser's insistence that literature "can never be brought to an end, for every reality must...produce its own irreality";¹³ and for Iser's reimagining of the reader as co-author whose asking 'what will happen next' "automatically raise[s] the degree of...participation in the further progress of the action".¹⁴ These are all considerations to which Roland Barthes' own writing on text is sympathetic.

Both Iser and Barthes have as a central concern the idea of two communicating or relating bodies (textual, fleshly), but also of the space between those bodies across or within which communication can happen. In Barthes' writing, this separation takes the form of a suture or seam or, later, as the space of discourse in *A Lover's Discourse* within which the lover speaks to the beloved. Iser's work

8 Iser, 251.

9 Iser, 251-252.

10 Iser, 252.

11 Iser, 31.

12 Iser, 249.

13 Iser, 213.

14 Iser, 11.

values the spaces in text where the text is not, which invite the reader into them; the effect of these gaps is a dynamism in the text which "proves to be unbounded by any recognisable teleology",¹⁵ a dynamism that has echoes in Barthes' idea of signifiante. That is, the space within texts (and the space within which texts are able to occur) is without a definite end or limiting point.

C. How are texts?

How: Interrogative. In what way, in what manner, by what means; Used to ask about the condition or quality of something; Used to ask about someone or something's physical or mental state; Used to ask about the extent or degree of something; The way in which; Any way in which.

The interrogative 'how' presumes relation between the being in question and the questioner, at least insofar as there is a shared system of reference to which the respondent's being can be compared or in which it takes place. Yes, systems of knowledge may just as likely use 'how' as a question that silences the subject of questioning by using 'how' rhetorically, as a point from which to describe or talk about that subject rather than as a hospitable question that opens space for the other to speak. As with any word, there is nothing to guarantee one meaning or usage of 'how'. But equally, then, that means that 'how' *can* be a question which allows the questioned to answer, or looks for that answer in the being of the other (rather than projecting answers onto it). Posed this way, the question 'how are you' as an ontological one resembles Brennan's idea of discernment. 'How are you' is an invitation to the other to tell about his/her/itself in his/her/its own words, figure, idiom. In this dissertation, it is, as the poet Ellen Bryant Voigt puts it, a question also of style—of choosing or attempting a responsive style over a pre-emptive one.¹⁶

The adoption of 'how' as a guiding question follows Heidegger's differentiation between ontic and ontological. As a way of being (rather than a subject who is), or an immersion (rather than an object or process), Dasein requires a shift from the ontic question 'what' to the ontological question 'how'.¹⁷ Dasein's "dynamic way of existing"¹⁸ cannot be adequately described via the question 'what', because 'what' is a temporal and spatial locator, a fixative. Instead, the question 'how' demonstrates both

15 Iser, 26.

16 Bryant-Voigt, Ellen.. "Double-talk and Double Vision". Bread Loaf Writers' Conference. Middlebury College. Middlebury, Vermont 12 August 2009, 16:11.

17 Dasein "is ontically distinctive in that it is ontological"; that is, Heidegger "cannot define Dasein's essence by citing a 'what' of the kind that pertains to a subject matter". (Heidegger, 1962: 32.)

18 Lévinas, Emmanuel, trans. Committee of Public Safety. "Martin Heidegger and Ontology". *Diacritics*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Spring 1996), p. 22.

Dasein's dynamism and its relational qualities. Rather than objects waiting 'out there' to be described, Dasein puts them into relation by "the manner in which they encounter Dasein, the manner in which they are".¹⁹ The object is "always 'in view of' [en vue de] something, because it is not a separate entity [...]. Its mode of being entails giving precedence to the totality of the function [oeuvre] in relation to which [it] exists".²⁰ Relation in turn precipitates care, attention. What happens if the ontological as a question of *being* (i.e. 'how') forms the attention given to understanding something like a text?

The question is an invitation to speech ('how are you?') and to relation, a hospitable interaction with the other, which aims to welcome the other before knowing who the other is, and responds to the "imperative to effectively welcome someone in particular and not some indefinite anyone".²¹ Since 'how' is concerned with particularity, before addressing the question of 'how' texts are, it is necessary to establish or outline an idea of 'what' they have been understood to be in recent theory.²² The scope of this dissertation does not allow for a detailed exegesis of understandings of 'text' throughout the tradition of Western philosophy. Barthes' work is an obvious point of concentration for this dissertation because of its place throughout both structuralism and poststructuralism (discourses explicitly concerned with ideas of text), and because of the ways in which specific works of his demonstrate their concern for textual ontology, notably *The Pleasure of the Text* and *S/Z*, as well as several essays. The former will be the work to which this dissertation has most recourse.

The text is unrestricted to "what is written (to literature)".²³ Unlimited to literature, to the body of extant work, the being of the text opens up the possibility of textuality to that which has not been written, or to that which is unwritten, to that which is yet to be written, or even to that which never will be written. That which is-written (as an on-going process) is not limited to what is called literature; the text can even be illiterate or unliterary. It can be unreadable. Text, then, *has being* in the play between what is written (literature, as the extant body of words on paper, in books, on subway walls) and what is-written (that is, the on-going potentiality of being able to write or to be written, where writing is a non- or a meta-physical process as much as a physical one). Unrestricted, the text can move, can play, can stand in relation to one thing and then to another. It can form spaces or gaps, transfer meaning, or wait for meaning to fill it (more than once). Barthes refers to "a sort of

¹⁹ Ibid, 19.

²⁰ Ibid, 20.

²¹ Naas, Michael. "Alors, qui êtes-vous? Jacques Derrida and the Question of Hospitality". *SubStance* Issue 106 (Volume 34, Number 1), 2005, p. 9.

²² Another way to say this is of course 'how' the word 'text' and texts themselves have been understood.

²³ Barthes 1981: 40.

islet within the human—the common—relation”²⁴ when he begins to lay out the properties of texts. An islet: small island, geographically speaking. But, speaking anatomically, an islet is also a portion of tissue structurally distinct from surrounding tissues. What structural difference separates the text from the common relation of humans to one another?

C.1. Then, what is (a) text?

“[T]he text is *what is written*”²⁵

Having gone to some lengths to talk about the ways in which the text is not limited to what is written, this section begins with a quotation from Barthes seemingly saying just that. Of course, even this statement is subject to the kind of taking-apart and playful or wilful or multiple misreading that Iser, Barthes, and others champion as a way of relation with texts. A text is just what Barthes says: it is the thing that *is written*.²⁶ In those two words he points to the metaphysical concept of text as “at once original, univocal, and definitive”,²⁷ the text as the thing whose being is already created (is written, in the past participial; is finished, complete, and whole). He also, however, invokes the idea of text as *whatsoever* is written, an ‘is written’ that extends beyond the work to gesture at, relate to, and include all things that have ‘being written’²⁸ as a quality, regardless of their existence or ‘completion’. The sense of the text as ‘whatsoever is written’ underlies the inclusion of Cy Twombly’s painting *The Ceiling* in Chapter 6.

Barthes’ work speaks to this second connotation. His text is manifold, constructed not by any individual work but by a network of relation that is limitless and expansive. The text in this understanding can be seen as “tissue”;²⁹ as a “system”³⁰ and as that in which “the system is overcome”;³¹ as “a fragment of language”,³² indicating that it is part of something greater than its

24 Barthes, 1975: 16.

25 Barthes, 1981: 32.

26 This does, of course, beg the question “what does ‘is written’ mean?”! For Barthes’ purposes, the answer to this seems to lie in the question of *signifiante*, or “meaning, *insofar as it is sensually produced*” (1975: 64), an ongoing and multiple process of becoming and generating. It is not limited to marks on paper, c.f. Derrida’s ‘writing in general’.

27 Barthes, 1981: 33.

28 ‘Being written’ is an example of ‘processivity’, the quality of foregrounding the being-made or the process of making the work; or, as Barthes puts it, *signifiante*.

29 Barthes, 1981: 32.

30 Barthes, 1981: 34.

31 Barthes, 1975: 29.

32 Barthes, 1981: 35.

singular instances; as a “practice” and a “productivity”³³ rather than a product; as an “intertext”;³⁴ as “something woven”;³⁵ as what is engendered by “All signifying practices”;³⁶ as “a science of becoming”.³⁷ Its human form is “our erotic body”³⁸—a network of synapses, receivers, nerves, all constructing meaning together from many ports. The text “[does] not respect the whole”;³⁹ that is, it gestures outside of itself and in so doing disallows the idea that it is complete unto itself and outside of relation. It leads us to “look up often, to listen to something else”⁴⁰—an index of whatever else is out there (or just outside of itself). It is “atopic”,⁴¹ decentred. The text is “language without its image-reservoir, its image-system”,⁴² in a “collective economy”,⁴³ which is to say it is produced by and belongs to all the members of the group that make or consume it, a set which extends ownership of text beyond the set of those who write.

The quality that defines text *throughout* Barthes' work is extension, the idea of text as something *in production*, something on-going. If a text is the text itself and whatever is related to the text, this is a collection that cannot be delineated, an ever-open(ing) set. The text as a woven thing, a textile, extends beyond its fabric to implicate makers, modes of production, elements of composition, and strands whose ends are not contained by the cloth. For good reason the idea of text as textile or woven thing has become a near cliché in theoretical considerations of the text. Not only does the embedded 'text' in 'textile' provide an immediate mnemonic link, explaining a (conceptual) text as a (material) textile succinctly alludes to the way in which both text and textile are composed. This figure is readily available in material terms; the likelihood that a reader is not in actual, physical, immediate contact with a textile while he or she reads 'text as textile' is extremely low. It is an eminently available comparison, whose implications are packed neatly into the familiar materiality of 'textile'. But despite—in fact, perhaps because of—the proliferation of this figure, it is worth taking the time to unpack it, because thinking about it attentively can tell us more about *how* a text is—if it is “like a textile”.⁴⁴ Although the figure presents us with an everyday point of reference by which to

33 Barthes, 1981: 36.

34 Barthes, 1981: 39; intertext is “the impossibility of living outside the infinite text” (1975: 36).

35 Barthes, 1981: 39.

36 Barthes, 1981: 41.

37 Barthes, 1981: 45.

38 Barthes, 1975: 17.

39 Barthes, 1975: 18.

40 Barthes, 1975: 24.

41 Barthes, 1975: 29.

42 Barthes, 1975: 33.

43 Barthes, 1975: 24.

44 As an interesting etymological sidenote, the word 'line' comes from 'linum' in Latin, which is also the root for English 'linen' and referred in Latin to the flax plant. So many lines here: the line of the horizon on the far edge of the field; lines of flax sheaves standing to ret; the stalks of flax themselves; the fibres spun from them into linen thread (a line itself), which then might be

understand 'text', how often is this comparison followed explicitly to its end? I would like, before going on, to unpack—or unpick—this figure.

'Textile' colloquially refers to any cloth, including cloths not made by weaving, such as knit or felted cloth, but technically refers only to woven fabric. Weaving is thus automatically implied if we are using textile as a figure for text. What is the importance of this? Weaving recalls us to the physical making of an object we take for granted and metonymically transfers that making to the making of the text, helping us understand that just as a cloth or a rug which is woven is made from different strands (all of which may have come from separate spools, been dyed in different dyestuffs, and contained disparate fibres), a text is a *made object*. A text so made contains traces of many 'strands' of thought; it might contain 'holes' to be 'patched' by a reader's knowledge at the time of reading or at a later time. A text as a textile is not just an artefact of some past time; it is an object of continued use and an object to which alterations or repairs may be made. It can be taken apart and put back together. It can be reduced to its physical basis, its 'fibres', so to speak. It has truck with the person who uses it (it *has use*), and its existence is necessarily related to those who make it and use it. Text as textile emphasises the artificial nature of text, the fact that it is created and that it is therefore—even if no reader ever found it—always already in relation: to its maker, to the context in which it is made, and to the texts that surround and interweave with it. And the idea of text as textile gives insight into *how* texts are, not just what they might be.

The figure that posits text as textile is about how texts interlace; how they are in relation, how their relation to the world and to us *is* is an interlacing relation. A woven textile, a text woven of other texts' remnants, memories, traces—these indicate *what else* was or is with them. The text sets up its world—not only the world within the limit of ink on paper (or lit LEDs on a screen, paint on a wall, etc.), but, like the jar in Wallace Stevens' poem, the world that the text's presence indicates is there, outside of itself.⁴⁵ And—text as textile calls to mind the synonyms for 'textile': fabric, material, stuff. Textiles as 'material' are what *things* are made of; as 'stuff' they rejoin the order of all created, generic objects. Both synonyms point to the being of the textile, and metaphorically to the being of the text, as that which is used to make other things, and that which is among the ranks of things that have been made and therefore exist.

woven into a cloth to line another garment. 'Textile' itself is from Latin 'Texare', to weave. Barthes notes this in "From Work to Text", saying that "etymologically, the text is a fabric" (*The Rustle of Language*. Ed. and trans. Howard. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 60).

45 Stevens, Wallace. "The Anecdote of the Jar". Accessed online at <http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/88/stevens-anecdote.html>, August 11, 2011.

Because in its being text refers, both materially and conceptually, to other texts (and also refers by extension to the people who produce and consume those texts, as well as to its own producers and consumers, and to the relations between and among these groups), its being is a being-with. It cannot escape being in relation if relationality is its fundamental state. The text cannot be without a reader, because its writer is also its reader; it cannot be without a writer, because even unwritten (physically), the text is produced or awaited in the company of its contexts; it is part of what is-written. For texts as for human beings, “[e]xistence *is with*: otherwise nothing exists”.⁴⁶ Because the text is an intertext, it contains within itself the “infinite text”⁴⁷ and the impossibility of an escape from such a text. Text as textile, as tissue, means “emphasising, in the tissue, the generative idea that the text is made, is worked out in a perpetual interweaving”;⁴⁸ that everything is already part of the text in its broadest sense. The invocation of tissue makes the figure both textile and bodily; textiles as a plane in which we can see various threads interacting and creating patterns, and bodies as non-planar systems of interacting pieces which create meaning and intelligibility together.

The text is not passively in a state of relation; by its being-in-relation it creates (or destroys) relation between its producer and consumer. The text “*does not give names*—or it removes existing ones”;⁴⁹ its power in creation is the power to realign categories or to extend them, and this includes the categories of ‘reader’ and ‘writer’ in their traditionally separate senses. In the Barthesian sense of textual creation, that is, “there is not, behind the text, someone active (the writer) and out in front someone passive (the reader)”.⁵⁰ The text redistributes these categories such that the reader and the writer are interwoven or even scattered throughout the text, rather than sitting on either side of it as though it were a physical division. The text, continually recreated and recreated moreover by many voices (not a single authorial voice), defects from the situation of absolutes and of fixed meanings, a “defection which approaches bliss”⁵¹ and “supersedes grammatical attitudes”.⁵² If we extend the figure of text-making or image-making to world-making (as Mitchell does), then we can understand the availability of textual creation as an opening of subjecthood, of agency, and of authorship to all involved in this creation, rather than only to certain ones of a certain tradition on a certain ‘side’ of the text. In an economy where the fixedness of names guarantees the subject-object hierarchy and the

46 Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Being Singular Plural* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 4.

47 Barthes, 1975: 36.

48 Barthes, 1975: 64.

49 Barthes, 1975: 44–45.

50 Barthes, 1975: 16.

51 Barthes, 1975: 45.

52 Barthes, 1975: 16.

dominion of those who write the history of what they conquer, the text “is (should be) that uninhibited person who shows his behind to the Political Father”.⁵³

So the text in its textile-ness is extensive and multiple and diverse; in its creation by many voices it is what we might call democratic. Barthes uses a further word to talk about how texts are, and that word is 'erotic'. In fact, the erotics of texts come from a continual opening and extending (implied both by the figure of the textile and the on-going possible inclusion/opening to other threads; and by the democracy of textual creation which opens to allow other voices). The 'how' of the text is also a question of its relation, and this relation is erotic, magical, enthusiastic,⁵⁴ oppositional, changeable— 'erotic' as Barthes uses it means that “opposing forces are no longer repressed but in a state of becoming: nothing is really antagonistic, everything is plural”.⁵⁵ When the erotic⁵⁶ properties of text go unrealised, it becomes stereotype, “the word repeated without any magic [...] as though it were natural, as though by some miracle this recurring word were adequate on each occasion for different reasons”.⁵⁷ The erotic properties of text point to its state of becoming; the erotic is erotic so long as it is incomplete, because the complete resists or even denies the liminal crossing which is the defining state of the erotic. In its eroticism the text *becomes* atopic and extensive, placeless and omnipresent. These are possible states, “makeshift[s]” that “[allow] for writing (and reading)”,⁵⁸ and “it is the seam between them” that becomes erotic.⁵⁹

C.2 Implications of text as erotic

“everything is relevant. / I call it loving.”⁶⁰

The creative properties inherent in the idea of text-making, image-making, and world-making, as noted above, appear in both Mitchell's argument and Barthes; in Mitchell's, it is that images *create* worlds, rather than simply mirroring them. In Barthes, the continually extensive and expanding nature of text means that if not *creating* new spaces into which it extends, it at least 'discovers' them. But discoveries are of course a kind of world-making; one need look no further than early accounts

53 Barthes, 1975: 53.

54 Ibid.

55 Barthes, 1975: 31.

56 Which is to say, permeable, oppositional, contrary, opening [...]

57 Barthes, 1975: 42.

58 Barthes, 1975: 5.

59 Barthes, 1975: 7.

60 Tate, James. “Rescue” in *Selected Poems*. (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1991), p. 28.

of an 'empty' 'New World' for examples of that. In any case, both Barthes and Mitchell assign creative agency to what might otherwise be thought of as inanimate objects. Barthes' conception of the erotic as it applies to texts provides further definition for Mitchell's idea of 'double belief' and his argument for the lives (and loves) of images, and outlines one source of the power in texts and in images.

Let us begin with the question 'What do pictures want?' in terms of an understanding of 'want' as 'lack', since it is in this question that the idea of pictorial desire is established.⁶¹ Mitchell takes pictures as "ways of worldmaking, not just world mirroring",⁶² so when he asks questions about what is missing from pictures, what they lack, or what they might want, he is acknowledging that it is not only what *is* in pictures that creates and structures knowledge. The question about what is missing or what lacks in something acknowledges the importance of emptiness and non-presence in the creation of worlds; the "poetics" that Mitchell imagines addressing itself to paintings⁶³ is a poetics that takes those spaces of lack into account. Particularly in the case of the erotic (and the case of the text understood to be erotic), lack creates meaning. Barthes, too, identifies a lack at the very centre of textual creation—the lack of surety. The writer "must seek out [the] reader [...] *without knowing where he is*", and this is the procedure by which a "site of bliss is then created".⁶⁴ The lack of the reader is the proof of the text's desire for a reader; if the "text you write must prove to me *that it desires me*" then "[this] proof exists: it is writing".⁶⁵ The empty space in the centre of the text is the questionable presence of another/a reader/a co-creator, and with "the writer of the text of bliss and [its] reader begins the untenable text".⁶⁶ Untenable: this text is slippery, unable to be held, in some way indefensible—indeffensible because it cannot be pinned down, only spoken with, co-created. Sites of lack create an "impossible"⁶⁷ text, and even more so if these are moving sites. The 'impossible' text is impossible to locate absolutely (is atopic) and by its movement does not captivate its reader so much as point to what (or where) else it could be. In the place where texts or pictures lack a 'something' (or even a 'nothing') runs the seam of "an appearance-as-disappearance".⁶⁸ This appearance/disappearance, the intermittence of a text—its flashing into and out of place—is erotic.⁶⁹

61 For the purposes of this chapter, and despite Mitchell's disclaimer that of course images and texts are not the same things despite similarities in possible treatments, imagine here that the question could as easily be 'What do texts want?'

62 Mitchell, xiv.

63 Mitchell, xv.

64 Barthes, 1975: 4.

65 Barthes, 1975: 6.

66 Barthes, 1975: 22.

67 Barthes, 1975: 22.

68 Barthes, 1975: 10.

69 Barthes, 1975: 10.

What, then, is the erotic? It is the gap between what we believe to exist and the possibilities for other existences; the split seam between the reality we have created and the one we imagine. Texts are one such seam; we are “moved as though these words were uttering a reality”,⁷⁰ even though, as with Magritte’s famous painting, the picture a text makes is not the thing itself.⁷¹ Mitchell’s corresponding example is the unwillingness to scratch out the eyes of a photograph of one’s mother, despite the very rational knowledge that the photograph *is not* one’s mother. The seam of the erotic is a place where belief flickers and the unknown becomes possible. The erotic is the flickering back and forth from the known or believed into the possible and unaccomplished. A text “is a field of action, change, becoming”; “its constitutive moment is *traversal* (notably, it can traverse the work, several works)”.⁷² These movements, both evolutionary and transversal, are erotic in the Barthesian sense, pointing to both sides of the seam. The way in which text crosses boundaries both calls them into question and charges the boundaries erotically by crossing them, seaming them, and showing the seam’s construction.

The erotic, which Barthes uses in company with ‘bliss’ and ‘pleasure’, is a state of being “at once excluded and at peace”⁷³ which “contradicts the general rule that would assign bliss a fixed form”.⁷⁴ Once bliss is categorised and labelled, it becomes a stereotype. Bliss and the erotic, and texts as a site of both, require forms that accommodate movement, which “can very well take the form of a drift. *Drifting* occurs whenever *I do not respect the whole*”.⁷⁵ If a text’s eroticism requires a moving form, and if forms that drift demonstrate that text’s lack of respect for the whole (and for the sense of completion that the whole brings with it), this points to the text’s own insufficiency and to its condition of always *approaching* fullness without gaining it. It puts the erotic text into a state of continual flux—or drift—if there is always more that can be known; the blissful text, despite its material length, “cannot be anything but short [...] it will be an introduction to what will never be written”,⁷⁶ pointing forever beyond itself, no matter how much more is ever written. This is an optimistic and positive stance; a hopeful stance. To the text that takes this stance, everything is relevant. Eroticism expresses the being of the text if we can understand bliss as fundamentally plural;

70 Barthes, 1975: 47.

71 I’m speaking, of course, of Magritte’s famous image of a pipe with the words ‘Ceci n’est pas une pipe’ (‘This is not a pipe’) over it. Magritte, René. “La Trahison des Images” (‘The Treachery of Images’). Oil on canvas. 1928-29. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California.
<http://collectionsonline.lacma.org/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=record;id=34438;type=101>

72 Barthes, 1989: 58, emphasis in original.

73 Barthes, 1975: 29.

74 Barthes, 1975: 27.

75 Barthes, 1975: 18, emphasis in original.

76 Ibid. Here, ‘short’ might also be read as a neutral ‘inadequate’.

then the text-as-erotic is also plural, and these pluralities have the quality of continual possibility, which is in fact the guarantee of their plurality. If the text, or if bliss, reaches a point at which it exhausts possibility, then plurality is jeopardised and in fact the text (or bliss) becomes bound to one way of being—and ceases to be text, in Barthes' sense.

The text's logic means that it lives in association, coincidences, overlappings, disassociations, "structured but decentered, without closure".⁷⁷ Broader than the material singular of the "work"—limited by its author, its genre, and its linear nature—text becomes "that social space which leaves no language safe, outside, nor any subject of the enunciation in a position as judge, master, analyst, confessor, decoder".⁷⁸ Text as a social space which proceeds by inclusion and erases the hierarchy of author|reader divisions, is "*experienced only in an activity, in a production*",⁷⁹ as opposed to the work, which is static, singular, "held in the hand".⁸⁰ In terms of the body, the text is out of a single body's scale, surrounding it and permeating it, becoming an activity (something the body takes part in but does not comprise). The body is able, on the other hand, to hold the work, contain it, create all of it, and reckon with it from a position of authority. Texts, therefore, transverse not only imagined or theoretical boundaries, but also the physical boundaries most personal to us: the seam between one body and the next, one name and the next.

The understanding of the plurality of the text is central to its eroticism. Texts of pleasure are "a sanctioned Babel",⁸¹ made by many voices in collective economy,⁸² which Barthes also describes as a "kind of Franciscanism [which] invites all words to perch, to flock, to fly off again".⁸³ St. Francis's inclusion of all creatures in his worship is a figure for a text that welcomes everything but understands in that welcoming posture that arrival does not mean permanence. The Franciscan mandate of poverty creates a space in its practitioners (even figurative ones) for objects, meanings, and ways of being to transverse, while acknowledging in its very stance their evanescent nature. That poverty means nothing *is*, originally, and so nothing can be assumed—and there is possibility for anything. It is a continuous poverty in a positive sense that is more about the possibilities inherent in emptiness than any kind of forlorn or pitiable state. A Franciscan text receives multiply, plurally—and from "heterogeneous, detached substances and levels: lights, colors [sic], vegetation, heat, air,

77 Barthes, 1989: 59.

78 Barthes, 1989: 64.

79 Barthes, 1989: 58, emphasis in original.

80 Barthes, 1989: 57.

81 Barthes, 1975: 4.

82 Barthes, 1975: 24.

83 Barthes, 1975: 8.

tenuous explosions of sound, tiny cries of birds, children's voices [...] gestures, garments".⁸⁴ The figure of Franciscan poverty both sanctifies the material objects which text traverses and acknowledges that text is not lodged in them. The work, marked with "the Father's inscription"⁸⁵ suffers from the heaviness which lodges it in history, in the singular author, and in itself; the text, and especially the text understood in a Franciscanism that emphasises the possibility of perching, flocking, and flying off, is a text that distributes meaning among its members. Like the 'body of Christ', the Franciscan text is unable to be delineated as 'this, this, and this, but not that'; in its state of "vital expansion",⁸⁶ it contains the *possibility* of including everything, forever—in hospitality, rather than in ownership. Barthes' declaration of the plural and transitory nature of the text of pleasure emphasises the decentredness of such a text, and in so doing relates that text to his definition of the erotic as a site of intermittence. His definition of the erotic, which is to say the unfinished, the liminal, reinforces the idea of text as perpetually becoming.

Before concluding this section, it is necessary to note that there is perhaps a contradiction to be pointed out between the idea of text as 'textile'—which is a material and singular object, with its selvedge-limits and its particular and limited times, places, and means of production—and text as transverse and continually created and extending social space. However, it is also possible to think about 'textile' in terms of textual decentring. Thinking of text in relation to textile-as-fabric (-material, -stuff) might seem on the surface to be oppositional to a conception of text in terms of Barthes' text/work distinction. But what if we imagine not the single and concrete bolt of corduroy, silk charmeuse, or boiled wool which can be pulled from the shelf, and instead think of these words in their most collective sense? The idea of the text as textile and as 'material' or 'stuff' makes only more clear its productive, expansive qualities, because these non-count nouns refer to an open set. Beyond the 'work' that is a singular textile (this bolt of chambray), the word's figurative qualities give us a picture of textile as a process. The invocation of its synonyms (stuff, material) gives us a sense of the openness of the set and provides a sense of textile that considers it to be first and foremost *in creation*. Material is that from which *anything* can be made; stuff is the set of all objects ever (and ever to be) created. In those senses the figure of textile for text is especially meaningful.

84 Barthes, 1989: 60.

85 Barthes, 1989: 61.

86 Ibid.

C.2.1 What the erotic wants/the uncertain text

What does the erotic want—that is to say, what does the erotic lack? The erotic is a continued state of arousal, heightened awareness, heightened sensitivity. It begins but does not end—once fulfilment comes, the erotic ends. The erotic therefore lacks fulfilment—it has being in the flickering state of incompleteness. The erotic wants fulfilment. This means, then, that the erotic exists in a state of being *unfulfilled*, which in turn allows its continuation. The erotic lacks finality, which means it is in a state of ever-becoming, ever-coming-into-being. Neither finished nor unbegun, the erotic exists as long as its own ending does not.

How is the text erotic, in this sense? Understood in terms of its lack, the erotic desires fulfilment (but does not reach it), and is therefore figured as continually reaching and moving toward what it does not incorporate (but could). The text-as-textile, similarly, exists in a continual state of creation, a “perpetual interweaving”;⁸⁷ its position is “uncertain”.⁸⁸ As Donna Haraway writes, at the point when this interweaving stops and “the system of connections closes in on itself [...] the world is frozen in a dance of death”.⁸⁹ The text is erotic, which is to say *alive*, generative, in its betweenness, its flapping open and closed, its place on the seam of created/becoming. It is “intermittence [...] which is erotic [...] this flash itself which seduces”.⁹⁰ The erotic text both creates the space for and stages its own ‘appearance-as-disappearance’, in and out of existence, here and there, available and reserved.

Textual pleasure is not “the pleasure of the corporeal striptease or of narrative suspense”, which are “a gradual unveiling”.⁹¹ Unveiling would mean that eventually all would be known or seen; it is uni-directional (clothes come off, veil falls). Instead, the pleasure of the text is a knowledge of both edges of the seam, the “origin and the end”,⁹² in combination with “tmesis”,⁹³ the unpredictable cutting of the text that the reader performs as she reads (and disregards or ignores). Tmesis, however, does not refer only to cutting, but also to the intersplicing of words between other words; not an unveiling and not a shearing-off, but a grafting. The erotics of the text lie along the seam of what is read and not read, or read and interspliced—and for that, they require a reader. Beyond the erotic’s general

⁸⁷ Barthes, 1975: 64.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Haraway, Donna. “The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others” in *The Haraway Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2004) p. 110.

⁹⁰ Barthes, 1975: 10.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Barthes, 1975: 11.

lack of finitude (and desire for continuity) the erotic *text* needs a reader who reads and does not read, reads and splices. A text with such a reader performs its erotics by its unpredictability ("the author cannot predict tmesis: he cannot choose to write *what will not be read*")⁹⁴ and its excess (it "exceeds any (social) function and any (structural) functioning").⁹⁵ Texts must therefore 'want' to express themselves as incomplete. And if texts want to show that they are incomplete, they must also want to enlarge themselves or run outside of the material boundaries that structure their physical forms (their works). If we are to understand texts as erotic, then we have to understand them as desiring *without* end. Whatever *is* cannot be enough for the erotic text, because 'enough' signifies a closure of enquiry and the end of the erotic. The erotic text requires a companion—a relation that is *itself* perhaps not erotic, but characterised by another kind of love: *philia*, which connotes friendship, familiarity, openness, and 'being in tune' with another. Eros is not the *only* kind of love or relation.

C.2.2 Possible relations to the text: idolatry, totemic

When Mitchell begins to form his argument for assigning a kind of agency to pictures, he carefully acknowledges how closely his consideration of the desires of images might come to animism. Instead of jettisoning the possibility of pictures' desire, Mitchell incorporates the question of animism into his argument, identifying a "double consciousness"⁹⁶ whereby we both believe and do not believe in the lives of images, exactly because questions like 'What do pictures want?' seem to be "just the sort of question that an idolator would ask".⁹⁷ In other words, instead of denying the possibility of or even his own tendency towards animism (as if it were something to be ashamed of or something which could have no place in his inquiry), Mitchell finds a place for it both in his consideration of art and in human lives more generally. This place is the 'double consciousness' itself—or even the seam or gap between the two sides. According to Mitchell, the "usual way of sorting out this double consciousness is to attribute one side of it (generally the naïve, magical, superstitious side) to someone else, and to claim the hardheaded, critical, and skeptical [sic] position as one's own".⁹⁸ Barthes also acknowledges something like Mitchell's double consciousness in the reader who "can keep saying: *I know these are only words, but all the same [...]* ", which he compares to the Freudian

94 Ibid.

95 Barthes, 1975: 18.

96 Mitchell, 11.

97 Mitchell, 25.

98 Mitchell, 7. This process exemplifies what Teresa Brennan calls the 'foundational fantasy' by which we project our negative, unwanted affects onto others.

economy in which “the child knows its mother has no penis and simultaneously believes she has one”.⁹⁹

If relations (to images and text) which afford them agency or desire are considered idolatrous or quasi-idolatrous, then one way to deal with these relations might be to reconsider what action is required (or could be required) by such relation. The idolatrous relation wherein idolatry is figured as *bad* calls for iconoclasm because the idol *cannot* be a living thing; however, this in turn requires the creation of the double consciousness described above, because if the idol were not a living thing or if it did not have the qualities of and seem to *be* a living thing, then why would one have had such a relation to it in the first place? But idolatry is not the *necessary* relation to an object (picture, text).

In place of an ‘idolatrous’ relation to the text, Mitchell proposes a consideration of images in terms of the totemic (rather than the fetishistic or idolatrous) in order to “disrupt the binary model of art history”.¹⁰⁰ Totemism, with its roots in relation (Mitchell identifies the origin of the word in Anishinaabe [Ojibwe] meaning ‘a relative of mine’)¹⁰¹, is, etymologically at least, a useful place to begin a relation that is attempting not to ‘shatter’ the other. Moreover, Mitchell argues that our attitude toward totems is one of “curatorial solicitude”¹⁰². With etymological roots in ideas of caring and preserving (both doctors and meats ‘cure’), curation is an interesting figure to place across the table from iconoclasm’s smashing and fetishism’s material attraction minus communal investment.¹⁰³ Totemism does not award the object, picture, or text a status beyond its being and its being-in-relation, and, in Mitchell’s words, historically “signalled a shift from the rhetoric of iconoclasm to a rhetoric of scientific curiosity”.¹⁰⁴ While this ‘scientific curiosity’ is by no means a flawless approach to the other,¹⁰⁵ and despite the ways that in actuality such relationships fall prey to the uneven power relations within them, the *ideal* relation between the observer and the observed would be one that asks ‘how are you? How do you work? What are you like? What do you need and want to keep living?’ and which would listen for the answers. It is in this sense—the sense in which the totem is a familiar, is something that is lived with, and is something that it is acceptable to know and to *want* to know about—that totemism is useful in terms of approaching the text or the picture.

⁹⁹ Barthes, 1975: 47.

¹⁰⁰ Mitchell, 98.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Mitchell, 100.

¹⁰³ Mitchell, 99.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ This dissertation’s objections to ‘science’ as an approach to texts in general, and to positivism and rationality in particular, are outlined in the Introduction and in Chapter 1.

Perhaps some of the 'movement' of the text, its *signifiante*, is created in the repeatedly and minutely traversed space between belief and disbelief. In having written a book that enacts the suture that he identifies between our belief in images' lives and our 'knowledge' that they are 'just things', Mitchell creates a text that, as Barthes says, creates meaning in its intermittence, its duality, in its 'appearance-as-disappearance'. The meaning we can find in our belief and disbelief in the lives of images, in other words, is not located at either extremity (i.e. either at belief or at disbelief) but in the flickering, transitory, moving and unpossessable space between them. Mitchell's question and the quasi-animist treatment of images it implies assert the suture between belief and disbelief; Mitchell's primary figure here is that of 'resonance'.¹⁰⁶

C.3 The resonant and incomplete text

Resonance implies both a transmitting device and a receiving one, but it also requires the space in which what is transmitted or received resonates, and motions to the space between the transmitter and receiver as similarly valuable. At this point, the focus of this chapter will turn to a specific treatment of resonance as a figure for an understanding that goes beyond the either/or of signification, in order to demonstrate how resonance functions as a figure for Mitchell's 'critical iconoclasm'/delicate critical method and the approach to texts suggested by this dissertation. Additionally, this consideration of the physical phenomenon of resonance will be framed in terms that draw on concepts from reader-response criticism: resonance is the place where the text opens to the reader, because resonance both requires and indicates the presence of *two bodies creating intelligibility* together. It is via the work of Jean-Luc Nancy that this section will proceed with its inquiry, and with an understanding that the resonance described can be metaphorically transferred to the relation between the text and itself, and the one between the reader/writer and the text. Nancy's work on listening operates on the premise of two bodies between which resonance happens—and figures resonance as the creation of a kind of meaning which precedes a fixing or absolutising knowledge. Because resonance is experienced via the body, physically, the 'sense' it creates is dual: sensory and intellectual information. Resonance cannot happen in a vacuum: it requires the presence of bodies between which or a body within which to occur. The body as an accumulation of "erotic sites"¹⁰⁷ consists of continual opening—and openings are where resonance can occur. Likewise, the erotic text resonates with meaning in the spaces that open between known quantities.

¹⁰⁶ See Mitchell, 26.

¹⁰⁷ Barthes, 1975: 56.

Nancy treats resonance as “the very beginning and opening up of sense, as beyond-sense, or sense that goes beyond signification”, and within his definition of resonance points explicitly to the body as “wholly [...] a resonance chamber”, which leads him to argue that what resonates in that body is “the ‘subject’ as that part, in the body, that is listening or vibrates with listening to—or with the echo of—the beyond-meaning”.¹⁰⁸ Nancy, writing about listening, is speaking simultaneously of a figurative resonance (which we might also call ‘feeling’) and of a literal resonance, that of sound waves in the bones of the ear. The discussion of resonance in this section cannot ignore this duality: resonance is neither simply physical nor simply figurative. It is complexly located at the axis of the two. Therefore, some examination of the figure’s literal counterpart—that is, mechanics, the branch of physics that looks at the behaviour of bodies subjected to force or displacement—can enrich both the figurative and the literal understandings of resonance.

In mechanics, all systems that vibrate are understood as having resonance (or resonant) frequencies.¹⁰⁹ At a system’s resonance frequency, that system has a larger oscillation or absorbs more energy. The interaction between two resonance frequencies can have physical effects; for example, a crystal wineglass exposed to a musical note of its resonant frequency will shatter. Any system can have any number of these frequencies, and here it is that the idea of resonance resonates, so to speak, with an expansive, erotic text. The number of frequencies a system can have is equal to its degrees of freedom, or ways that it can move. The more complex a system is, the more vibrations it experiences. Complex or extended systems that experience resonance from internal vibrations—for example, the pipes on an organ, the string on a guitar when it is vibrating, or even the human body—are called resonators. Since these resonators are made of millions of joined parts, they can have millions of resonance frequencies, and so they can have millions of degrees of freedom—of possibilities for movement, direction—or, metaphorically, for intelligibility.

The quality of a complex resonator that is important as a figure here is its enormous number of resonant frequencies—the infinitude of things, following Nancy’s language, that could touch it, or, following Mitchell’s, that could “make it speak and resonate”.¹¹⁰ This is the state of the text of pleasure, wherein “opposing forces are no longer repressed but in a state of becoming: nothing is

108 Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Listening*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), p. 31.

109 The number of occurrences of a repeating event per unit of time.

110 Mitchell, 27.

really antagonistic, everything is plural".¹¹¹ The erotic text, the text of pleasure is a dual affirmation of possibility and possible expansion, movement. Its multitudinous resonance frequencies are expressed by the "generative"¹¹² quality of text itself—which reaches beyond any singularity—and in its state of bliss, which is "asocial",¹¹³ "atopic",¹¹⁴ and unfixed.

Both the complex resonator and the text of pleasure express the possibility of movement in almost limitless directions. Both allow for the possibility of continued and unpredictable articulation, which remains "open, its densities accessible to action and intervention".¹¹⁵ This possibility marks a "defection which approaches bliss"¹¹⁶ as the text moves beyond the names given to it (its known resonance frequencies, if you like) and creates further meaning and the *possibility* of still *further* meaning. The text is a resonator like the unpredictable body of the other (and of the self), a "material semiotic generative node"¹¹⁷ which wants a continual redefinition and re-vision, reinvention in our imagination and understanding.

Nancy points to resonance, which happens *in the body*, as the 'opening up' of sense, of a sensitivity to what goes beyond signification. Could we understand this 'beyond' as the index of those uncountable degrees of freedom a complex resonator would have? And if we so understand them, and if we think then of Mitchell's call for a new iconoclasm that would strike images enough to make them resonate but not so much as to smash them, aren't we talking about making a critical method that acknowledges possibility, the limit of one person's knowledge at one point in time, and the intricate ways in which systems of resonance affect one another? In other words, doesn't Nancy's figure provide a link back to physical phenomena that can help in conceptualising the qualities of the erotic in terms of its being a *possible* becoming, and the ways in which that becoming can help us understand the text as erotic? The erotic text so understood is inseparable from the body, whether that body splits "into erotic sites"¹¹⁸ or acts as "a resonance chamber".¹¹⁹ In this instance, the "text and the body lose all distinction".¹²⁰ The text *is* the body of the other in which its otherness resonates. Mitchell's figure for the new method he proposes (which is centred around the question 'What do

111 Barthes, 1975: 31.

112 Barthes, 1975: 64.

113 Barthes, 1975: 39.

114 Barthes, 1975: 29.

115 Haraway, 110.

116 Barthes, 1975: 45.

117 Haraway, 68.

118 Barthes, 1975: 56.

119 Nancy, 2007: 31.

120 Haraway, 327.

pictures want?') is a 'critical iconoclasm', which would cause icons (pictures, ideas, text) to resonate, rather than shatter, when struck. This points to a different sort of relation, one which puts the focus on both the icon (or idol) and the iconoclast (or idolater), rather than on the iconoclast alone, and, importantly, to the fact that iconoclasm is a relationship. Mitchell's use of the word 'resonate' supports Nancy's assertion that resonance is the 'beyond-sense'; the body is the resonant chamber within which this 'beyond-sense' can happen. The relationship in which a would-be iconoclast can strike a text or a picture and make it resonate rather than break is a relationship in which the subjectivity of that other body is recognised. An approach that would call on that resonance, rather than smash the body, recognises the value of both the body itself and the resonance and possibility of resonance it contains. A resonant approach is a way of respecting the otherness of the text, and of calling it 'my relative', of being curious (as in curatorial) about it without letting it own you (as an idol) or needing to own it (as a fetish). It offers a way to preserve the distinction between one and the other without necessitating a hierarchy of one over the other.

C.3 Resonance and separation

"This is the strange thing about relationship. What you desire is what creates your quality. You are not made by yourself, but by the thing that you want."

Fanny Howe¹²¹

The question 'What do texts want?' (as with Mitchell's original phrasing of that question), when understood as a question about what is *not* there or what is lacked by a text, posits sites of lack, also figured as wanting or desiring, as one starting point for relations with texts. One distinct textual lack is that of an end point—the state of incompleteness that renders a text in perpetual *significance* likewise renders it to some extent endless. Like the erotic, the text in a state of continuity lacks finality; the desire that sustains this being is a desire for continued incompleteness such that the end (or The End) is always just a bit further away, in the distance. The text of pleasure in particular demonstrates this extensive quality; because bliss cannot be assigned a standard or fixed form, the text of bliss too escapes that assignation. Both bliss and textuality are terms shaded with the sense of on-going creation and modification.

Further diversions into mechanics aside, here again, as with the other physical processes (drawing, painting) already invoked in the opening chapter of this dissertation, we have a link between the

¹²¹ Howe, Fanny. "Catholic", in *The Wedding Dress: Meditations on Word and Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p. 110.

material, mechanical, physical world and the world of the philosopher. The material happening—the actual and phenomenal occurrence of resonance between and within bodies—can give nuance to the way we use its name figuratively. Not only that: just as the material properties of cadmium red paint point to its geological origins,¹²² and its name points to its discovery at Thebes¹²³ during the Classical episteme, the *idea* of resonance is an index of the material fact of resonance, and of the conditions resonance requires. Resonance happens within and between bodies, and indicates potential for movement as well as pointing back to the fact of those bodies; it cannot happen in a vacuum. The concept of resonance 'points back' to the physical presence of bodies (human or otherwise) because the necessary condition for resonance is space for sound to resonate in *and* bodies from which to resonate. In this way, the resonant itself (as any concept) is text "worked out in perpetual interweaving".¹²⁴ The resonant, then, wants both presence *and* absence, but not too much of either—like the erotic, it requires a questionable or shimmering location rather than a static one. The very possibility of complex resonant systems having millions of frequencies at which they might resonate speaks to this idea—resonance is not something that is once and for all located, but a state of possibility that only after (or during) its occurrence invokes and indexes the presence of bodies. The primary state of the resonant, like that of the erotic, is that of intermittence and possibility, because before resonance can happen, conditions have to be perfect for it to happen—therefore, when it does, it points to those conditions. One of those conditions is the presence of something with which to resonate.

The ontology of the erotic drawn from the question 'what does the erotic want,' which is outlined above, comes down to a lack of completion. This lack can be construed as a desire to remain incomplete. It follows from this desire to remain incomplete that the erotic is a state of incompleteness—which indicates that this is an on-going or continuous state. If incompleteness implies continuance in terms of the erotic, it implies thereby a desire to continue being and continue being to some extent unknown. The erotic, in its desire for a continual state of incompleteness, then, involves a similarly continual generation of possible 'frequencies' such that there might be infinite new ways in which to touch it, to listen to it, to make it, to sound it. Resonance works as a figure when talking about the erotic—and about the construction of meaning in terms of a 'critical iconoclasm' such as that suggested by Mitchell—because it indicates not only the presence of two 'bodies' (a receiver and a transmitter, whether or not those two bodies are physically separate) but

122 In the mineral Hawleyite, for example, which is mined in the Yukon Territory of Canada.

123 *Kadmeia* = Cadmean earth; Cadmus was the prince who founded Thebes.

124 Barthes, 1975: 64.

also the space or difference between those two bodies which holds the possibility for the change, distortion, loss, or mutation of what is sent—a quality of both the erotic and the text. The space between two as a critical feature of relation will recur especially in consideration of the work of Luce Irigaray in Chapter 4, but it is a thread through much of the work which lays the ground for this dissertation, including Derrida's consideration of the other-as-other. Mitchell's insistence on resonance as a figure for a new iconoclasm, and Nancy's use of the same as a way of locating the subject, foreground the importance of that space in an approach which takes into account the otherness of the one approached.

C.4 If/then

To begin with, the form of the chapter feels scant: fitting 'text' into it seems impossible, when the defining characteristic of the object of study is its expansion, its slipperiness. But this very scantness performs the inability of the work to hold the text: not its inability to communicate *some things*, but its inability to say everything or fully describe the thing it approaches. By nature of its otherness and its incompleteness, the text escapes. Along the faultlines or seams of yes-that's-it/ah-there-it-goes, the text runs, winking and shining. The only answer that the question 'how is the text?' yields is that the text is plural, expanding, on-going. In this way it is a model for any Other, whose completeness is unknowable to us thanks to their otherness. One's treatment of the text, then, is a form of world-making, not a mental exercise conducted in a vacuum, but a demonstration of one's values and one's approach to others. Text is an ideal medium for this because of its expansiveness; its limitlessness permits multiple or even revised approaches. It forgives, or perhaps invites, contradiction. Most of all, it sits in relation by the 'how' of its creation: brought into existence by language or the thought of language, the text exists *is* in relation to its makers and those who interact with it.

If the text is open, incomplete, erotic in its running along the gaps in knowing/not-knowing, how then should it be treated? Treatment of the text as an other calls for an engagement of the space between two, the recognition of the absolute otherness of the other. It is this recognition that Derrida calls "love"¹²⁵ and which is for Irigaray and others the basis of any interaction. This relation, which requires spaces of difference like those created by texts' continuous production (or reconfiguration) of meaning, is a relation texts desire. It acknowledges them as they are and as other, and it requires this acknowledgement as a basic principle—if love is essentially a recognition of

125 Derrida: Interview (1997).

otherness, one cannot love what is subsumed or identical to oneself. A loving approach would not only resonate with texts, it would also be able to acknowledge that the difference between the text it approaches and its approach are on-going, irreconcilable, and productive. Chapter 3 will outline the ways in which deconstruction, especially Derrida's work, has been to some extent such an approach. Chapter 4 will engage with other readings that constellate with Derrida's work to suggest the loving approach this dissertation proposes.

Deconstruction as a loving approach

"Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text, but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself."¹

"It is always necessary that the other sign, and it is always the other who signs last. In other words, first."²

"love obeys a reason [...] that [...] deals not only with objects, but with those, like you and I, who handle, produce, are ever using them [...] a logic that is completely different from the logic overseeing the management and arrangement of objects."³

1 Miller, J. Hillis. "Stevens' Rock and Criticism as Cure". *Georgia Review* 30 (1976), p. 334.

2 Derrida, Jacques. "Force of Law", quoted in Naas, Michael. *Taking on The Tradition: Jacques Derrida and the Legacies of Deconstruction* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003) p. xvii.

3 Marion, Jean-Luc. *Prolegomena to Charity*. Trans. Stephen Lewis. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), p. x.

A. Introduction

Having situated itself in the context of poststructuralist and postmodern discourse, as well as in the broader context of discourses on the production of knowledge; having staked its claim on the territory of an approach that might complement or revise the use of the term 'method' in literary or theoretical arenas; and having presented the view of 'text' from which it will proceed with such an approach, this dissertation now turns to the possibility of that approach already extant in the literature. The sources in question here are a range of post-structuralist texts and voices, to be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, including the writings and practices of Jacques Derrida—on which this chapter centres. These writings and practices, as well as the diverse appropriations and reuses they have engendered, have come to be thought of collectively as a deconstruction, or as a deconstructive method.

The chapter begins by offering an example of the text of pleasure introduced in Chapter 2, which, by grace of its situation in Derrida's corpus and in the poststructuralist corpus more broadly, provides a link between the resonant textuality discussed in the preceding chapter and the considerations of deconstruction which preoccupy this one. To some extent, it also serves to introduce and exemplify this writer's internalisation of so-called 'deconstructive strategies', or, in other words, to approach Derrida's text from a deconstructive position. In the terms of this dissertation, such a position can only ever be occupied singly—that is to say, the surety of *what* or *how* deconstruction is is only ever a surety in the moment of approach as one makes it.

If this dissertation proposes deconstruction as a possible fulfilment of what it terms 'approach', then it is necessary to examine what is understood by the term 'deconstruction', as well as to define what is intended by the use of that term here. From such a definition, it will be possible to proceed to a consideration of whether and how deconstruction might escape the constraints of 'method' into which it is often placed. The chapter proceeds from its opening, performative gambit to take on both this identification of deconstruction with method and the (mis)readings of Derrida and his work which give rise to such an understanding, in order to show that Derrida's own insistence on the priority of the other means that deconstruction-as-method is an improper, if not impossible, approach to others, textual or not. The second aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the possibility in deconstruction for a loving approach to the other in order support the broader aim of the

dissertation, which is to propose and exemplify such an approach, the precedent for which is to be found in the literary/theoretical context surrounding the dissertation.

B. Resonance, Romance, and the Between: Derrida's 'posts' and the text of pleasure

Having asserted the importance of the thread of difference through Derrida's work to this dissertation, this section will offer a bridge between the reading of the erotic text as material-semiotic⁴ and deconstructive readings/writings or approaches as possible sites of such textuality via a reading of one of Derrida's own texts. When *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* (to be referred to as *The Post Card*) was published in 1987, Jacques Derrida had already been an important figure in the world of theory for almost twenty years. The book plays with textuality, meaning, language. It is dense. Its concerns are with technologies of communication and with the transmission or failure of transmission of messages of all kinds. While an in-depth discussion of *The Post Card* would easily run the course of an entire dissertation⁵, the scope of this dissertation does not allow for this; instead, this chapter will conclude by looking at one section of *The Post Card* in terms of resonance in a space between two bodies and in terms of the continually expanding, co-created text of bliss.

The first section of *The Post Card*, "Envois", is ostensibly concerned with the sending of personal messages via a postal system; in fact, it is transmission, as much as receipt, which is at stake here. "Envois" is a collection of "the remainders of recently destroyed correspondence"⁶ about which there is no certainty to be had in regard to the questions "Who is writing? To whom? And to send, to destine, to dispatch what? To what address?"⁷; these are things which "finally [...] I do not know".⁸ Not only are these "Envois" (or 'sendings') an amorous text—a collection of love letters, or at least of letters to a beloved—their forms intimate that they can be read as a text-of-pleasure made flesh.

4 Donna Haraway: the term "[highlights] the object of knowledge as an active part of the apparatus of bodily production" (Haraway, 2004: 68). That is, the object of knowledge is no longer just means to an end, but part of the process of creating meaning.

5 See, for example, Barker, Tom Paul. *Disclosure and inscription: Heidegger, Derrida, and the technological difference*. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Warwick, 2003; Drake, William McClellan. *Representation: Re-collecting mythology in an age of showing and telling*. Ph.D. Thesis, Pacifica Graduate Institute, 2001; and Davis, Randal Bryan. *Thesis as object (with scholarly apparatus)*. M.A. Thesis, The University of Texas at Dallas, 1988.

6 Derrida, Jacques. *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*. Trans. Alan Bass. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 3. Henceforth Derrida, 1987b.

7 Derrida, 1987b: 5.

8 Ibid.

Occurring as they do in the space between the posts (between sending and receipt, in the hands of a reader who may or may not be the intended recipient), the letters' meaning is distributed rather than localised. They perform textual bliss by their omissions (physical gaps where text is missing, chronological gaps where letters are missing) and by their having fallen into our hands. The diversion of the letters themselves opens up continuously new possibilities for reading, given that the writer, whoever he was, could not have predicted who the reader would be in the space between sending and receipt. Likewise, the gaps in the text are a kind of enforced tmesis—an enforced cutting, at least, creating actual white space on the page into which the reader may or may not actually inscribe writing of her own. If nothing else, these white spaces allow for possibilities of unknown happenings, therefore relegated to the imagination or surmise of the reader, who despite their non-presence must to some extent divine what might have happened.

The metaphor of the resonant entwines with that of the erotic in its acknowledgement of the beginning *and* the end, the gap within which it is possible for meaning to occur. Derrida engages with this space of possibility at length in *The Post Card*, where 'post' ('*poste*') points to "*position* [...]" and to the entire topic of the 'thesis, the singular position',⁹ and its nuances of both "to station and to send"¹⁰ serve to remind the reader of how communication is happening by indicating both the 'stationed' transmitter and receiver (who are at least positioned in their own bodies,¹¹ if otherwise mobile) and the space between, through which messages are sent. Derrida writes that "the post office is the site of a great affair [...]. Everything is possible there".¹² The post office in this instance is a site of resonance, of possibility, and of the erotic, in that it is "never certain",¹³ that it requires distance "*in order to write*", and that, despite the sender's best desires, receipt (or receipt of a message as it was sent) cannot be guaranteed—a "tragedy of destination"¹⁴ wherein non-arrival is as possible as arrival. By identifying the circulation of postcards, which are readable by anyone but addressed to one receiver, as "an open but illegible letter",¹⁵ Derrida acknowledges the possibility of resonance that the sender or transmitter does not anticipate, and thus also the possibility of an endless transmission which continues to resonate at any of its potential frequencies.

9 Derrida, 1987b: xxv.

10 Derrida, 1987b: xxvi.

11 Body in this context refers to more than the fleshly body—to something like Nancy's 'chamber of resonance', which unites the body and whatever is beyond/behind/within/throughout/alongside it (mind, soul, heart, subject [...]).

12 Derrida, 1987b: 69.

13 Derrida, 1987b: 45.

14 Derrida, 1987b: 23.

15 Derrida, 1987b: 12.

In *The Postcard*, what is created 'between the posts', as it were, is not only the written record of the text per se, but the institution of the archive, which in its expansiveness echoes the form Barthes assigns text. The archive here is the composite of ephemeral objects: "a small piece of Plato's post card that Freud has translated"; references to books; train routes; films; myrtle in a pot; proper names; references to poems; an aquamarine ring; letters and suicide notes; codes; "a monument, a house of cards" and other monuments to that ultimately ephemeral thing, life; universities and libraries; calling cards; telegrams; photographs taken in station photomats and photomats themselves; Derrida's own published works¹⁶ and his existent or imagined children; Purim cakes (also known as hamentaschen) and their Proustian qualities; broadcast media; and everywhere the 'you'¹⁷ to whom the writer addresses the postcards, letters, and stream-of-consciousness missives that fill the 'envois' themselves. The archive of unimportant objects (made important only by their inclusion or by their specificity, their private meaning) is a resonant space, a space where meaning can emerge given combinations of seemingly neutral things because of their relation to one another and to the writer-transmitter and reader-receiver; the given object is "no longer tautological...it is *interpretable*".¹⁸

The reader is set down in the middle of a narrative which has already begun and may have been going for some time, and the extant work ends before the story does, with a direct reference to "tomorrow".¹⁹ And what 'actually happens' in this narrative is what happens literally between the posts—between the posting of one card and the next, between the position of sender and receiver, between the position of reader and author. The 'happening' of the "Envois" is the diversion from any intentionality, the loss of control over the reader and thus over the meaning the texts hold. Even the burning of the whole archive which the writer references several times repeats this motif of loss of control: fire as *tnesis* would be an ultimate randomness of choice—what goes, what stays, what narrative can be constructed from what fragments. The narrative that is constructed in the wake of this destruction (or even in the wake of the effacement of certain sections of the letters), however, requires an other in whose mind, memory, or experience to resonate. Not the author, because there is no gap in knowing there (having written what was written and lived what was written about, even if

16 Citations on this page to this point and the preceding page, last paragraph, in order: Derrida, 1987: 166.; 82, 189, 225; 32, 179, 189; 246; 77; 148, 166, 192; 8; 102; 186; 229; 80, 148, 152; 17; 148; 86, 109, 208; 225; 153; 37, 79; 109; 80.

17 Citations on this page, first full paragraph, in order: Derrida, 1987: 39; 73; 109, 225; 4, 16, 23, 25-26, 33, 69, 109, 170, 210, 232, 256.

18 Barthes, 2002: 78.

19 Derrida, 1987b: 256.

that was just the writing), but an other whose knowledge is incomplete and can therefore expand into the empty spaces, or resound with them, or make them resound. The receiver-reader has access to parts of the stories that the writer sends to the receiver via the 'private' (but actually public and open) exchange conducted on the backs of postcards. We cannot know how the sections that are elided disappeared—whether they ever existed; whether those gaps represent what went unread in the first place; whether the text's disappearance points to what was read (and censored) by some author(ity), and so whether what we are left with is actually the traces of what was unread that other time, the positive space as the negative space of the 'blind spot'.

It seems excessive but still necessary to state that "Envois" is epistolary, and by its nature an epistle is composed *after* the action that it describes—it can't pretend to the proximity that other narrative can. The letter is a record, a trace of the event, but not the event (that is described) itself; it is always scrambling one step behind the happening to which it attests (even as it and its writing/its being-written are other kinds of happening and attestation). The text attests to the space between transmitters (the event being written, the writer) and receivers (the written page, the readers). "Envois" records, traces and invents paths for meaning, communication, and connection. The activities, places, relationships, and objects that are documented, however, take place on a scale that is greater than the postcards (the "Envois") themselves. The cards' existence makes sense in terms of their fragmentation. They can only represent part of what is happening, and as such they are essentially textual in Barthes' sense. They point explicitly and implicitly to an on-going production of meaning and feeling outside the work itself, whether that work is the book or the lives represented in the book.

C. What we talk about when we talk about 'deconstruction'

Deconstruction is widely understood to be a way of engaging with texts, a practice of criticism, a way of taking things (concepts, ideas, objects) apart, or a literary theory that was initiated by early writings of Derrida. 'Widely,' because not only is deconstruction a familiar term to members of a literary/cultural/academic elite (to whom it is definitely familiar)²⁰, it has penetrated the vocabulary of people who are not involved in literary or academic circles by way of a certain, sometimes

20 See Michèle Lamont's article "How to Become a Dominant French Philosopher: The Case of Jacques Derrida" (*The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 93, No. 3 [Nov., 1987], pp. 584-622) for a detailed analysis of the acceptance of deconstruction, and specifically of Derrida's work, as legitimate currency in both academic and high cultural life in France and the U.S.

malapropic, adoption by news and other media. And 'or,' because these multiple understandings are not necessarily present in every invocation of the name 'deconstruction'; nor are they necessarily the limits within which this 'deconstruction' operates.

As with anything which is 'widely understood,' what 'deconstruction' means is diffuse, conflicted. In popular²¹ use, deconstruction is presented as anything from a process which "carefully dismantles or removes materials from structures, as an alternative to demolition"²² to "the deconstructed Caesar salad (stacked romaine lettuce, an anchovy, an egg yolk, and some shaved Parmesan, in separate heaps on a plate)",²³ to "an on-going trend" in fashion.²⁴ The use of the word "deconstruction" in these cases is relatively divorced from the way it is used in literary criticism, philosophy, and critical theory—even though that 'way' is in fact a multitude of often different inflections, to the point that in one newspaper article it is first defined simply as a word "used by almost anyone who wants to say that she disagrees with how things have been thought of or done"²⁵. And the weak grasp of just what one means when one says or writes 'deconstruction' is not limited to some public sphere. The very people who one might think ought to know just what it is, what it means, and how it works—the authorities, critics, and scholars—either struggle to define it or insist on its resistance to definition. This means that although the concept has legs, it is difficult to be sure of what kind of animal is walking around on them.²⁶

21 'Popular use' begs the definition of 'popular'. For the purposes of this dissertation, popular use is non-specialist use.

22 Kinsella, Susan. "What is Deconstruction?" (pdf file), <http://crra.com/rrarc/rrarcreuse.html>

23 "Deconstructed Food: Why didn't I think of that first?"

<http://www.gather.com/viewArticle.action?articleId=281474976732943>

24 "Ghosts of Fashion Past: Deconstruction" <http://fashionindie.com/ghosts-of-fashion-past-deconstruction/>. Despite the temptation that might occur for further play with hauntings, ghosts, traces, and memory here, this extremely brief article only states that some designers take apart and then rebuild garments. It identifies 'deconstruction' as a trend but does not point to the reasons for the use of that term, nor contextualise deconstructive fashion, nor point to the adoption of deconstruction as a tactic in fashion theory (see Alison Gill, "Deconstruction Fashion: The Making of Unfinished, Decomposing and Re-assembled Clothes" and Hanne Loreck, "De/constructing Fashion/Fashions of Deconstruction: Cindy Sherman's Fashion Photographs", for example).

25 Aquino, Fr. Ranhilio Callangan. "What is Deconstruction?". *Manila Standard Today*, 24 May 2010, accessed 12 January 2011. <http://www.manilastandardtoday.com/insideOpinion.htm?f=2010%2Fmay%2F24%2FRanhilioaquino.isx&d=2010%2Fmay%2F24>

26 It is this very instability that seems to attract and repel people in deconstruction. For an example, see John M. Ellis's article "What Does Deconstruction Contribute to Theory of Criticism?" (*New Literary History*, Vol. 19, No. 2, [Winter, 1988], pp. 259-279). Deconstruction's unwillingness to settle on a single meaning seems to make Ellis extremely uncomfortable. He undertakes a debunking of deconstruction—or, in his words, an analysis of the "substance and value of this program as a contribution to theory of criticism" (261)—which is peppered with derision for 'deconstructionists' and their propensity to take "the traditional [...] and [stand] it on its head" (268) and a complete disbelief in, or even willingness to engage with the possibility that there might be privileged readings (265) in favour of a view of criticism which "provides real progress" (269), without ever seeming to note that it is the notion of 'real progress' which deconstruction would call into question.

Even within the province of specialised attention to concepts such as deconstruction—the academy and communities of thinkers—what *exactly* is meant by the term or appellation 'deconstruction' is unclear in that there is no absolute consensus. Nor is there a merely general consensus or majority opinion, given the different receptions of what is variously called 'deconstruction', 'deconstructivism', and 'deconstructive theory' within subject areas as varied as literary theory, geography, feminist theory/women's studies, analytic philosophy, and so on. Instead, there do tend to be ways of imagining deconstruction that recur; there is also a certain set of vocabulary which haunts discussions of deconstruction, especially those in which writers attempt to understand deconstruction via or in the terms of already-existing epistemological procedures. When attempts are made to describe what 'deconstruction' is, it is variously referred to as a 'method';²⁷ a 'procedure' or set of procedures; a 'methodology'; a 'way of reading' (this is perhaps its most frequent definition); a 'strategy'.²⁸ More rarely, it is described as an approach. When definitions of deconstruction are attempted, it is heralded as anything from "the literary theory wing of poststructuralism, a roughly described antifoundationalist intellectual movement originating in France in the 1960s",²⁹ to something that merely "involves the reading of texts and the writing of that reading",³⁰ to something that is concerned with "formal analyses and close reading procedures"; with "techniques of close and careful reading".³¹

Deconstruction, if it ever could have been said to have had a central or sustaining 'meaning'³² cannot be said to have such a thing now. There are as many 'deconstructions' as there are thinkers to perform them—which leaves deconstruction vulnerable to being reduced to instrumental positions, but also allows for free play with its tactics. This play (and the refusal to designate methods, origins or order which birthed it) means that deconstruction can be, for better or worse, the name given to all kinds of philosophical, critical, or theoretical work which aims to demonstrate the thinness of presumptions about *how* the world is and what it is made of. To put it in a nutshell, deconstruction's

27 As in Fuchs, Stephan, and Steven Ward. "What is Deconstruction, and Where and When Does it Take Place? Making Facts in Science, Building Cases in Law". *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (Aug., 1994), p. 482. See also Royle, quoted in Pasanen, Outi. "Review: Derrida in and out of Context: On the Necessity to Know: Why Derrida?" *MLN*, Vol. 118, No.5 (Dec. 2003), p. 1307.

28 See note 2 in Edic, James M. "Husserl vs. Derrida". *Human Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (1990), p. 117; see also Poovey, Mary. "Feminism and Deconstruction". *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Spring, 1988), pp. 51-65.

29 McCormick, John P. "Derrida on Law; Or, Poststructuralism Gets Serious". *Political Theory*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (June 2001), p. 419.

30 Orton, 35.

31 Barzilai, Shuli, and Morton W. Bloomfield. "New Criticism and Deconstructive Criticism, Or What's New?". *New Literary History*, Vol. 18, No.1 (Autumn, 1986), p. 153.

32 Of course not; the rejection of just such a thing is part of its own project and has been since the beginning.

unwillingness to self-define means that definition is available to those who make the work, a kind of textual, theoretical, critical open-source. The only implications of open-sourceness are modifiability and availability. Open-source does not mean that every reinvention or reimagination of the 'software' will fulfil the intentions of those who first worked with it. In fact, those intentions cannot be known; once the software is released, intention is no longer in play, and it becomes a question of interpretation and of application.³³ The open-source theoretical object is not inherently 'good' or 'bad'; radical or conservative; necessary or exorbitant. It is simply *available*,³⁴ which is both its strength and its weakness, but in the end its greater strength in a system which values choice and the trust that accompanies choice.

However, deconstruction, like anything else, can ossify. Although it *offers* the potential of limitless movement, redefinition, turning, un-deciding, the achievement of this potential relies on the wakeful attentiveness of those who engage with it. It is not intrinsic to deconstruction that things should go on being-becoming undecidable; without attention paid to a continual movement within thought, "undecidability itself soon rigidifies into a meaning, i.e. another form of decidable closure".³⁵ This is why what Fred Orton calls deconstruction's "second strategy"³⁶ is so important to a practice which chooses to call itself (or which is identified by others as) deconstruction/deconstructive: this strategy works to "prevent what has been accomplished by the first strategy—that overturning of the binary oppositions—from getting reestablished".³⁷ To 'practice deconstruction', it is not simply a question of inverting binaries, but of inscribing the 'results' of such inversions—of inscribing one's own thinking—in the place of the undecidable. Inscribing one's writing/thought into the places of undecidability or the undecidable into one's writing/thought requires yet further movement away from binary opposition, without ever regrouping to a new concrete form—without "ever constituting a third term, without leaving room for a solution in the form of speculative dialectics".³⁸ Rather than standing as third-term synthesis, the undecidable is what disallows an integrating or synthesizing third term to arise from a binary opposition. Standing between the two, the undecidable forces consideration of both. It is a skin or a membrane through which both terms are

33 I mean in this instance an application that is not that of one thing *onto* another, but the bringing-together of two things.

34 Which is not to say that this availability is not political or tinged by this writer's perception. That is, 'availability' is a subjective understanding of deconstruction, rather than a statement of objective absolutes.

35 Rimmon-Kenon, Shlomith. "Deconstructive Reflections on Deconstruction: In Reply to Hillis Miller". *Poetics Today*, Vol.2, No.1b (Winter 1980-81), p. 188.

36 Orton, Fred. "On *Being Bent 'Blue'* (Second State): An Introduction to Jacques Derrida/A Footnote on Jasper Johns". *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (1989), p. 36.

37 Ibid.

38 Derrida, Jacques. *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass. (London: The Athlone Press, 1987), p. 43.

visible but inassimilable. In light of this, what is intrinsic to deconstruction, or to what might be called a deconstructive practice, is the responsibility one has to a continual re-evaluation of what has already been thought.

D. Deconstruction, in Derrida's words

Despite his reluctance to be identified with 'deconstruction' or even necessarily to admit to the assignation of such a name, Derrida's status as the author of certain texts taken to be deconstructive or on deconstruction meant that he was seen to be, or felt himself, responsible for undertaking a discussion of the terms assigned to him, even if he resisted them or disliked them. This section will take a few of Derrida's remarks on deconstruction into account in order to generate certain parameters for understanding what Derrida might have meant when he used the word 'deconstruction', even if these parameters are or were the parameters of a 'given moment' rather than eternal guidelines to be counted on and gone back to.

First of all, in speaking about deconstruction, Derrida mentions that deconstruction is a question of "overturn[ing] the hierarchy *at a given moment*".³⁹ What does this mean? It means, first of all that deconstruction is on-going; that it is not an action one takes and which then need never be taken again. Indeed, it brings the idea of 'an action' into question in the same way which seeing a prima ballerina dance brings the idea of 'a step' into question, or that in which seeing a master of karate perform a kata brings the idea of a single strike into question. Action in these terms becomes part of a longer movement. A moment in which one overturns the hierarchy may be deconstructive, but only if this overturning does not result in a field in which the terms rest in a new opposition (containing in itself the terms of hierarchy). The moment in which the hierarchy is overturned is only a moment, only a single instance, and if things are imagined to have been 'resolved' by that overturning, so imagining indicates "a *neutralization* that *in practice* would leave the previous field untouched, leaving no one hold on the previous opposition".⁴⁰ In other words, if deconstruction is an overturning of a hierarchy, and if this overturning occurs only for its given moment, then if one desires a continual practice of deconstruction one cannot simply reside in the field created by the inversion of terms; one must in each moment overturn them again, and "mark the interval between

39 Derrida, Jacques. "The Double Session". *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 271.

40 Derrida 1987: 41.

inversion [...] and the irruptive emergence of a new 'concept' [...] that can no longer be, and never could be, included in the previous regime".⁴¹ Elsewhere, in Derrida's description of the occasioning of his work (in *Positions*), he sets out a sketch of possible interactions, writing that one can "put to work *in* the text [...] certain [undecidable] marks [...] which escape from inclusion in the philosophical (binary) opposition and which nonetheless inhabit it, resist it, and disorganise it [...] *without ever* constituting a third term".⁴² It is in the space between the inversion and the irruption of a new concept that this undecidable, inassimilable third term resides.

How, though, to go about this? How to proceed with inversion such that irruption occurs and the undecidable might be tracked down, pinned, examined, and set free? Of course these are rhetorical questions, and their rhetoric is fustian. The point is that such a procedure has not been outlined and perhaps, in the terms of what we call deconstruction, cannot exist. However, even the *vague* orderliness of the inversion → irruptive emergence of new concept seems to imply steps that might be followed in order to generate something called 'deconstruction'. When Derrida at one point calls deconstruction a "marching order",⁴³ what might this mean? Is deconstruction something that takes an order, or gives one? In the terms of a 'marching order', we can understand it as a call to move out, to shift, with no further direction given (just *Raus!*). But 'marching order' also presumes one who gives the order (who knows where we are going, how we will get there; who directs us).

Deconstruction—or what has come to be *called* deconstruction—relies not on the destruction of a term through to be foundational, but on its transformation in relation. Thus, to "deconstruct an opposition is to undo it and displace it, to situate it differently".⁴⁴ If this is so, then deconstruction itself must be, despite (or because of) its resistance to procedure, somehow tangled in relation to that very thing, even if this relation takes primarily (or only) the form of questions.

Derrida delineates what deconstruction is not ("not [...] a specialized set of discursive procedures, still less the rules of a new hermeneutic method that works on texts or utterances in the shelter of a given or stable institution") and in fact refuses even to capitulate to such an appellation, referring only to what "is sometimes hastily called deconstruction". He goes on to indicate what it *might* be,

⁴¹ Derrida 1987: 42.

⁴² Derrida, Jacques. "Positions". *Diacritics*, 2 (1972), p. 36.

⁴³ Derrida 1981: 271.

⁴⁴ Culler, Jonathan. *On Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press., 1982) p. 150.

taking care not to define what it is or how it is done, gesturing instead to ways of being that concern it: "It is [...] at the very least a way of taking a position, in its work of analysis, concerning the political and institutional structures that make possible and govern our practices, our competencies, our performances". But, he adds, deconstruction is "neither a methodological reform that should reassure the organization in place nor a flourish of irresponsible [...] destruction, whose most certain effect would be to leave everything as it is and to consolidate the most immobile forces in the university".⁴⁵

Even in delineating what deconstruction is not (methodological reform, flourish of irresponsible destruction) or what it does not do (leave everything as it is), Derrida allies it with some *kind* of procedures despite the fact that he refuses to lay out how these procedures take effect or indeed what exactly they are. And in *Positions*, Derrida insists that while "Reading is transformational",⁴⁶ it is not haphazard; "this transformation cannot be executed however one wishes. It requires protocols of reading".⁴⁷ However, despite Derrida's assertion that reading requires protocols in order for transformation to come about through it, he is not at the same time asserting that deconstruction could be these protocols (or indeed in any way asserting what deconstruction is in these terms). He goes on to note "bluntly" that he has "not yet found any [such protocols] that satisfy [him]".⁴⁸ It would seem that the philosophical work of Derrida himself could thus be characterised by this dissatisfaction, which has its expression in a continual desire to overturn what (by itself or after previous inversion) appears to be foundational, whole, settled.

E. Deconstruction, a local definition

From the varied definitions and descriptions of deconstruction, several things emerge. One is the consideration of deconstruction—or the desire to consider it—in the same way that scientific and other empirical processes have been considered, which is to say, to understand it in terms of its method (often broken down into two parts, as in Orton's establishment/inversion of two terms → prevention of emergent third term; see above). Indeed, the drive to understand deconstruction methodically often results in deconstruction itself being *called* a method, and means that discussions

⁴⁵ Quoted in Culler, 1982: 156.

⁴⁶ Derrida 1987: 63.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

of deconstruction are often tied to ideas of method or a calling-into-question of just what is meant when we talk about method.

However, deconstruction's relationship to questions of method is not the only thing to emerge from descriptions of deconstruction. Twinned with these questions are deconstruction's relationship to its forerunners—its context and its history. This, too, points to the tendency of those who want to 'understand' deconstruction to affiliate it with some already extant thing in order to do so (rather than attempting to take it on terms which are completely new and completely its own).

The tendency to affiliate deconstruction with other things in order to understand it is the condition under which another common strand emerges. But given that the 'founder' of deconstruction himself refused either to be identified as its origin point or to provide a definition of just what was meant by the term in such a way as to be applicable across the board and eternally, the very idea of being able to 'do it right' seems to reflect more on the unnecessarily competitive 'industries' to which deconstruction has become fashionable or typical than on some absolute model which can be attained if one only tries a bit harder to find the origins of things. And, given the difficulty both of 'doing it right' (whatever that might mean) and the difficulty of pinning deconstruction down in the shape of pre-existing models for thought and behaviour, Derrida's suggestion that the "deconstructive" way of thinking context is neither a philosophical position nor a critique of finite contexts, which it analyses without claiming any absolute overview",⁴⁹ implies that in fact what deconstruction 'wants' (to use Mitchell's term) is a consideration which will not lock it in to preconceived notions of how it 'ought' to behave. The appropriate aspect here is curious, sensitive, and delicate; not necessarily methodical, not necessarily in line with its history (or necessarily out of line with it).

Another way to understand objections to the categorization of deconstruction might be in analogical terms. Negative theology insists not that it can identify the essence of God, only that it can say what God is *not*. Neti, neti—not this, not this. Or, failing that analogy (given deconstruction's troubled relationship to theology in general), perhaps we can approach deconstruction as a "technique". If deconstruction is approached as a technique, this allows deconstruction a sense like that of *technē*, as a way of making, of art-making, thus of world-making, thus of being-with. A turning-toward, an

⁴⁹ Derrida, Jacques. "Toward an Ethic of Discussion", in *Limited, Inc.*, ed. Gerald Graff (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p. 137

attitude. This allows a route other than the necessity of pigeonholing deconstruction as a 'method' simply because it occurs in sites where methods have tended to occur (philosophy, scholarly writing, universities—choose your site).

For the purposes of this dissertation, deconstruction may most usefully be considered in terms of an approach, which, in refusing to be absolutely defined, also refuses the ability to fully define the other.

F. Criticisms

It would be impossible to see deconstruction simply as a neutral theoretical object, and of course Derrida as its (unwilling) representative is not in a neutral position. Besides its status as a piece of theoretical equipment imported from France to serve the needs of scholars at Yale and other universities, and besides Derrida's reputation as an intellectual,⁵⁰ and besides deconstruction's position in popular understanding as an 'arty'⁵¹ or 'intellectual'⁵² or 'edgy'⁵³ or simply confrontational⁵⁴ mode of discourse, deconstruction is positioned specifically within the confines of academic thought by grace of its adoption over the past thirty or so years. And even in the arena of specialised readers (academics and scholars, critics and theorists) deconstruction has "the reputation, justified or not, of treating things obliquely, indirectly",⁵⁵ a reputation widespread enough for Derrida to both be aware of and comment on it.

But obliquity is not the only, or even the primary (as in most often cited, or most foregrounded) criticism of deconstruction.⁵⁶ As often as it is criticised for density or linguistic decoration, for difficulty or for élitism, deconstruction is also the subject of a more generalised, and more damning,

50 For a discussion of Derrida's legitimation both in France and in the U.S., see Lamont, 593-600.

51 As in the 'deconstructed' salad.

52 Read 'overthought', as in the 'deconstructed' salad.

53 As in *Comme des Garçons* and other 'deconstructed' fashion.

54 As in the article by Fr. Aquino, but also in Ellis, etc.

55 Derrida, Jacques. *Acts of Religion*. Ed. and trans. Gil Anidjar. (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 244.

56 George Watson's criticism that deconstruction is a "technique of trouble" (*Modern Literary Thought*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1978. p. 13) is a specific example; for a more general survey of the reception of deconstruction on the American scene in particular but with reference to European receptions, see *From the New Criticism to Deconstruction: The Reception of Structuralism and Post-Structuralism* by Art Berman (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1988). The scope of this chapter does not support a detailed exegesis of the many ways in which deconstruction unsettled the field of literary theory, but certain readings of deconstruction (including by so-called 'deconstructionists') will be treated later in this chapter, and those treatments include an examination of the ways in which a defence against the uncanny slipperiness of deconstruction is incorporated even into documents meant to support or propagate it.

critique. This is the allegation of destructiveness, negativity, or relativism.⁵⁷ At worst, deconstruction is a 'negative' process undergone to uproot and replace a standing order, or, in Derrida's gloss of his critics, "a quasi-nihilistic abdication before the ethico-politico-juridical question of justice and before the opposition between just and unjust".⁵⁸

To summarise these two perspectives, deconstruction is obscure, difficult, snobbish—enough to be a little ridiculous, as in Paul McCormick's recognition that in some circles "deconstruction has been deemed salon leftism for the Reagan-Thatcher era".⁵⁹ And if it is not snobbishly obscure, deconstruction is nihilistic, destructive, and 'godless'.

'Negative' how? In the context of a positivist metaphysics—a philosophy of the presence of things—deconstruction is 'negative' in the sense that meaning is not added to or found in things (a positive or additive process), but that the meaning understood to be in things is shown to be unstable. It is this instability that seems to carry the 'negative' feeling from which arise accusations of nihilism. This feeling of negativity ignores the logical conclusion of imagining that meaning is unstable and *not* located in texts. That is, if, as posited by deconstructive tactics, there is already no inherent meaning to be found in a text, then the process of engaging the text in tactics which play with its instability does not deplete the text of meaning, but meets it on ground which is to some extent its native territory.⁶⁰ The affront of "the deconstructive program", oversimplified, is that it "involves taking the traditional [...] and standing it up on its head".⁶¹ This simplification shows where the most basic objections to deconstruction occur: at the juncture between the traditional (what we're used to doing; what has 'always' been done) and its inversion. It also gives an insight into the tone of such objections: standing some thing 'on its head' is a disruption of the comfortable and 'natural' order of things. We stand on our feet, not our heads; we proceed through a text in *this* way, not that way. The

57 For indirect allegations of relativism in deconstruction, see Armstrong, Paul B. "The Multiple Existence of a Literary Work". *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Summer, 1986), pp. 321-329.

58 Derrida, 2002: 247. The quotation does nothing, of course, to dispel accusations of obliquity. The language is dense and particular. But it is not purposeless jargon; that is the function of particularity in language—to try to get as close as possible to precision, knowing precision is impossible, by making use of the widest array of functions (stylistic, lexical, grammatical) available.

59 McCormick, 400.

60 Arguing that the tactics of deconstruction could meet the text on 'native territory' would seem to imply that in fact there is a stable ground to return to. However, what is intended here is not the argumentative establishment of some absolute ground to which to return, but the tracery of the logic by which deconstruction meets texts in terms of their instability, and a demonstration of why it might do so. This is not to establish the necessary positivity of deconstruction, but to demonstrate that neither is negativity a necessary condition of such a practice.

61 Ellis, 268.

objection to deconstruction on the basis of its topsy-turviness is an objection from a place of defensiveness⁶² and fear. If there were really no substance to the deconstructive tendency to invert binaries, or to “[undermine] the referential status of the language being deconstructed”,⁶³ a defensive position would be unwarranted.

Not all readers of deconstruction—the word, or the writings so called—have turned to it with this type of attention, however. In the literature that contains the response to its arrival in the United States, deconstruction attracts reactions from almost all corners: literary criticism, law, humanities, social sciences. Despite—or perhaps because of—the eager adoption of deconstruction as cause and mode by some American writers and scholars in the 1970s and '80s, there was a visible struggle *against* its adoption, which likewise crossed disciplinary boundaries. Deconstruction is obliquely identified, along with perhaps Structuralism to some extent⁶⁴, as an “apocalyptic [...] irrationalism” which fabricated objections to the New Critics. At other times, however, deconstruction is seen as “merely a continuation and imitative form of the New Criticism”⁶⁵ or even “traditionalism's last formalist buttress”.⁶⁶ So which is it? Is deconstruction a sign of the apocalypse approaching, the death of all criticism; or is it simply and dismissibly an opulent next step in the project of close reading set out by the New Critics, a project which was too narrow from the start?

Deconstruction is criticised as “just another decadent version of always narrow formalism”;⁶⁷ in other words, no better than what is seen to precede it, and in fact slightly more useless or dangerous due to its apparent Baroque-ness—its form suiting no function but decoration. Along similar lines is the criticism that deconstruction is a game whose ends tell us that “actually carrying out deconstruction is a trivial pursuit”⁶⁸—that is, that not only is deconstruction merely a game, it is a game which wastes our time and energy because only once we carry it out do we discover that our efforts have been spent at something which is 'trivial'. Elsewhere, it is criticised as “an attempt to delineate and exceed the limits not only of traditional metaphysical doctrines, but of the 'philosophical ground' derived

62 Paul de Man: “One must be feeling very threatened indeed to become so [...] defensive”, quoted in Derrida, Jacques. *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2*. Trans. J. Plug and others. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 294. Derrida further writes that “We can easily see on which side obscurantism and nihilism are lurking when on occasion great professors or representatives of prestigious institutions lose all sense of proportion and control; on such occasions, they forget the principles that they claim to defend in their work” (Derrida, 2004: 147).

63 Miller, J. Hillis. “Review: Deconstructing the Deconstructors”. *Diacritics*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Summer, 1975), p. 30.

64 Ibid; see reference to Barthes.

65 Barzilai and Bloomfield, 151.

66 Lentricchia, Frank. *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 169.

67 Leitch, Vincent. *Deconstructive Criticism: An Advanced Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 142.

68 Ibid. 868.

from those doctrines”,⁶⁹ which sounds like a fair description of what deconstruction does indeed end up doing sometimes—except that the ‘philosophical ground’ here is not understood to need that delineating or excess.

Other critics see deconstruction as much more serious a problem than the decadence of a game played in university offices and between the pages of academic journals. Gerald Graff identifies deconstruction, in its most extreme manifestation, with “the force of consumer capitalism itself”, as that which “rendered negligible” concepts of “nature, essence, immanence”, all of which are supposed to hold the value of the human being firmly in place, tied to its metaphysical Being. As consumer capitalism, deconstruction is “more powerful” than “any school of philosophy or criticism”.⁷⁰ Graff’s criticism is problematic because it can *only* see one possibility for the loss of absolutes with which he identifies deconstruction, and this possibility is in fact tied to his conceptions of ‘nature, essence, immanence’: the one possibility is the possibility of the void—void of value, void of belief. This, however, imagines deconstruction as a one-way system whose adoption would only cancel out old relationships, replacing them with their opposites, and is a clear misreading of a deconstruction that must continually revise, but not delete, its relationships to its historical and present contexts in order to render the undecidable. Graff’s proposition contains a contradiction of its own terms—deconstruction as absolute figure (absolute nil) is still absolute and thereby subject to taking apart, juxtaposition; in a word, to deconstruction. In Derrida’s words, it is “a kind of general strategy of deconstruction [...] to avoid both simply *neutralizing* the binary oppositions of metaphysics and simply *residing* within the closed field of these oppositions”.⁷¹ Graff’s fear that deconstruction is either the root or a symptom of the problems of end-game capitalism imagines something that resides precisely within the ‘closed field’ Derrida describes.

Graff’s criticisms of Derrida are related to others’, in part because they focus on the relationship between what is called ‘deconstruction’ and the theoretical/philosophical/cultural grounds which form its context, both historically and contemporaneously (at the time of the articles in which these criticisms occur). Terry Eagleton calls deconstruction “the death drive at the level of theory” because it “turns its violence masochistically upon itself and goes down with it, locked with its object in a

⁶⁹ Schwartz, Stephen Adam. “The Deconstructive Imperative”. *MLN*, Vol. 105, No. 4 (Sept., 1990), p. 857.

⁷⁰ Graff, Gerald. “The Pseudo-Politics of Interpretation”, in *The Politics of Interpretation*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982-83), p. 154.

⁷¹ Derrida, Jacques. *Positions*. (Trans. Alan Bass. London: The Athlone Press, 1987), p. 41. Henceforth Derrida 1987a.

lethal complicity which permits it the final inviolability of pure negation".⁷² Many criticisms of deconstruction focus precisely on its apparent capacity to *destroy*, which begs the question, destroy what, exactly? Negate what, exactly?

The focus on deconstruction's negating or destructive potential makes some sense in terms of the history of recent literary criticism seen as a straight line in which Romanticism is eaten by the larger fish of Modernism, etc., until we reach Formalism, Structuralism, the New Critics. And if deconstruction enters the scene here—a scene structured by the imagination of progressively more 'right' methods for dealing with literature⁷³—then according to the terms of the scene it *has* to be a threat. Although this syllogism is not laid out in the literature, the viciousness with which its detractors criticise it upholds it. These attacks are not only on how deconstruction appears to work (they are rarely about that, in fact). They are about *what it is*—the 'death drive at the level of theory', 'pure negation'. As such, one function of these criticisms is to avoid seeing what possibilities there might be in deconstruction, instead assuming that it will take the form which the critic anticipates, i.e. destroying what came before it. If the critic is also implicated in this 'before', no wonder deconstruction seems "apocalyptic".⁷⁴ But if a critic *is*, or *feels*, so implicated, then his or her criticism contains its own unreliability. Deconstruction is something which "undoes the very comforts of mastery and consensus that underlie the illusion that objectivity is situated somewhere outside the self".⁷⁵ The text is not *deconstructed*. It is always already in the process of demonstrating its own deconstruction—the inclusion of and reconciling with its own opposites or others.

G. Feminism and deconstruction

I want to diverge for a moment from a discussion of the criticisms of deconstruction that take aim at it in the context of its introduction as a way of reading or a method for literary studies. There is

72 Eagleton, Terry. "Marxism and Deconstruction". *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Autumn, 1981), p. 482.

73 Characterisations of 'best practices' for deconstruction manifest this concern with the rightness of one's methods. Whether offered by its defenders and proponents or by its detractors, these characterisations often descend into a kind of high theoretical name-calling wherein one party defines the other according to their ability (or not) to understand or perform a certain method or tactic, as well as in terms of the perceived usefulness or pragmatics of that tactic. The idea seems to be that the more another's reading adheres to one's own image of how deconstruction works, the more 'correct' it is. No surprise; this is, after all, a fairly standard way of evaluating information. But if we can find in deconstruction the possibility for another way of being with information than evaluating it, then this demands of us to find a likewise different way of behaving when we encounter approaches that seem different—even orthogonal—to our own.

74 Welck, René. "The New Criticism: Pro and Contra". *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (Summer, 1978), p. 621.

75 Johnson, Barbara. "Nothing Fails Like Success". *SCE Reports* 8 (Fall 1980), 11.

another place where deconstruction is taken to task—though not for its potential threat to a practice of literary analysis. This place is in feminist criticism and theory. However, as I will briefly show, this taking-to-task is not an attack so much as a reminder to deconstruction itself that both identity and the dissolution of identity are involved in deconstructive moves—and in feminism. The question of the relationship between deconstruction and feminism is especially apposite in light of this reminder: both entities are defined for convenience methodologically or ontically, but *are* in their (individual) practice. Nevertheless, the relationship has not always been a fond or uncomplicated one, and feminist readings are part of the larger body of criticisms of deconstruction.

What is the space in deconstruction, or even in the debates around it, for women and others writing in terms of identity politics; that is, writing theory that is based in part on the assumption that 'woman' is a discrete category?⁷⁶ Feminist perspectives on deconstruction are in part about the work of puzzling out whether or not one needs an a priori ground from which to reason; however, these are not intellectual games—questions about the being of women are questions that have real effects in the world. As Laura Lee Downs asks in the title of her article, "If 'Woman' is just an Empty Category, Then Why am I Afraid to Walk Alone at Night?"⁷⁷ The supposed 'emptiness' of absolute categories is no consolation when a woman is cat-called, groped, or harassed; denied control of her reproductive functions; refused education or compensation for her work. In other words, in order for political action to be taken, this action requires a ground from which to operate. In the case of feminism, this 'ground' is the identity 'woman' (or 'female'). On the other hand, of course, it is the essentialised category 'woman' from which spring arguments about 'women's places', underwriting the very oppression which feminism addresses; an "emphasis on female difference comes disturbingly to echo the very patriarchal prejudices against which the champions of women's equality are struggling".⁷⁸

The relationship between feminist criticism and deconstruction is complicated; Derrida himself said,

76 Because this dissertation stakes itself in part on a rereading and realignment of deconstruction in terms of *écriture féminine*, I will only deal with feminist criticism's relationship to deconstruction. There is much more that could be said about all kinds of identity-based theory (queer theory, for example) in relation to deconstruction, but this is work that will in this instance fall outside of the dissertation.

77 Downs, Laura Lee. "If 'Woman' is just an Empty Category, Then Why am I Afraid to Walk Alone at Night?: Identity Politics Meets the Postmodern Subject". *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Apr. 1993), pp. 414-437. This citation, p. 414.

78 Moi, Toril. "Feminism, Postmodernism, and Style: Recent Feminist Criticism in the United States". *Cultural Critique*, No. 9 (Spring, 1988), pp. 3-22. This citation, p. 6.

"I am not against feminism, but I am not simply for feminism."⁷⁹ But Moi takes his statement to task, denying the real possibility of being 'simply for' feminism at all. Both feminism and deconstruction, though ideas which have intellectual being, are *also faced with* the "complexities of the real, empirical world".⁸⁰ One of those complexities is the embodied fact of women's bodies and the relation between those bodies and a systemic oppression of them. In order to address what is specific to the oppression of women—to address that what is oppressed is "not *otherness*, but specific, historically constructed agents", that "Women under patriarchy are oppressed because they are women",⁸¹ Moi argues that a certain kind of closure must be *deliberately* imposed on the feminist text. This 'closure' is the situation of "deconstructive gestures in specific political contexts"⁸² such as feminism. It is this gesture of closure—the acknowledgement or even willing imposition of limits—which actually enacts a deconstructive turn: "awareness of our own limitations and the necessity of certain limits for our discourse recalls a properly analytical [...] stance, not simply a re-enactment of metaphysical authority".⁸³ In other words, to begin by acknowledging the points of closure in one's work does not preclude, and in fact can assist, one's writing's participation in deconstruction. To acknowledge sites of closure is, paradoxically, to open the text to further readings, and to assert incompleteness. Because there is no single feminism, however, these sites of closure take different forms, and what is foreclosed by the political necessity of writing as a woman is unpredictable. In the writing of Gayatri Spivak, Moi writes, "high theory' is impudently interrupted by apparently unrelated personal and pedagogical anecdotes"⁸⁴ with Moi's analysis of the results varying from the explosion of linear sequentiality and the decentring of the subject to the creation of a text which makes connections "so elusive as to become private".⁸⁵ The sites of closure that Moi identifies are represented by the word 'etc.' in Judith Butler's examination of the failure of theories of feminist identity: these theories "elaborate predicates of color, sexuality, ethnicity, class and able-bodiedness" and "invariably close with an embarrassed 'etc.' at the end of the list".⁸⁶ 'Etc.' is the indication of the impossibility of completely describing or including the situated subject; it is the failure or limit of inclusion. However, Butler sees in this word the possibility of the "illimitable process of signification itself"; using Derrida's word, she calls it "the *supplément*, the excess that necessarily accompanies any effort to

79 Jacques Derrida, in conversation with Geoff Bennington, "On Colleges and Philosophy," in *ICADocuments 4 und 5*, ed. Lisa Appignanesi (London: ICA, 1985), 71.

80 Moi, 18.

81 Moi, 12.

82 Moi, 18.

83 Moi, 18.

84 Moi, 21.

85 Moi, 21.

86 Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 143.

posit identity once and for all".⁸⁷ The limitations of feminism—the problems of relying on an identity which can neither be stable nor central, and the inevitable neglect of individual experience which occurs when systems of description arise—reflect the concerns of deconstruction. After all, even to deconstruct something, one must begin by acknowledging it, defining it. And in Moi's words, "Definitions may well be constraining: they are also enabling [...] .To name is to exercise power. The notion that closure, or conceptually rigorous definitions, is merely constraining is a fashionable dogma of poststructuralism: such a simplistic view is not only utterly undialectical, but also a travesty of the thought of Jacques Derrida himself".⁸⁸ A feminism which did not begin with an essentialising move might neglect the specific, embodied situation of women as subjects; one which limited itself to such an essentialism, however, would run the risk of perpetuating the oppression it set out to confront. Acknowledging points of closure (of identity, of essentialism) allows the feminist writer to enact the deconstructive gesture which points to the identity it overturns as false, and admits its simultaneous meaningfulness.

H. Culler's deconstruction

Setting aside the possibility or even the appropriateness of such a task, it is not only the detractors of deconstruction who tend to place it in the box marked 'critical methods'. And so placing it indicates no failure other than that of the imagination, which clings to the models already built for it, whether by positivist science, by the history of philosophy, by linguistics, by Structuralism, or by literary theory. But perhaps before a new container can even be imagined, we need to exhaust the possibilities for placing what we study into the categories we already have. This is the role of work like Jonathan Culler's *On Deconstruction*, which will be the centre of this section's questioning. *On Deconstruction* attempts an understanding of deconstruction which, if not conclusive or exhaustive, might at least "describe the logic according to which meanings are engendered"⁸⁹ by the processes and attitudes which by the time of Culler's writing had become known as deconstruction (in this case referring pretty much directly to Derrida's writing and that of a few other post-structuralists). In other words (again Barthes'), what Culler is building is "a science of the *conditions* of content".⁹⁰ In the first section of the book, Culler historicises the emergence of deconstruction and places it in terms of its

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Moi, 9.

⁸⁹ Barthes, Roland. *Criticism and Truth* (*Critique et vérité*), p. 63, quoted in Culler, Jonathan. *On Deconstruction*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 1982, p. 32.

⁹⁰ Barthes, Roland. *Criticism & Truth*, trans. and ed. K. Keuneman. (London: The Athlone Press, 1987), p. 73.

various adoptions, adaptations, and affiliations, relating it to Structuralism, feminist theory, and reader-response criticism. He does this for the most part without making a direct connection between the explications of, for instance, feminist theory (which he designates 'reading as a woman', underlining my point above regarding the simultaneous 'double belief' in and deconstruction of identity) and deconstruction; in a way, these early sections act as predictive case-studies, demonstrating deconstructive possibilities at work, for instance in the way that feminist readings confront "male readings with the elements of the texts they neglect",⁹¹ thereby inverting the hierarchies male readings put in place in those texts and calling those elements into question. These first sections prepare the reader not only by demonstrating how and in what contexts deconstruction might be at work, but also by providing a historical gloss to the period during which 'deconstruction' emerged as a term naming the practices which Culler identifies throughout *On Deconstruction*. These 'stories of reading'—reading as a woman, reading as a New Critic, reading as a structuralist, reading as a post-structuralist, reading as a responsive reader—are confronted by deconstruction, which "explores the problematic situation to which stories of reading have led us".⁹² In other words, deconstruction is what allows us to see the ways in which stories of reading are only *part* of the story of reading, the whole story (if perhaps unattainable or inexpressible) being that which contains all its own contradictions rather than suppressing or denying them.

Culler also attempts to describe the conditions out of which Derrida's writing arises, situating it in terms of Saussure's work as well as Austin's, in addition to in terms of the history of philosophy. While a historical understanding of context is important and helps to shape one's impression of deconstruction and how it might appear in contrast to other ways of engaging with texts, such an understanding is both reductionist and impossible—or at least contradictory to deconstruction's inversions of causality and origin, identified by Culler in the second chapter of his book ("Writing and Logocentrism"). A historical understanding of deconstruction reduces it to a product of such-and-such a time or set of conditions, which then might be (or must be) replicated in order to 'replicate' deconstruction itself. If deconstruction is an attitude that allows for inversion and contradiction, then a historical understanding of deconstruction in some way goes against this grain, by forcing a progress and a direction. Deconstruction may have appeared, in a literally chronological understanding of things, after semiotics, for instance. But seeing semiotics as a precedent for deconstruction only sees a genealogy without further trying to determine "what this history has been

91 Culler, 55.

92 Culler, 83.

able to dissimulate or forbid".⁹³

In keeping with this attitude, Culler begins his explanation of *what* deconstruction is by noting that it, too, is engaged in the flux between the story and the reading of the story; deconstruction is "variously presented as a philosophical position, a political or intellectual strategy, and a mode of reading."⁹⁴ Note that in Culler's reading of others' readings of deconstruction, deconstruction is both the thing which can *be read* (i.e., a philosophical position) and the *way of reading* (a strategy, a mode). Thus, implicit in his initial definitions of what deconstruction is or how it can be is an acknowledgement of deconstruction's own tendency to cross the boundary or to exist on both sides of it—calling the meaning of a line between reading and being-read into question. A philosophical position is also something that can be taken and from which a mode of or strategy for reading can develop, so inherent in Culler's description is also a possible notion of cause and effect which is, by Culler's later examination of the properties of 'cause' and 'effect' itself, open to deconstruction—that is, to the inversion of understandings, such that the philosophical position emerges as an effect of reading, for example. Culler refines and revises—corrects—the readings of deconstruction as philosophical position/mode of reading by proposing deconstruction be understood instead (or as well) as "a strategy within philosophy and a strategy for dealing with philosophy" which "aspires to be both rigorous argument within philosophy and displacement of philosophical categories or philosophical attempts at mastery".⁹⁵

Perhaps the most important word in this description is the small preposition 'within', because it is the quality of the 'within' that signals deconstruction's relation to texts it deconstructs. Deconstruction is not a force which applies itself *to* texts *from* outside of them; it is the principle at work *within* texts which dislodges the hierarchies in them and which, in overturning these hierarchies, (re)introduces, makes visible again, an undecidable term which "can no longer be included within philosophical (binary) opposition".⁹⁶ Culler sees that deconstruction "works within the terms of the system but in order to breach it" and that "to deconstruct a discourse is to show how it undermines the philosophy it asserts".⁹⁷ By Derrida's admission, the "classical philosophical opposition" is not "the peaceful coexistence of *vis-à-vis*, but rather [...] a violent hierarchy" which requires the overturning of that

⁹³ Derrida 1987a: 6.

⁹⁴ Culler, 85.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Derrida 1987a: 43.

⁹⁷ Culler, 86.

hierarchy.⁹⁸ Despite Derrida's figuration of the violent hierarchy and despite the relatively aggressive phrasing Culler uses ('breach', 'undermine'), Culler's assertion that "deconstruction appeals to no higher logical principle or superior reason but uses the very principle it deconstructs"⁹⁹ offers an understanding of deconstruction which from its first principles—and not necessarily by violence, but even by something which we could understand as passive or non-violent resistance—slips out from the rigid up-down structure of a hierarchy and into another kind of relation. We might figure this other relation as mutually concentric, a relation in which each term both contains the other and is contained by it. In any case, deconstruction coming from *within* that which 'is deconstructed' means that deconstruction is an interior function, a *sympathetic* one, even, in that it produces an effect similar to others also arising from and in the text. Deconstruction is not an attack; instead, it is a resistance to a system (the system of phallogocentrism or of the metaphysics of presence within which Western thought has been formed) that is violent by its insistence on one term's placement over another, violent in its insistence that a space might only ever *be* occupied by a single term.

Culler sums up the 'origins' of deconstruction in Derrida's writings, pointing out the instances of Derrida's discussion of what are now major deconstructive tropes—différance, supplement, meaning, presence, logocentrism, writing/speech, iterability, grafting/intervention. In so doing, whether or not his intention was to avoid it, Culler creates something of a guidebook to deconstruction, which by the nature of the limitations of a book's physical structure (linear; a set number of pages; one-directional reading¹⁰⁰) is forced to behave as though deconstruction were a set of strategies so *containable*. That is, in setting out to talk about deconstruction, what Culler is able to do is talk *around* it, neglecting or unable (a fault of the book form or of the possibilities of writing/language?) to confront the possibility that deconstruction is an attitude or way of being whose traces are visible but whose scheme is not. That is, that deconstruction may not be able to be talked about in terms we already use; that it may not be able to be outlined or replicated—that, despite similarities, each iteration of what has come to be called deconstruction or a deconstructive practice is different and

98 Derrida 1987a: 43.

99 Culler, 87.

100 For the most part; see David Foster Wallace's essay "Host" in *Consider the Lobster* (London: Abacus, 2007) for an example of non-linear reading. But we still read left to right across the page, or across the word. We do not experience a dimensionality of writing. It is not, for instance, sculptural. See Jonathan Safran Foer's *Tree of Codes* (London: Visual Editions, 2010) for a further counter-example, especially in terms of reading in three dimensions. Of course, there is another medium in which reading routinely becomes, at least to some extent, three-dimensional, and that is hypertext. Although we are still confined to read from left to right (or right to left, etc., depending on the language being used), the way that links and other texts interrupt the 'main' or 'original' text suggests hypertext as a model of deconstruction—the disruption is inherent to the text, not imposed, and this inherence resists a structure of text (writing or reading, in English or other L-R, top-down written forms of language, in this case) which adheres exclusively to a left-right, top-bottom program.

gains its very meaning by that difference; and that deconstruction can probably not be caught in any meaningful (or at least exclusive) way between the pages of this or any book. Deconstruction, then, is the relation between the theory and the practice, theory being what is public, set down, spoken, and momentarily fixed; practice being what is private, enacted, fleeting. This makes Culler's book—and every other text 'on deconstruction', including this dissertation—a cautionary tale, since each reading is incomplete and open to amendment, criticism. The warning is ontological, built in to the attempt to talk about what deconstruction is, how it works, what its effects have been; "no reading can escape correction [...] this account of misreading is not, perhaps, a coherent, consistent position, but its advocates would claim, it resists metaphysical idealizations [sic] and captures the temporal dynamic of our interpretive situation".¹⁰¹ By Culler's own admission the things his book might caution against (in its failures) are unavoidable since all readings are misreadings, all representations are incomplete and failure is a built-in part of beginning to write. In this way, the warning is not a *thou-shalt-not* but a *thou-wilt*. He recognises that his "own misreading of Derrida may in some contexts pass as sufficient understanding, but it will also be attacked as a misreading".¹⁰²

There is a problem with the word 'attack' used here, and that problem is the omission of a kind of scholarly compassion for others whose readings do not, in one's opinion, go far enough, dare enough, risk enough, or find the 'right' conclusions. A judgment is not an attack (necessarily). It is an engagement with the project the writer puts forth. And so, when Culler writes that "historical narratives are produced by interpreting the supposedly less complex and ambiguous texts of a period", and defines these narratives as "stories of changes in thinking and of the thoughts and beliefs appropriate to distinguishable historical periods",¹⁰³ although he is not arguing for an understanding of history (or narrative) that is "invoked as ultimate reality and source of truth",¹⁰⁴ he nevertheless builds a historical narrative of what he calls deconstruction (mainly the writings of Derrida) and of its surrounding texts, both complementary and critical. One effect of this narrative-construction is that despite Culler's sympathy to the project of deconstruction (and its refusal to "[define] meaning in order to tell you how to find it"¹⁰⁵), his method of talking about it inadvertently fixes deconstruction. Why this might be the case—questions of the performative aspects of Culler's writing; his Anglophone style versus a francophone style; his historical position writing at the

¹⁰¹ Culler, 178.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Culler 129.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. He also notes, on p. 130, that history has no special privilege as part of "the general text, which has no boundaries".

¹⁰⁵ Culler 131.

beginning of deconstruction's appearance in the U.S.—would provide the backbone for a whole chapter, which this dissertation's scope does not encompass. What does, however, fall within the remit of this dissertation is the question of method in terms of Culler's approach to deconstruction. This dissertation's critique of Culler here has taken into account Culler's own side note that “the edifying philosopher necessarily writes hybrid texts”;¹⁰⁶ I recognise that in part Culler's project in *On Deconstruction* is a demystification of 'deconstruction' and that this is undertaken out of a respect for Derrida's work evidenced by Culler's familiarity with his texts in the original and in the translation. I also recognise that this project requires Culler to create a text which both plays by old rules—about how literary theory operates and what it is—as well as models new ones. I argue that in fact his text does too little of the latter, and that his reliance on tropes of method and procedure is in part to blame for this.

Call to mind Derrida's assertion, quoted in full in Section C of this chapter, that deconstruction is not “a specialized set of discursive procedures, still less the rules of a new hermeneutic method”.¹⁰⁷ Why does Culler, in light of this assertion, still argue things like “deconstruction leads not to a brave new world in which unity never figures but to the identification of unity as a problematic figure”?¹⁰⁸ The problem here is not the topic. In fact, the idea at stake—difference—is inarguably central to much of what calls itself or has been called 'deconstruction'. But how Culler writes here—using the verb 'leads', for example, which gives the feeling of progress and contiguity—takes the form of a prescription. This exemplifies Culler's difficult position, which is in part a consequence of his historical context. *On Deconstruction* had to discuss or clarify what 'deconstruction' was 'about', how it 'worked' because that operation was emblematic of (Anglophone—American) literary criticism and academic writing in the humanities. Culler is using the language that he is expected to use, both in order to be understood and in order to gain credence (for himself and his subject). His audience, who were not only non-practitioners of deconstruction, but also others interested in or practicing it, were to some extent hostile.¹⁰⁹ Culler is writing into a time and place where the ideas he explains are both threatening to the general order and vulnerable to “attack and misunderstanding”.¹¹⁰

106 Culler, 152 *fn*.

107 Culler, 156.

108 Culler, 182.

109 See Culler, 228, *fn*, for example; also pp. 227-228 for examples of the reception of deconstruction by mainstream/elite media (*Newsweek*, the *New York Times Review of Books*) and by prominent academic critics (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy; Gasché).

110 Culler, 150.

But, because of these constraints or regardless of them, what this means is that despite Culler's dedication to the project of looking at and talking about deconstruction, what he builds is to some extent a prescription for its performance; a removed, descriptive observation of how it works and what it does. At the centre (almost exactly!) of the book is Culler's logical syllogism for deconstruction, a six-step schema of deconstructive reversal.¹¹¹ Statements such as these tell us that deconstruction *does* have procedures; that it is, then, a specific method rather than a way of being-with. *Method* is ingrained in Culler's reading of deconstruction by the idea of deconstruction as something which might be replicated (more faithfully), and in the readings of critics of 'mechanical applications' of deconstruction likewise, by their implied assertion that it has been replicated less faithfully (to its "original radical force",¹¹² for example).

However, at several points in *On Deconstruction*, Culler concentrates on the idea that the "attempt to 'know thyself, whether by a person or a poem, may produce powerful interpretive discourse, but something crucial will remain unknown or unnoticed".¹¹³ (This statement in particular comes from a section on framing and parerga.) The unknown, the unnoticed, or what slips out of view supplements the text (self, poem). In Culler's text, what seems to go unnoticed is the way that, despite his argument via recourse to Derrida's insistence that deconstruction is non-methodical, Culler repeatedly describes, figures, and lays out deconstruction in ways that make it appear to be a method or fold it into an understanding based on method, order, procedure. For instance, besides the examples earlier in this section, at one point Culler differentiates deconstruction from other theoretical practices; deconstruction "makes itself felt not by disturbing critical concepts but by identifying a series of important topics on which critics may then focus in their interpretation of

111 Ibid: summarised here.

(A) demonstrate opposition is an imposition of metaphysics/ideology

1. bring its assumptions and role in metaphysics to the fore via analysis of texts
2. show how this is undone in the texts which rely on it.

(B) simultaneously, maintain this opposition

1. use it in your own argument against it
2. reinstate it via reversal.

In this way, Culler demonstrates that the project of deconstruction is displacement and reinscription rather than deconstruction. Still, his mode of accomplishing this demonstration is to rely on a procedure which, further, he lays out in an orderly fashion, as though it might be followed from step to step each time one wishes to undertake a 'deconstruction'. Seen in tandem with accusations of 'mechanical' applications of deconstruction (228, *fn*), it is difficult not to understand such presentation as contributing to the problem by which deconstruction becomes a method to apply to texts or into which to force them.

112 Culler, 228 *fn*.

113 Culler, 205.

literary works".¹¹⁴ The list he makes, which includes speech/writing, presence/absence, origin, marginality, representation, and indeterminacy, is written with serial commas and no final conjunction, demonstrating rhetorically that the set is not closed. But there are two objections to raise here. First, that such a list of topics undoubtedly *does* disturb critical concepts because the topics are not merely objects of study but also ways *of* studying, lenses through which to see history, literature, art, etc. Second, and this is the greater objection: Culler's phrasing pretends to—or actually maintains—an ignorance of the way that deconstruction understood as an attitude rather than a method is not limited to a treatment of one set of 'important topics' but can become a way of dealing with the world in its encountered materiality and textuality.

Yes, no one would question that there are major ideas in Derrida's work (which is not the sum total of deconstruction, but that is another matter): writing and speech. The name. The signature. The gift. Truth. The archive, inheritance, genealogy. But these, or even the full bibliography marked *D* for *Derrida* or *deconstruction* could not spell the limits of what deconstruction ought to or could be. This is why Derrida's writing (for instance) can engage with everything from Freud's pleasure principle to postcards to the Joycean 'yes' to e-mail to the secret. Not because these concepts are innately bound to deconstruction, but because if there *is* an 'innate' quality of deconstruction it is its propensity to touch everything. Availability to everything. Taking ideas from Derrida's work and saying 'These are the topics' narrows the field in such a way as to make it thinkable that a single method could be applied to it, much as in a particular kind of laboratory (with certain equipment and a specific question to answer) only specific procedures will be undertaken.

Culler is doing something useful and probably necessary: constructing a map or a geography of the theoretical terrain he occupies. At no point does he state his explicit intention for this work to be a deconstructive work itself, and his style and form likewise do not demonstrate such an intention. Therefore, perhaps understanding the work of *On Deconstruction* as that of a guidebook in a foreign city would be a fitting trope. However, this still leaves us with the problem of deconstruction if it is understood as not only unmappable but something to which the fitting of maps is inappropriate. Culler is an advocate for deconstruction. But in his advocacy, he misplaces an attention to the potential that deconstruction holds when it is seen outside the matrix of method, and, in writing deconstruction into that matrix, he contributes to an understanding of deconstruction as

114 Culler, 206.

instrumental and end-oriented which does not acknowledge the possibilities it provides for interaction based on approach rather than application.

I. Another possibility for deconstruction

The final section of this chapter will focus on a short excerpt from an interview with Derrida that was conducted by Nikhil Padgaonkar in 1997. Padgaonkar asks Derrida to explain “the view that deconstruction is not an inherently negative term, that it is not to be understood as criticism or destruction”.¹¹⁵ Padgaonkar cites a previous interview (1982), which had also been published in *Le Monde*, wherein Derrida had said that “deconstruction is always accompanied by love”,¹¹⁶ and asks about the love in deconstruction; specifically, he asks whether that love is “*philia*”. I will begin by quoting Derrida's reply in full. A reading of this reply will comprise the rest of this section.

This love means an affirmative desire towards the Other—to respect the Other, to pay attention to the Other, not to destroy the otherness of the Other—and this is the preliminary affirmation, even if afterwards because of this love, you ask questions. There is some negativity in deconstruction. I wouldn't deny this. You have to criticise, to ask questions, to challenge and sometimes to oppose. What I have said is that in the final instance, deconstruction is not negative although negativity is no doubt at work. Now, in order to criticise, to negate, to deny, you have first to say “yes”. When you address the Other, even if it is to oppose the Other, you make a sort of promise—that is, to address the Other as Other, not to reduce the otherness of the Other, and to take into account the singularity of the Other. That's an irreducible affirmation, it's the original ethics if you want. So from that point of view, there is an ethics of deconstruction. Not in the usual sense, but there is an affirmation. You know, I often use a quote from Rosensweig or even from Lévinas which says that the “yes” is not a word like others, that even if you do not pronounce the word, there is a “yes” implicit in every language, even if you multiply the “no”, there is a “yes”. And this is even the case with Heidegger. You know Heidegger, for a long time, for years and years kept saying that thinking started with questioning, that questioning (*fragen*) is the dignity of thinking. And then one day, without contradicting this statement, he said “yes, but there is something even more originary than questioning, than this piety of thinking,” and it is what he called *zusage* which means to acquiesce, to accept, to say “yes”, to affirm. So this *zusage* is not only prior to questioning, but it is supposed by any questioning. To ask a question, you must first tell the Other that I am speaking to you. Even to oppose or challenge the Other, you must say “at least I speak to you”, “I say yes to our being in common together”. So this is what I meant by love, this reaffirmation of the affirmation.

¹¹⁵ Derrida, Interview (1997).

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

The affirmation in question here is the affirmation of being-together. The project of deconstruction cannot even begin without the affirmation that the other is an other and that each other *sees* the other and affirms the otherness of the other, because without an other there is nothing to 'deconstruct', i.e. nothing with which to engage in relation. The love in deconstruction is the 'affirmative desire' towards the other, which is at least the affirmation that the other is there and cannot be assimilated. Before any of the negative functions of deconstruction can be performed; before criticism, questioning, negation, destruction, challenge, the one who deconstructs must already have said 'yes' to the other. Even being able to pose a question to the other is already to have acknowledged that absolute otherness, the boundary or frontier that in its unapproachability affirms its continued otherness. Such acknowledgement is the respect Derrida calls for: a way of paying attention to the other. Derrida sets out three qualifications of this affirmative desire: respect, attention, and non-destruction, all three of which echo the premise that in order for deconstruction to take place, the other's presence is required. Respect tends to the boundaries between self and other and judges the kinds of transversals that are appropriate. Attention is a living-with the other. Non-destruction means that the other's remaining other, which precipitates everything, is ensured: the other can neither be smashed, nor assimilated, if relation is to occur. Like Mitchell, Derrida, in insisting on the affirmation of the otherness of the other, is calling for a delicate and resonant critical approach, one that requires *two* bodies.

Affirmation, then, is primary; it is "even more originary than questioning". Affirmation is, in fact, the place from which questioning can begin and which is almost invisible in its priority. The yes to the other takes the "form of a promise or an agreement or an oath",¹¹⁷ wherein "the 'yes' must be absolutely inaugural [...]. Inauguration is a 'yes'. I say 'yes' as a starting point. Nothing precedes the 'yes'. The 'yes' is the moment of institution, of the origin; it is absolutely originary".¹¹⁸ The form of the yes as a promise means that it is bound by the relation it forms to reiterate itself, a reiteration which is a continual reinvention and renewal of relation, not merely its replication. The yes-affirmation of the other is a choice to be made over and over; it is not made once and then inescapably in place. Yes is the place from which relation begins: it is inaugural, an inauguration itself, a starting point, unprecedented, the 'moment of institution', origin itself, originary. The link between 'yes' and something irreducible for Derrida is clear. Although deconstruction as an approach cannot be

117 Derrida, Jacques, from "Ulysses Gramophone: Hear-Say Yes in Joyce", quoted in Caputo, John. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: Conversations with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham U. Press, 1996), p. 27.

118 Ibid.

systematised, it can be said to have founding principles. The attitude of an approach that has yes as its inaugural moment must also be a yes; that is, must be open to the other and to the unknown. The 'yes' institutes relation, without which deconstruction cannot occur. Therefore, yes, and specifically the yes of the promise to be in relation, is the first principle of deconstruction, whatever else follows.

Yes is the promise which assures the otherness of the Other, acting not only as its guarantee in the moment of the yes, but as the "yes, yes"¹¹⁹ which commits the speaker to confirming his or her commitment (the yes) "in the next second, and then tomorrow, and then the day after tomorrow" and "implies memory in that promise".¹²⁰ 'Yes' is not only originary but contains within itself the promise of its own iteration—of continued resonance with the Other, who is *irreducibly* other. The irreducibility of the other ensures that relation is on-going and that the 'yes' of affirmation will likewise be a promise that must be made and remade, "reinvented every day".¹²¹ Relation reinventing itself with each moment means that "every speech act is fundamentally a promise",¹²² as even the act of addressing the other first requires the affirmative desire—the recognition of other-as-other to whom one can speak—which is itself a promise.

The 'yes' of the interview and section of "Ulysses Gramophone" quoted above is the yes of a promise that has always already been made; it precedes relation without itself being precedable. Yes is the promise, the attitude, that makes relation possible, because inherent in the yes is the acknowledgement that the other is in fact other (infinitely so) and therefore *is* for relation. The other and the self in deconstruction cannot be described in terms of what they are (because the principle of affirmation of otherness affirms no less than the unknowable in the other and therefore in the self to whom the other also relates). Instead, they must be thought in terms of *how* they are. Their 'how' is the how of turning towards one another and of opening. The one says yes to the other, to the possibility of relation with the other. The ontology of the other in deconstruction is a quality of being open to relation. The ontology of the self is likewise. The "irreducible affirmation"¹²³ in deconstruction is this being-open. It is irreducible because in terms of deconstruction-as-relation, there can be nothing beyond it. Without the other, there is no relation, therefore no deconstruction of that relation. With the other, all being is being-together, and therefore requires the

119 Caputo, 27.

120 Ibid.

121 Caputo, 28.

122 Caputo, 23.

123 Derrida, Interview (1997).

acknowledgement of the other as an other, a non-assimilated other, which is this affirmation from which relation begins.

From this affirmation of the other, Derrida suggests the existence of “an ethics of deconstruction”. The ethics of deconstruction, then, are based on the continual reaffirmation of the affirmation (the other is an other) and on the primary value of this affirmation even in the event of criticism, negation, etc. The ethics of deconstruction, then, is a foundationally relational ethics, one that values relation and one that, without relation, would not exist. This relation is what Derrida refers to as love. What would a textual relation with the other based on love—based on the affirmation of the other as other being that which permits relation in the first place—look like? Derrida’s work, and the work of deconstruction in general is often seen as a practice which breaks things apart, a method to be applied as rigidly to texts as any other (invert binary; introduce third term; ta-daa!). But this is in part because the models that exist for looking at texts have anticipated a method that can be broken into steps and then replicated; a method that acts upon, rather than with, the things it finds. But it is also possible to read in Derrida’s writing, as well as within that of other theorists, philosophers, and writers of the last forty years, a pursuit of relation in and to texts that seeks *not* to impose a method upon them but to be with them. If we avoid reading deconstruction as a method or something to be applied to texts, then we have an opportunity to discover other ways of seeing it and other possibilities for it. One of those surely must come from deconstruction’s relation to philosophy, to the root of philosophy, which is *philia*—that is to say, its relation to love.

No matter how we proceed after that initial (and continually reaffirmed) yes, it would seem from Derrida’s own insistence on it that there is a “positive side of deconstruction which does not consist in merely inverting a binarism but in suggesting how the inconsistency in question can be inscribed in another...system”.¹²⁴ This positive side is the absolute ethical stance of the yes that recognises the other a priori to any inversion, criticism, or negation that might follow. And so the responsibility of deconstruction, regardless of difficulty, is to realise that the “infinite(-ly other) cannot be an object because it is speech, the origin of meaning and the world”,¹²⁵ to avoid a rhetoric which could “amount to the violence of theory, which *reduces* the other”.¹²⁶ It is on the basis of this responsibility

124 Hadreas, Peter. “Deconstruction and the Meaning of Music”. *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Summer, 1999), pp. 5-28. This citation, p. 12.

125 Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. (Routledge: London. 1995), p. 106.

126 Ibid, emphasis in original.

that deconstruction can proceed as an attitude and a way of being with the other, even the textual other.

Other texts, other voices

A. Introduction

In Chapter 1 of this dissertation, tensions between positivist science and poetry, between philosophy and love, were laid out. But the suggestion that there are tensions—that for example philosophy must to some extent repress the *philia* that makes up half its name—does not mean that the schism between love and wisdom is so great that no one traverses it. In Chapter 3, a re-reading of deconstruction as a potentially loving approach to the other was offered; such an approach is one means by which a bridge between the tradition of critique and a new reason “completely different from the logic overseeing the management and arrangement of objects”¹ might be constructed. This chapter offers texts that, along with the readings of Derrida presented in Chapter 3, demonstrate the precedent that exists for a loving approach in philosophy. This chapter will show that the potential for such an approach is latent in the literature, waiting to be constellated into new ways of moving with love toward texts. This will prepare the field for Chapter 5, which presents an authorial approach to texts whose performative and philosophical qualities supports and develops a loving readerly approach to texts. If it is of any use, a model for thinking about these three theory chapters (though not proposed within the chapters themselves) is as concentric circles, where meaning spirals or radiates, rather than traveling in a single direction.

B. Lévinas to Brennan: the body's knowing

Despite the problem of origins, it can be said that Derrida's approach to the other as other, as well as his understanding of love as a 'yes' have roots in the writings of Emmanuel Lévinas. To Lévinas and his writings Derrida owes some of his considerations of Jewishness, of ethics, of the other, and especially of the other in relation to justice. From Lévinas also comes Derrida's idea that “that the 'yes' is not a word like others, that even if you do not pronounce the word, there is a 'yes' implicit in every language, even if you multiply the 'no,' there is a yes”.² In the same response where he formulates an approach to the other which begins with the responsibility one has to acknowledge the other as other and to respect that otherness, Derrida also acknowledges his debt to Lévinas as regards his ability to have formed such an approach. For that reason, this chapter begins with a consideration of love and the other in the works of Lévinas.

¹ Marion, 2002: x.

² Derrida, Interview (1997).

How can we understand love? If we understand it as relation with the other via *eros*, asks Lévinas, can this relationship “be characterized as a failure”?³ Lévinas goes on to answer his own question in the affirmative, saying “the answer is yes, if one adopts the terminology of current descriptions, if one wants to characterise the erotic by ‘grasping’ ‘possessing’ or ‘knowing’”.⁴ But this affirmation is sly, because Lévinas tells us that the answer is yes—that the relationship of love is a failure—only if we characterise it via the relations we are already familiar with; that is, the love relationship or a relation through love fails if we try to enact it via other relations already in our repertoire. These relations are “grasping”, “possessing”, “knowing”.

What does it mean, then, that a relationship to an other via love—not just *eros*, but any love—cannot succeed in familiar channels; not by grasping, possessing or knowing? First of all, it means that the relationship to the other cannot take place in terms that are foregone conclusions. Lévinas describes these terms as “current” descriptions, giving the sense that, for one, these descriptions change, are current (or not); and that, for another, they are shared, in common use. To be in common use, a term must be generalised, at least enough to have meaning within a community. Therefore, the terms we use for love cannot be general or communal; they must be specific.

Not only must these terms be specific—tailored, made by hand, to fit the needs of each situation and each other—they must be invented and then reinvented (Derrida: So this is what I meant by love, the reaffirmation of the affirmation)⁵; the relation will fail if the words spoken or the actions made or the approaches undertaken are those which grasp and know. The words that Lévinas chooses to exemplify the failure of the love relation have to do with fixing the other, anticipating them. In a relation typified by grasping, by knowing, the other is always presumed; always, then, somehow assimilated to the self by this knowing-of-the-other. Grasping is the process of going after the other, trying to hold onto them. Even here the slipperiness of alterity is implied; grasping, while it can connote attainment, also refers to the attempt to catch something that eludes one.

Successful, accomplished love, then, is not “‘grasping,’ ‘possessing,’ or ‘knowing’”, but something else; it is, again in Lévinas’ words, the relationship with the Other as “the absence of the Other [...] in a

3 Lévinas, Emmanuel. *The Lévinas Reader*. Ed. S. Hand. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993, p. 51.

4 Ibid.

5 Derrida, Interview (1997).

horizon of the future".⁶ In love, the other, rather than being known in their totality, is continually receding; there is always more to find out (or not find out). And Lévinas traces the distinction between knowing and loving to Heidegger, for whom, he writes, "to relate to beings *qua* beings means to let beings be, to understand them as independent of the perception that discovers and grasps them".⁷ The state of *being* independent of an exterior perception seems to me to be what Lévinas refers to when he talks about the 'absence' of the Other. Lévinas' separation of the grasping of knowledge from a love of a continually unknowable Other culminates in responsibility to that Other (to "let beings be"), which he also states directly as "charity and love".⁸ So with Lévinas we can arrive at a consideration of what love is not (it is not knowledge, it is not possession) and what it is (responsibility to the other).

The question of *how* love is remains, however, and Levine's identification of love as "worn-out and debased"⁹ in part provides an answer—or at least a direction. In Chapter 2, this dissertation discusses the idea of franciscanism as it relates to the erotics of the text as a "mandate of poverty [which] creates a space in its practitioners [...] for objects, meanings, and ways of being to transverse, while acknowledging in its very stance their evanescent nature" and which "means nothing *is*, originally, and so nothing can be assumed—and there is possibility for anything".¹⁰ In a franciscan poverty, what is possible begins exactly *in* what is "worn-out and debased".¹¹ Discarded by the communion of current description, love is hardly worth a public and general attention—it is worn-out and now cliché, debased by *too* general a use in the past. So discarded, debased, and worn out, love becomes filled with the potential of continuous poverty in the franciscan sense, which refuses to limit the possibilities for love.

Lévinas calling love worn-out makes its own kind of sense. Not only, as above, does love's debasement free it for unprescribed work within un-prescribed stories, Lévinas *also* identifies it as "originary".¹² Originary, and therefore long in use, providing the sense of being 'worn-out'; if love is worn-out, then its tatters mean that it works long hours establishing places for others. Of what, then,

6 Lévinas, 51.

7 Lévinas, 1998: 6.

8 *Ibid*, 204.

9 *Ibid*, 103. He also calls it "worn-out and ambiguous" (108). Ambiguous—having more than one interpretation.

10 How would I cite this? *Would* I even cite this?

11 For example, a cow's manger in a stable in Roman-era Judea, rather than, say, a palace of the same place and time, or a high-tech hospital in Manhattan in the late 20th century. Whether or not the story is believable, it *begins* in that place because no narrative was configured for such a birth—except the prophetic one, the aim of which is to break with ordained narratives.

12 Lévinas, 1998: 108.

is love the origin? “Justice comes from love”,¹³ he writes. Justice, the quality of being reasonable—of paying a living attention¹⁴ to the other—is what establishes the worth of human life. It is the expression of the value of other humans in a world where the “only absolute value is the human possibility of giving the other priority over oneself”.¹⁵ Love is “the first value, which is that small amount of humanity by virtue of which alone the creation deserves to continue”,¹⁶ not a concern exclusive to theology, to poetry, or to private affairs. When Lévinas writes that “besides curiosity, knowledge of the other also demands sympathy or love, ways of being that are different from impassive contemplation”,¹⁷ what he does is to set up love as an attitude of philosophy—a way of being adopted in order to know about the world. Love, the attitude from which a just consideration of the other comes, is also a point of possible change in the way the other can be approached, and our ways of trying to know the other can be changed.

Love, by its relation to justice (and therefore its relation to the other), is not a process by which worth is evaluated and from which methods of establishing value are instituted. It is instead “the beginning of the intelligible”.¹⁸ Difference is the beginning of intelligibility; love is affirmation of difference. Lévinas again: “The sphere of intelligibility—of the meaningful—in which everyday life as well as the tradition of our philosophic and scientific thought maintains itself, is characterized by vision [...] .Hence the priority of *knowing*”.¹⁹ If vision is linked to knowing (fixing, grasping), then love as a way of knowing the other (or the world) must be enacted by sensory means other than those which have historically been identified with philosophy.

The expression of love in philosophy, or a way of trying to know the other which would concern itself with love first, would be a “a non-thematising wisdom of the flesh, which is art or poetry”.²⁰ Non-thematising because this is the action of love, not to organise but to approach the other. This is a way of knowing which does not enact categories into which to cram all that it encounters; it allows for the encounter with the other as the other because it does not call for the other’s immediate assignation to this or that *kind of* thing. Again, Lévinas is insisting on love as something that resists

13 Ibid.

14 This is Teresa Brennan’s word; see Brennan, pp. 116-117, for example.

15 Lévinas, 1998: 109.

16 Lévinas, 1993: 231.

17 Lévinas, 1998: 5.

18 Lévinas, 1998: 109.

19 Lévinas, 1998: 159.

20 Lévinas, 1998: 183.

the pre-established descriptions into which people, ideas, things, and places fall, insisting instead on the potential of their own definitions and of their difference to that which has already been encountered. He defines this non-thematising wisdom as, firstly, "of the flesh", and secondly, as "art or poetry". The ways of knowing the other, the origin of this wisdom, are not primarily intellectual, but corporeal, originating with the body which feels and makes. Making and loving are linked by the possibility of their refusal to ordain what comes next, and their willingness to go and find out on terms other than their own.

Like Lévinas, Brennan considers love a way of knowing things. She, too, identifies this knowing as having its locus in the body instead of in the intellect alone. Brennan goes further than Lévinas, however, in identifying the problematic relationship between philosophy and the body. She bases her arguments on clinical observation and chemistry, providing evidence in these modes that support her thesis that the separation between the body (affect, hormone, emotion) and mind is a culturally constructed, rather than natural and absolute, one.

Brennan's argument about the extension of emotional knowledge and experience outside of the distinct individual, which she calls the transmission of affect, begins from what is known about the "communicative function" of pheromones, detected "by touch or smell".²¹ Brennan argues against a purely chemical (i.e. pheromone-based) understanding of the transmission of affect, writing that "olfactory [is not] the only means for the transmission of affect",²² citing "body movements and gestures", "rhythmic aspects of behaviour", "prosody" (the rhythms and patterns of speech), and even the transmission of images from the eye to the brain as "an anatomical process, rooted firmly in brain physiology".²³ The experience of affect is not, then, limited to an interior one, but instead is shared. We are linked to others by affect, by 'sympathy and love', by passions; that is, by non-rational modes of interaction.

The problem of knowing with the body in the Western tradition of philosophy is not only that the mind and body have been imagined to be split, of two completely different substances, but also that the body has been imagined as a container, separating its feelings and its parts that feel from other bodies and from the effects of those bodies. Unlike intellectual communion, which has a long

²¹ Brennan, 69.

²² Ibid.

²³ Brennan, 70.

tradition in Western philosophy—beginning with Socrates, even—the transfer and sharing of emotion is hedged by the idea that the “psyche is structured in such a way as to give the person the sense that their affects and feelings are their own, and that they are energetically and emotionally contained in the most literal sense”.²⁴ If the body is distinct and separate, then the things which ‘really’ seem to make us up individually—that is to say, our feelings, rather than our thoughts, which we already know are shared with a long tradition of other thinkers—can be counted on to be likewise separate, and this separation guarantees the identities of ‘subject’ and ‘object’. It also allows the ‘empirical’ study of the one by the other.

This “distinction between subject and object” forms our ways of thinking and gives primacy to sight as way of knowing. The subject/object split is “essential to all received views of knowledge and perception, to Western philosophy, and to the history and practice of science”.²⁵ This distinction is woven into the fabric that makes up the many modes of thought and inquiry that descend from that philosophical tradition, so ingrained as to be almost invisible. And its “emotionally contained subject is a residual bastion of Eurocentrism in critical thinking, the last outpost of the subject’s belief in the superiority of its own worldview”.²⁶ By constructing a difference between the subject and the object (the self and the other), the self “divides itself off from the rest of the world”.²⁷ But the divided self does not exist in a vacuum, and what it represses is the relationship it shares not only with the other but with its own other parts. If “repression involves fixing something in place, holding it still, preventing it from coming forward”,²⁸ then what is constrained here is the concept of subjecthood and the relation between the other and the self. So ingrained into ways of knowing, the split between the body and the intellect, the self and the other, seem to be facts; conceiving otherwise is difficult. But the ‘fact’ of this difference is contradicted by “the fact of feeling and the existence of affects”;²⁹ separation arises out of what Brennan calls the ‘foundational fantasy’, by which weaknesses are projected onto others and one’s own fears become others’ faults.³⁰

Brennan makes an argument for “feeling and sensing [...] as methodological tools for studying the

24 Brennan, 25.

25 Brennan, 94.

26 Brennan, 2.

27 Brennan, 93.

28 Brennan, 38.

29 Brennan, 94.

30 For further explanation of this, please see Chapter 1.

object [...] because they constitute a *connection with the object*".³¹ Rather than depending on sight, individualism, and cognition, which are "associated with the subject/object distinction, with thinking in terms of subject and object",³² Brennan argues for a thinking that would take subjectivity into account, one that would rely on "knowledge gleaned precisely by feeling or sensing".³³ By this, Brennan means "studying what one has experienced oneself and valuing it, or valuing the subjective side of one's interactions with the object studied"³⁴ and rejecting the notion that to think or study well the "individual has to be severed from affective connections with the surrounding environment and others in it",³⁵ which is part of "a particular understanding of objectivity [...] based on the notion that the objective is somehow free of affect".³⁶ Brennan's argument is based in the idea that the self is *not* bounded in the way that it has been imagined. Instead of positing a naturally constituted individual "severed from affective connections with the surrounding environment and others in it",³⁷ Brennan writes that "the idea of 'boundaries' [...] is a culturally specific tool",³⁸ and that "the person is *not* affectively contained".³⁹ The affective non-containment of the individual allows for the possibility of knowledge via the body and for a relation not only between thinking and feeling but between the subject and the 'object'. This relationship is also intimated by Derrida in his assertion that deconstruction begins from the point where one says yes to the other.

Neither Brennan nor Lévinas subjugate one thing called 'thought' to another called 'feeling'. Instead, they establish a ground from which feeling can be reconsidered as a way of thinking which offers possibilities for wisdom that other modes of encounter (such as empirical research, observation) do not necessarily provide.⁴⁰ In fact, when he writes that it is *besides* curiosity that we need "sympathy or love, ways of being that are different from impassive contemplation",⁴¹ Lévinas establishes the copresence of both intellect (represented by curiosity) *and* these other ways of being which are not

31 Brennan, 19. My emphasis.

32 Brennan, 19.

33 Brennan, 23.

34 Brennan, 19.

35 Brennan, 19.

36 Brennan, 19.

37 Ibid.

38 Brennan, 25.

39 Brennan, 2.

40 Brennan calls love "living attention", which can break the cycles of abuse, hierarchy, and dependency which constrain the person to a belief in their separateness. Note, however, that Brennan does not identify *only* love as lived attention; she also calls reason lived attention, pointing to the multiple possibilities for the ways of knowledge on which philosophy has traditionally been based. Reason, too, can be about a sustained attention to the being of the other and to the relationship between the other and the self.

41 Lévinas 1998: 5.

“impassive”; that is of ways of knowing which deny feeling, and other ways of knowing which centralise it.

Curiosity and love (or sympathy) can perform similar roles: they can be conduits by which the self extends into the world and interacts with it. The idea of extension is etymologically linked to a loving approach: it is tender. Tenderness is imbued with the idea of our being-in-common; it takes into account the being of the other. These qualities inform, for example, both Barthes' and Richard Rorty's definitions of tenderness. For Barthes, tenderness is “nothing but an infinite, insatiable metonymy”,⁴² that is, a state in which the desire to identify with the other is continually in flux as the other changes, leapfrogging just behind those changes in a continually renewing desire to keep feeling *with* the other, but—'insatiable' and 'infinite'—never reaching a space of actual identification. When “you are tender, you speak your plural”,⁴³ in tenderness, one extends one's consideration across the gap. Being tender, extending toward, one cannot forget there is an other, because it is toward that other that one extends.

Rorty's considerations of tenderness come in the context of an essay on Nobokov, aesthetics, and cruelty in which he defines the expression of tenderness as having “time for other people's fantasies, not just [one's] own”.⁴⁴ Tenderness is about being able to identify with the other in such a way as to remain distinct (understanding that others' fantasies and one's own are not the same) while extending (both tenderness and curiosity are externally directed) across the distance between us. A willing extension. An impossible but nevertheless credible pluralisation of the singular tense of the self.

The tender expression is a caress that “would renounce possession [...] It is tender in that it does not push to take anything”.⁴⁵ Tenderness, then, exists in paradox. It caresses (one could even say 'grasps') but does not possess. Its claims are translucent and delicate and unreal. The tender “tends to give, extend, tender forth the tender: 'Tiens,' hold, take what I do not possess, nor you, what we do not and never shall possess. This will not be properly our own; of this, we shall never be the masters and

⁴² Barthes, 2002: 224.

⁴³ Barthes, 225.

⁴⁴ Rorty, Richard. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1989), p. 159.

⁴⁵ Derrida, Jacques. *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 93.

owners".⁴⁶ Tenderness revokes ownership as Lévinasian love revokes grasping and possessing. Both, however, are about movement toward wisdom, moving out of the single self and toward the other, toward an intelligibility that is offered rather than applied.

Derrida broaches the possibility of a tenderness even toward the text in his preference to "tenderly attend to these words".⁴⁷ He approaches his own three-word text ("tender, tend, extend"⁴⁸) *with* tenderness; he extends toward the words on their terms as others, taking account of possible secondary meanings, nuances, connotations, translative equivalences, and plays on words that do not translate. That is, Derrida's exploration of this text begins with a 'yes' to the otherness, the beyond-understanding of these words. The words that are offered to us by language are also withdrawn, impossible to pin down absolutely. The 'yes' of tenderness takes place because of the impossibility of absolute identification of or with the other; the 'yes' is unstable and *practical*, requiring ongoing renewal, or, in Derrida's words, the "reaffirmation of the affirmation".⁴⁹

Tenderness, then, is the possibility of extension outside of oneself in order to be nearer, imaginatively speaking, to others. Such tenderness to act as an approach not only to human others, but to textual ones; an approach by which the non-human other, too, is ungraspable. This approach is the realm of those who study literature, images, ideas; in short, in the realm of the thought—the philosophical. What would a philosophy that actively remembered its roots in love (*philosophy*) look like, what would it add to the generational conversation? And what would a philosophy that not only remembered those roots but cherished them, paid attention to them, look like? What new ways of speaking would it offer? What spaces would it create?

What would a philosophy that remembers its roots in love feel, look, behave like? In other words, how would such a philosophy be? An 'artistic, musical, touchful' way of communicating and of creating meaning could not rely on a single mode of articulation, nor on a single perception, nor on the simply objective or receptive presence of the other. In a practice—*thinking itself*—that prides itself on its remove from emotion, even defines itself that way, a move toward this 'artistic' way of being is already happening from time to time, in one small way which has indications for larger

46 Ibid.

47 Derrida, 2005: 94.

48 Ibid.

49 Derrida, Interview (1997).

changes. One such move is the presence of the *I*.

C. Another *I*

Tenderness, as any extension, requires not only an other towards which to extend, but also a site from which to extend. In other words, to be tender requires two acting subjects: one to make the gesture and one to receive the gesture. Although the *I* in philosophy has been the centre of that universe, the thinking subject who has lawful, 'natural' dominion over all (non-thinking) others, the male subject whose gaze and imagination and hands roam over bodies and landscapes that do not belong to him, this is not the only *I* there is. What if the *I* could be another *I*, a radically different *I*, *I* as trace not of mastery but of the tender extension of the fallible, individual self?

The *I* is the trace of the maker, the mark of the hand in the work. The slim body of the *I* stands in for the subject's body. The *I* acknowledges that the work does not stand alone, removed from the process of creation and the one(s) who created it. It replaces a pretence of distance and objectivity with the embedding of the subject within the text itself, integrally, grammatically. Such an *I* is not

the *I* of philosophers, that *I* who is supposed to be universal, a disengaged spectator or transcendental subject, a spokesman for each and everyone because he thinks exclusively what anyone can by right know in the place of anyone else [...]: that which concerns no one personally;⁵⁰

instead, it is the *I* that represents the one who signs, the maker of the work. The *I* acknowledges its own incapacity to be everywhere and know everything by its association with the fallible subject. Despite saying *I* in the name of the other, the *I* also indicates that we "don't know the same thing [...] yet we know as much".⁵¹ The *I* of the philosophy of love enunciates that each knowledge is incomplete and requires supplement from elsewhere (other people, other ways of knowing). It implies that being is being-with; that our theories (our touching, our art, our music) only make sense in terms of one another and in terms of *us*. Touch, art, music: they all begin in the one and proceed to the other, indicating the presence of each. Indicating their *madeness*.

Not all the writers whose work suggests a loving approach to be desirable employ the *I* as a strategy

50 Marion, 2008: 9.

51 Marion, 2008: 10.

in their writing; for instance, there is no *I* in *The Way of Love*, apart from Irigaray's prefacing remarks⁵². However, this is *one* strategy that can be undertaken when approaching texts as others—acknowledging the singularity, vulnerability, and fallibility of the subject.⁵³

D. *Philosophy*

Luce Irigaray begins *The Way of Love* by identifying the “wisdom of love” as “perhaps the first meaning of the word ‘philosophy’”,⁵⁴ which retains only the other side of this meaning, the ‘love of wisdom’. Irigaray's setting forth of the concept of the wisdom of love pluralises understandings of philosophy so as to join together “the body, the heart, and the mind” and does not “resort to a logic that formalizes the real by removing it from concrete experience”, instead providing its users and creators with “measures that help in living better”.⁵⁵ Wisdom-of-love positions philosophy as “a knowing how to live” that affirms that “most rational knowledge is first mystical”.⁵⁶ Irigaray removes wisdom from the rarefied and separate space in which it is a

formal knowledge [...] reduced to a mental exercise, passed on from a master to disciples, of use in populating universities and in having discussions among the uninitiated but without the impact on our lives that a wisdom presupposes⁵⁷

in order to “resist the formal games”⁵⁸ of knowledge-transfer and of inside/outside binaries. These ‘games’, by which Irigaray means the transfer of information *qua* information rather than the creation of a being-together (a conversation between subjects), privilege “the object, the similar, the multiple”⁵⁹ in a language that Irigaray identifies as the “speech of little boys, adolescents, and men”.⁶⁰ In so doing, Irigaray emphasises the generally masculine tradition of philosophy and emphasises the role of the feminine (the other) in reintroducing love. It is a typically poststructuralist flourish by

⁵² That Irigaray's book would not have been complete—or at least, so it would seem, as she and her editors have chosen to include them—without the I-voiced introductory remarks is a perfect example of her very thesis that new or unorthodox ways of speaking are required to even begin speaking to and with the other. Which, then, is the supplement—the personally-voiced essay introducing the work, or the work itself, which insists on the necessity of such a voice to the kind of work it does, but does not manifest that voice in its own body? Obviously this is an undecidable question.

⁵³ See exemplary readings in Chapter 6.

⁵⁴ Irigaray, 1.

⁵⁵ Irigaray, 2.

⁵⁶ Irigaray, 3.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Irigaray, 4.

⁵⁹ Irigaray, 4-5.

⁶⁰ Irigaray, 5.

which she intimates the relationship of the othered (feminine/love) element to the centralised (masculine/wisdom) one.

The masculine language of the history of empirical knowledge and positivist science is supplanted in Irigaray's work by *écriture féminine*, "an artistic, musical, touchful way of speaking or saying and of listening able to be perceived in a written text [...] not reduced to a simple assistance for remembering meaning or to some code to be respected".⁶¹ *Écriture féminine* is elsewhere described as a language "more fluid, less narrative, less constrained by reason, and more given to juxtaposition and ambiguity than older norms of prose and poetry had allowed".⁶² That is to say, this other language, identified by name as feminine, is less dependent on absolute identification of terms, is more comfortable with a general slipperiness or ambiguity. Unknowability is par for the course. Moreover, this is a 'touchful' way of speaking or listening, depending not (only) on vision for affirmation, understanding, or world-construction, but on other senses; it is a 'musical' and an 'artistic' one, expressing its experiences in forms other than immutable ones.

What *écriture féminine* proposes is a fleshing of the whole world, an incarnation of the world, through the "whole body",⁶³ in place of a language that "cares more for words than for persons, attitudes or acts".⁶⁴ The 'whole body' involves not only the static physical presence of that body, but also the parts of the body which extend outward in the production of thought, objects, song, speech, affect, feeling, touch. This body is, then, ontologically rooted *and* winged. It does not *only* consist of the inescapable ruin of the body (the undependability of the body), but also of the possibility of creation that belongs especially to the female body. Such a language is therefore tied to the reinvention (re-incarnation) of the world.

A writing or a language that is of the 'whole body' is cellular as well as holistic: it acknowledges the way that regeneration and change on a microscopic level offer the possibility of the regeneration of the whole, or parts of the whole, such that what and how the whole *is* changes. It does not require its

61 Irigaray, xx.

62 Burt, Stephen. "I Came To Talk You into Physical Splendor: On the Poetry of C. D. Wright". (On the 'Modern American Poetry' section of the website of the department of English at the University of Illinois. Accessed 14/8/2011. http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/s_z/cdwright/burt.html), n. pag.

63 Cixous 1994: 203.

64 Burt, n. pag.

maker "to mourn, to look back to resented or idealized pasts, to regret or lament already-lost powers"⁶⁵ because it acknowledges that change is on-going. Because it calls for the use of the whole body, rather than one part of that body, the tendency of such writing is to draw the outside in, to permit the other to enter, and to make exchanges that are not plotted, "starting with this 'permission' one gives oneself, the multiplication of the effects of desire's inscription on every part of the body and the other body".⁶⁶

Via Irigaray and Cixous it is possible to rethink philosophy in terms of the place of love within it. If philosophy, forgetful of its origins in love, considers only those things which preserve the singularity of the self, its autonomy, its isolation; and if the language of this philosophy is then preoccupied with its own reproduction through codes of transmission and replication; then this philosophy will be forever scrambling to contain itself and its productions, limiting who can say, write, teach, think (that is, hold authority), and what can be said, write, taught, thought (and how, and why, and where, and by what means, and at what times). Philosophy that forgets its roots in 'philia' represses the memory of what wisdom can come from beginning in mystery and continuing in an approach of the other that does not presume to grasp them. Karl Marx's accusation that the "chief defect of all previous materialism [...] is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the *object or of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively"⁶⁷ provides an example from within the tradition of critique of the stated desire for a philosophy such as the one which Irigaray and Cixous propose.

The question is, how do we find a place, as philosophers, as theorists, as academics, as scholars, and as students, for an exchange which can "exist as loving between us [...] prepare for a loving between us"⁶⁸ when as it stands "we still lack a culture of relation with the other"?⁶⁹ How do we find (how do I find) or make the space of silence that signifies "I am listening to you, I wait for you to speak to me"? How do we apply ourselves (how do I apply myself) to "not appropriating the thing but letting it be a thing"?⁷⁰ How do I "encourage the other to be and to remain other"?⁷¹ How do I "let the

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Cixous 1994: 41.

⁶⁷ Marx, Karl. *Theses on Feuerbach*. (Reproduced on Marxists.org, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm>. Accessed 14/8/201.), n. pag.

⁶⁸ Irigaray, vii.

⁶⁹ Ibid, ix.

⁷⁰ Irigaray, 29.

⁷¹ Ibid.

other come into presence [...] without claiming to be their foundation"?⁷² This is "a question of making something exist"⁷³—a call to creation, generation, and newness or renewal. This question is about the possibility for speaking—bidirectional speaking—and for listening that arises when the otherness of the other is not seen as a challenge to the self, but as something precious to be respected and taken care of. It is a question which, with Mitchell's concern for what pictures want and Derrida's for the affirmation of the other as other prior to any critique, is part of a collection of gestures toward the other and toward a concern for the other which would not destroy the otherness of the other.

The question of a place and a language in which to meet the other is a question of making: because the existing languages and places with their "formal and a priori moral code would not be able to recognise such an evolution",⁷⁴ we find ourselves in need of an other language in which to form our relation to one another. Irigaray's solution is based not only on another language, but on "another relation with language, a relation which favours the act of speech in the present and not a language already existing and codified",⁷⁵ that is, a relation which takes as its appropriate expression a language which changes and shifts to reflect the dynamic nature of the relationship itself. The exchange between two is a space in which "meaning quivers and always remains unstable, incomplete, unsettled, irreducible".⁷⁶ The language Irigaray is searching for is not the "descriptive and narrative [language] [...] to which we most often resort today",⁷⁷ but a "poetic language [...] the articulation of thinking and poetic saying" which "first of all exists in a present dialogue with an other different from myself".⁷⁸ Where the descriptive and the narrative name and tell the story of a thing, resorting to preordained patterns of meaning and relation, the poetic, for Irigaray, recalls its roots in Greek *poesis*: making. Poetic language is a language that continually reinvents itself and its saying such that its forms do not become codified and the onus is always on the speaker(s) to make meaning that does not reduce either the self or the other—or their relation. It is a "language that creates, that safeguards its sensible qualities so as to address the body and the soul, a language that lives".⁷⁹ Most importantly,

72 Ibid.

73 Irigaray, viii.

74 Irigaray, xviii.

75 Irigaray, ix.

76 Irigaray, 28.

77 Irigaray, viii.

78 Irigaray, xi.

79 Irigaray, 12.

it is "a matter of being attentive to what is proper to the other without wanting to appropriate it".⁸⁰ Poetic language as a way of being with—listening to and speaking to—the other involves "questioning another possible relation to language, thus modifying the status of language and of oneself as human".⁸¹ When this questioning takes place, possibility comes into play; the "encounter itself can create a new speech".⁸² Newness, renewal, a "radical disappropriation", something that "open[s] anew upon the unknown":⁸³ these are the qualities of this new speech.⁸⁴

Poetic language—an actively changing and making language—would value "intersubjectivity [...] dialogue in difference [...] attention to present life" and raises these things "to a level of wisdom".⁸⁵ That is, Irigaray is proposing a way of making speech but also of making understanding that is meant to take its place beside the codified, rigidly structured language and philosophy she calls "the speech of little boys, adolescents, and men"⁸⁶ which has forgotten the wisdom of love and replaced that wisdom with "a taste for games [...] A certain contempt for life".⁸⁷ The winking game of philosophy's belief/non-belief⁸⁸ in other wisdoms (our simultaneous understanding that the body teaches us, and our unwillingness to allow its evidence into our 'courts' of academic decision) excludes knowledges

80 Irigaray, 37.

81 Irigaray, 38.

82 Irigaray, 40.

83 Irigaray, 45.

84 Irigaray contrasts this new speech with "information, recital, narrative" (46).

85 Irigaray, vii.

86 Irigaray, 5.

87 Irigaray, 4.

88 Irigaray's dismissal of philosophy with its 'contempt' for life is a perfect example of this double belief. After all, she herself is making philosophy very much in the tradition of philosophy she deplores: obtuse, difficult, dense, full of wordplay, and definitely "of use in populating universities and in having discussions among the initiated" (3). Anecdotal: I recently attended a seminar given by Irigaray, which was followed by a reception with professors from the host institution, graduate students attending a week-long series of workshops, and others (like myself). The seminar was on engagement with the other. At no point—and this was remarked upon repeatedly by groups of people from different areas of the University—were the hosting department, the inner circle of graduate students, or Irigaray herself openly welcoming. If Irigaray is honestly in pursuit of an engagement with the other, and especially one that opens to the other via the body, touch, and other ideally non-hierarchical speakings, then I have to say that any obvious engagement with this was not in evidence on this occasion. I bring this up as an example of the insidiousness of the winking-game itself: that we say we believe (and we believe!) one thing, but we also say (with our actions or words, etc.) the opposite, and believe (i.e. act on) it, too. In Irigaray's own words, in any case, "It does not suffice, in fact, to speak about the present, it is important to make this present, and the being in presence, exist" (xv). This call, however, to 'make' the present (to create a way of being-together which is non-hierarchical and respects, in Derrida's words, the otherness of the other) is of course not easily accomplished in a structure like a university (or any of our cultural structures) where hierarchy is both implicit and expected from even those members who cite most religiously their adherence to non-hierarchical relation. I don't point a finger at Irigaray alone here. I know that as an academic and as a member of any community I am also responsible to perform this opening to the other and extension toward the other that allows the other to be whatever they are, rather than only what I expect them to be. And even as I point whatever fingers I point at Irigaray, myself, or anyone else, I have to do it with the knowledge that 'everyone I meet is fighting a hard battle'; with mercy. With an awareness in the approach to the other that the only quality I can be sure of is contradiction and complexity, and with an awareness that my responsibility in my approach is to stay on guard against my impulse to reduce the other to a form that fits my ideas about the world.

created by things other than the intellect, and relegates those knowledges to 'other' subjects. One of these subjects is love. Setting out to make room for love in philosophy, Irigaray calls for "an artistic, musical, touchful way of speaking or saying and of listening able to be perceived in a written text"⁸⁹ that would counter the tendency our "rational tradition" has of being "much concerned with 'speaking about'" while reducing "'speaking with' to a speaking together about the same things. Which supposes a common universe and conversations about a third without real exchange between ourselves".⁹⁰

The space in which this 'artistic, musical, touchful' speaking can arise is the same space that enables one person to love another; it is the space between the two that is irreducible, expansive, and different. And it is "always becoming",⁹¹ always in flux, and therefore always calling the one and the other *into* relation. What relationship could tolerate this? Not commerce, which relies on knowing for the other what is good, constructing desires and wants before they can be born (unruly!) and slip into their own routes. Not any kind of hierarchy, with its tendencies toward assimilation of the less-dominant party and its dependence on communication through 'closed words'.⁹² Not in any "suspension in immutable truths or essences" but a relationship that "provides a faithfulness to oneself in becoming".⁹³ The relation that can tolerate and bear the always-becoming, that can resist "fusion, or [...] couples of opposites whose relation will be governed by hierarchy, submission of one to the other"⁹⁴ is love, a "constitution of two worlds open and in relation [...] which give birth to a third world as work in common [...] and to be shared".⁹⁵ This is what Irigaray calls the "clearing of language—the vastness [...] a place where the intimate is possible with measure thanks to the respect for the one or for the other. And also thanks to the renunciation of dominating".⁹⁶

In Irigaray's case, she is in part invoking 'love' as a way of interacting with the other in a modality of resistance within a stultifying milieu (especially an academic or a philosophical one). Derrida, of course, in the discussion of love cited earlier in this chapter, is not speaking of love in the romantic sense necessarily—he is not dispensing deconstructionist relationship advice, but appealing to a

89 Irigaray, xx.

90 Irigaray, 7-8.

91 Irigaray, 9.

92 Irigaray, 25.

93 Irigaray, xiv.

94 Irigaray, xv.

95 Irigaray, 10.

96 Irigaray, 29.

more 'universal' consideration and respect for the other. Both Derrida and Irigaray are looking to love as a way of understanding all kinds of relation, including the relation between people in the particular institutions of which they are themselves part. That is exactly why their positions on love—Derrida's brief statement that the 'love' he finds in deconstruction is its 'original ethics' during his interview with Nikhil Padagaonkar, and Irigaray's choice to set a love relationship as a model for interscholastic engagement in a discipline that has obscured or forgotten its roots in love—matter to this thesis. The movement from the personal relationship or the poetic expression in works such as Roland Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse* to a stylised, formal expression of love as a figure for relation to and within institutions, including the institution of textual criticism mirrors what Irigaray identifies as problematic in philosophy—the codifying and estrangement from the knowledge produced by feeling *per se*. But it also reflects the possibility of engagement within the academy in a loving way. And what that does is to say that in fact, we do not study love to 'objectively' understand and isolate our private lives from the ones which we are living in community with other thinkers, writers, scholars, artists, makers. We study it, and we act on it, because it forms an integral part of our study of other things. Not-knowing, unknowability, unsubsumability, or our own willingness to give up the desire to subsume the unknown to our knowing: these are what make us go out into the world asking it what it is, how it is, what it wants. They are also the basic stance of the lover.

E. Space

"What is thus built is not only a refuge. It is also a space where the horizon of the already lived and defined reopens. A space where the bridge between past, present, and future is elaborated, as well as the passages between the other and oneself."

Irigaray⁹⁷

Irigaray's concern for an 'other' language, which would challenge the "normative science of the truth",⁹⁸ arises in what she terms a "world",⁹⁹ an "expanse"¹⁰⁰ that is not "a world proper to all subjects"¹⁰¹ but that "is generated thanks to the withdrawal imposed by difference".¹⁰² This means that the 'space' which is imagined or experienced to be there when two people converse with (rather than speak to) one another is because of the acknowledgement by each person of the difference of the other. Irigaray's deployment of space as a figure in talking about love in philosophy is not only

⁹⁷ Irigaray, 146.

⁹⁸ Irigaray, 2.

⁹⁹ Irigaray, 9.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Irigaray, 8.

¹⁰² Irigaray, 9.

explicit, however. Above all, that a 'musical, artistic, touchful' way of being and of knowing should be present implies a breaking-apart of the limitations of positivism and empiricism. In so doing, this way of being creates new fields, new spaces, and especially makes a place for the body in thinking; for voices and bodies which have not had spaces to speak from (for bodies which have not been considered rational, for example).

The field created by difference between two means that its constitution is one of "always becoming" and "calls for a relation between subjective and objective where the one could never assume nor integrate the other because the one and the other are two".¹⁰³ As a basis for the generation of this world Irigaray sets the impossibility of objectivity, which "is not [objective] [...] and, moreover, the sensible and feelings have their objectivity and are worthy of being thought".¹⁰⁴ Irigaray presents the possibility of this kind of speaking in the terms of the discipline in which she is trained and in which she writes—Western philosophy, which, as noted earlier in this dissertation, plays a winking game with its own belief in objectivity. In Irigaray's terms, this game means that philosophy becomes "the relation between a subject and an object or a thing he tries to analyze, hardly caring about speaking to the other, in particular [not caring about] starting from a listening to the other".¹⁰⁵ This, then, is a philosophy that is disinterested in what there might be between two. In order to invert it, Irigaray foregrounds the qualities of silence (the silence of the other) that facilitate speech, bringing the other again to the centre of things. If the possibility of speaking together (conversation) begins in the possibility of silence, then speech itself requires that a space is left for the other. Irigaray's understanding of the possibilities—the conditions—for expression of the relation between two, and of the language that we use to create those expressions, are similar in their insistence on the space required for speaking-with to happen to Roland Barthes' concept of the lover's discourse.

Like Irigaray, Barthes uses spatial tropes to talk about love. This is a figurative or perhaps metaphysical space; its boundaries are the bodies of people or the thoughts of people, language, thought, feeling. Nonetheless, in its creation—the hollowing-out of a place to talk about love, for example, or the various ways in which it is sensed or transversed—it is spoken about in terms that put it in an intermediate position between the material and the textual. Love is intermediary in two senses: first of all, in that it goes between two; and second, because it is what is produced when two

103 Ibid.

104 Irigaray, 8.

105 Irigaray, 15.

are together in conversation.

Barthes calls love the “site” of a discourse that is “exiled” (a space, therefore, embodying separateness). In Barthes, there is both the separation of love as a discourse and a material or formal separation within the object that is his book (comprising 80 fragments of this discourse). The form of the book—its ‘arbitrary’ ordering and its fragments—is a representation of a discourse in which much slips out of meaning, or is never included in the first place. The tropes of love in this book come with a place of articulation or sense of field—paradise; the body; a gift; song; the novel; a map; a ship; a tapestry; the embrace (a space between arms); a train station; a tableau; a constellation, village, network, “a little cosmos”; a theatre. Even writing gives the amorous subject a place: “I am alongside it” (writing); language is a “region”.¹⁰⁶ Barthes’ examination of love returns over and over to the trope of space to describe love, linking it to expanse, distance, area. His insistence, meanwhile, on love’s ‘atopia’ means that love reserves its potential to change, to be tailored, to mutate; to go, as it were, off the map.

The concurrent metaphors of place and atopia of love mean that Barthes offers a way to understand what love is like without ever saying ‘this is it’ or ‘this is where it is’. His descriptions hold two things simultaneously—the spaciousness or space-like-ness of love and the fact that love occurs in a nowhere, is unmappable, and therefore remains to be charted, always unauthoritatively each time, by whoever strikes out for it.

Barthes writes that it

is not true that the more you love, the better you understand; all that the action of love obtains from me is merely this wisdom: that the other is not to be known; his opacity is not the screen around a secret, but, instead, a kind of evidence in which the game of reality and appearance is done away with. I am then seized with that exaltation of loving someone unknown, someone who will remain so forever.¹⁰⁷

The qualities of limitless space, even figurations of such, mean that there is no endgame. Across the limitless expanse of the other, the fact that “I cannot open up the other, trace back the other’s origins,

¹⁰⁶ Citations from these sentences, in order from the beginning: Barthes, 2002: 76 (see Derrida, 2005, p. 95, for more on the extension of the gift across space); 77; 93; 95; 101; 103; 105; 118; 123; 138-39; 142; 98; 99.

¹⁰⁷ Barthes, 2002: 135.

solve the riddle” means that “Where does the other come from? Who is the other?”¹⁰⁸ are permanent questions that leave the asker ever further and further to go.

The code which is the lover's discourse itself is a further space: we “fill in this code according to [our] own history [...] the figure must be there, the site (the compartment) must be reserved for it”.¹⁰⁹ It is precisely the 'own'-ness of the history and the site that, for Barthes, has necessitated the book. Everything in it “follows from this principle: that the lover is not to be reduced to a single symptomal subject”.¹¹⁰ Barthes identifies the “necessity” for the book in the “*extreme solitude*”¹¹¹ of the lover's discourse “spoken, perhaps, by thousands of subjects [...] but warranted by no one [...] forsaken by the surrounding languages: ignored, disparaged, or derided by them” and “severed not only from authority but from the systems of authority”, an “exiled” discourse.¹¹² But Barthes ends his jeremiad by attesting to the possibility of this exiled discourse containing or producing the possibility “however exiguous, of an *affirmation*”.¹¹³ The lover's discourse, solitary and meek as it may be, is also the site of a promise, an assertion important enough to be “the subject of the book that begins here”.¹¹⁴ Its solitude and its disenfranchisement as a discourse are the necessary conditions for its (self-) constitution. The lover's discourse *is* in each instance because

there is no system of love: and the several systems which surround the contemporary lover offer him no room (except for an extremely devaluated place): turn as he will toward one or another of the received languages, none answers him, except in order to turn him away from what he loves. Christian discourse, if it still exists, exhorts him to repress and to sublimate. Psychoanalytical discourse (which, at least, describes his state) commits him to give up his Image-repertoire as lost. As for Marxist discourse, it has nothing to say.¹¹⁵

This discourse, perhaps as with any, is initially about creating a space within which what has no place for utterance can be uttered. The particularity of the lover's discourse means not only that it has no built-in place, but also that even as it creates its own place, its self-difference means that this place continually expands, changes, fabricates its own unknownness.

108 Barthes, 2002: 134.

109 Barthes, 2002: 5.

110 Barthes, 2002: 3.

111 Barthes, 2002: Preface (n. pag.; emphasis in original).

112 Ibid.

113 Ibid, emphasis in original.

114 Ibid.

115 Barthes, 2002: 211.

The lover's discourse is a site and so in some way 'locatable', but it is also "unclassifiable, of a ceaselessly unforeseen originality",¹¹⁶ an 'originality' represented by the fragments of the book's title and form. Formally, the book represents the structure of love as partial, disordered, and incomplete; the short pieces of writing do not form a greater narrative or produce a sense of continuity. Instead, they achieve a sense of sensual and textual accumulation from which a feeling may be arrived at. Barthes' conception of the lover's discourse as a code written and rewritten according to the history of the lover in question¹¹⁷ figures this discourse as to some extent non-replicable. This means that the lover's discourse of Barthes' book, for example, is not a 'recipe' or how-to, but a transmission in a language which seems familiar but whose uses we cannot fully grasp. It also means that each new producer of this discourse is a producer of a *new discourse*, not simply a new producer of an established one.

The *Lover's Discourse* enacts and exemplifies the form the discourse of being a lover in the individual and particular instance takes, which is that of a continuing revision of official counts—an escape from the accustomed descriptions of the world and a creation of a new one, with suitably new ways of expressing itself. The form of Barthes' book—its 'arbitrary' ordering (it is alphabetical rather than random in order to escape "the wiles of pure chance" which might have created "a philosophy of love' where we must look for no more than its affirmation"¹¹⁸)—is a representation of a discourse in which much slips out of meaning, or is never included in the first place. The book of fragments is like a sentence with ellipsis or a series using commas without an 'and': its form indicates its own incompleteness, rather than pretending to comprehensiveness. Barthes' use throughout the text of marginal annotations likewise points to the impossibility of including everything, classifying everything, describing it, but also to the infinite possibility of relation. The form and its contents represent the experience of loving as greater than the container created to hold it, whether that container is stereotype, story, language, expectation. The lover's discourse and the book Barthes has created to represent it "have been left in the frequently uncertain, incomplete state suitable to a discourse whose occasion is [...] the memory of the sites (books, encounters)"¹¹⁹ which precipitated its creation. The incomplete and 'arbitrary' state of Barthes' work also allows for the possibility of reordering—since the order is arbitrary, the work can be read in any order, opened at any point. Any

116 Barthes, 2002: 34.

117 Barthes, 1978: 5.

118 Barthes, 1978: 8.

119 Barthes, 1978: 9.

part of it can be more or less important. The work respects the possibility of other readings, and by association, the possibility of other experiences of love; this possibility is addressed directly by Barthes in the section “*Adorable!*”. The beloved is perceived by the lover “as a Whole (in the fashion of Paris on an autumn afternoon), and, at the same time, this Whole seems [...] to involve a remainder”;¹²⁰ the “loved being [...] endlessly withdraws and pales”.¹²¹ Whatever is *there* is not enough; the beloved is always just a little bit further beyond the point of attainment.

The remainder in love—the unspeakable optical illusion that hovers just out of sight, and which is that thing that preserves the otherness of the other, “something like a syncope in the lovely phrase of the loved being”¹²²—closes off the lover’s discourse at the point where language cannot exceed the words “I love because I love you”.¹²³ Love and its discourse may seem isolated from or repressed by logic and the discourses of authority but love’s power comes from its “stubbornness”, which is not about a relation to larger systems but the fact that “despite discomforts, doubts, despairs, impulses to be done with it, I unceasingly affirm love, within myself, as a virtue [...] I counter whatever ‘doesn’t work’ in love with the affirmation of what is worthwhile”.¹²⁴ Enacting its own resistance against “the most divergent systems employ to demystify [...] limit [...] erase [...] depreciate love”,¹²⁵ love creates a space, hollowing out and making room for itself by these affirmations; for

what I have affirmed a first time, I can once again affirm, without repeating it, for then what I affirm is the affirmation, not its contingency: I affirm the first encounter in its difference, I desire its return, not its repetition. I say to the other (old or new): *Let us begin again.*¹²⁶

On beginning again, the discourse restarts itself; it finds new ways to affirm and new affirmations to make. Whatever space it makes is changeable and restless. It “resists description, definition, language [...] [it] makes language indecisive: one cannot speak *of* the other, *about* the other; every attribute is false, painful, erroneous, awkward: the other is *unqualifiable*”.¹²⁷ Barthes identifies the space of the lover’s discourse as atopic—without a set location.

120 Barthes, 2002: 19.

121 Barthes, 2002: 112.

122 Barthes, 2002: 25.

123 Barthes, 2002: 21.

124 Barthes, 2002: 22.

125 Ibid.

126 Barthes, 2002: 22.

127 Barthes, 2002: 35.

Atopia means that the discourse cannot be mapped according to the structures in which we already participate. It is not part of agreed-upon descriptions or categorizations of the world. Where, then, is this atopic space, this site of discourse, to be found? If it is atopic, unplaceable (ungraspable), can it be said to exist? Yes—like weather, which is unmappable but present, the lover's discourse moves through and is created by spaces. It is created in "relation itself".¹²⁸ Its strength 'evacuates' narratives that pre-exist it; "when the relation is original, then the stereotype is shaken [...] evacuated".¹²⁹ The placelessness of love and its discourse is their strength; being transient, they retain the possibility of movement.

F. Exorbitance and saying yes

"Philosophy defines itself as the 'love of wisdom' because it must in effect begin before claiming to know".¹³⁰

The potential for an approach to the other of which deconstruction is one representation is further carried out by Irigaray's concern for the language by which we construct our relations on the one hand, and by Barthes' consideration of the potential of lovers' discourses in particular to be models of textual bliss—changeable, unpredictable, and open. Rather than offer a methodology, this dissertation, and Chapters 3 and 4 in particular, attempt to mobilise a collectivity of voices that represent the possibility of reading lovingly. The desirability of such a collectivity of voices is indicated by the insufficiency of 'Derridian deconstruction' alone for the task of constructing a loving approach to texts.

Deconstruction is supplemented by these texts; as with any supplemental relationship, the effect of this is to demonstrate the necessary relationship between the two elements. Although deconstruction is widely studied, practiced, and 'replicated', Derrida's explicit identification of the role of a loving relationship between the 'deconstructing' self and the 'deconstructed' other is limited, which has allowed deconstruction to be interpreted and applied in ways that are not aligned to this attitude. Therefore, in order to offer a more textured and fuller picture of the possibilities of a loving approach (which deconstruction, as in Chapter 3, can be one example of), the introduction of these other voices is necessary. Where Derrida leaves off—or, we could say, where he begins, because his

128 Barthes, 2002: 35.

129 Barthes, 2002: 36.

130 Marion, 2007: 2.

statements are about fundamentals—he leaves space for a relationship with writers with whose writing his own can be constellated. Lévinas' insistence that love is about what cannot be known, and that this is the place from which justice proceeds, reinforces and adds complexity to Derrida's definition of the love in deconstruction as the yes to the other. Irigaray's world-construction through listening to the other and the performance of a new kind of speech begins from the point where Derrida insists that priority for the other is the first movement in any deconstructive engagement. Barthes' and Irigaray's use of space between the lover and the beloved as a figure for the unknowability of the other provides a visual mnemonic for Derrida's assertion of the otherness of the other. And Teresa Brennan's argument that we are not affectively separated means that a reordering of the relationship between subject and object such as the one Derrida offers is necessary—and offers evidence from philosophy, anthropology, psychology, and chemistry as support.

The point of identifying the links between these thinkers is not to construct a master narrative of philosophy, a genealogy of ideas which can be traced to an authentic source, but to demonstrate that ideas identified by Derrida as central to the project of deconstruction are actually present across many and diverse bodies of writing; that the attitude of deconstruction toward the other is shared and proposed by thinkers even outside the canon of poststructuralism; and that a constellation of these texts and thinkers can show the possibility of and desire for a loving approach.

The diversity of these texts, which are by no means the limits of texts which could be so constellated, resists the methodological drive to containment: such diversity denies the satisfaction of achieving a set of rules which may be followed to a consistent end, and it presents the texts as exemplary, rather than authoritative. As such, it practices saying yes before knowing. Instead of developing from a framework that is pre-made, an approach that respects the space between two acknowledges the necessity of mystery to knowledge. One result of this is the on-going openness and incompleteness of such an approach. It cannot be proven 'best' at anything. It can only be taken. As such, it is to some degree an exorbitant approach. Yes is an exorbitant answer because it is by 'yes' that the outer circle of what is possible expands. Yes is excessive, not ascetic.

The exorbitant offers models for approaching texts, as well as for creating them (whether in the juxtaposition of extant texts or in writing 'new' ones). It acknowledges the seam between 'inside' and 'outside' information, 'permissible' and 'impermissible' sources of information, and performs the

'flash' Barthes identifies with textual erotics. The exorbitant is no place; it is the continued traversal in both directions of whatever line is set up to designate what belongs where. Like the lover's discourse, it exists in relation.

The enactment of exorbitance calls up escape, exit, "the attempt to get out of a rut...to get outside the metaphysical closure that sequesters theory from the real"¹³¹. But such an escape is impossible. It would be impossible to develop a purely exorbitant approach, to speak only of what is unspoken, forgotten, excluded, or ignored, or to write in such a way as to perpetually slip outside the bounds of the academy (for example). Furthermore, such an approach would forget its own necessity—the play between presence and absence that calls to mind both—and lose its erotic flashing between here/not-here. The impossibility of a purely exorbitant method is what exorbitance speaks to—that there is always something that slips out of grasp or just beyond language. What this approach aims for, then, is to be informed by the qualities of exorbitance that direct thought outward, which demand a continual reformation and creation of the world. Exorbitant is a description of questions like 'What do pictures want?' and considerations of the other-as-other in a history of philosophy which has had little time for non-objectified subjects. Considering subjects in terms that allow them to speak for themselves, instead of only those that assign meaning, is an exorbitant approach. The exorbitant represents a space of continual expansion, continual possibility, of which textuality is a performative aspect, and love is one form.

The choice in this dissertation of exorbitance as a description of the approach being developed is not unique. In fact, Derrida calls the exorbitant a "Question of Method"¹³² and "[prepares] to privilege, in a manner that some will not fail to judge exorbitant, certain texts".¹³³ The exorbitant participates in the construction of meaning as the aphorism does—as an "exposure to contretemps"¹³⁴ and a simultaneous "promise of a now in common [...] the desired sharing of a living present".¹³⁵ The living present of Derrida's aphorism and the necessity of the exorbitant to continually redefine and transverse the boundaries express the same interest in an unstable communication. What is living is untypifiable because it has not yet finished developing, mutating, growing. This means that the

131 Gallop, Jane. *Anecdotal Theory*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 8.

132 Derrida, Jacques. "The Exorbitant. Question of Method" in *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak. (Johns Hopkins University Press; 1976), p. 157.

133 Derrida, 1974: 231, quoted in Gallop, 7.

134 Derrida, 1992: 416.

135 Derrida, 1992: 419.

exorbitant as a living state is a relational one. Living-ness and exorbitance incorporate the fact of contradiction, almost insouciantly. Any representation of what is living or exorbitant should include the caveat that what you see is not what you get—that the totality on the page or canvas or projection screen is partial to an infinite degree, despite claims to the contrary that may be made by its creators, its contexts, or any combination thereof. An approach that includes what it should not, or includes the fact of its own limits; an approach which reactivates the subject in all of its ways of knowing; an approach which reorganises the relationship between subject and object in terms of what has been “excluded from recognizable, sanctioned knowledge...relegated to ‘the personal’”¹³⁶ is an approach with room for tenderness toward the other it approaches. It acknowledges the impossibility of grasping. It echoes in the work of these writers.

¹³⁶ Gallop, 56.

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“love's function is to fabricate unknownness”:

**E. E. Cummings, Rainer Maria Rilke
and approaching the other**

A. Introduction

“an identity not of roots but of meeting places”¹

In the Introduction of this dissertation, the problematic schism between science and poetry, philosophy and love was established. Subsequent chapters dealt with the demonstration of the desire for, rather than the repression of, the love in philosophy. In Chapter 3, this dissertation analysed understandings of deconstruction in order to demonstrate the possibility for a reading that takes deconstruction as exemplary of, or as holding the potential for, an approach to texts which takes the otherness of those texts into consideration. Derrida figures the ‘love in deconstruction’ as respect for the otherness of the other that forms a place from which one might begin to critique, negate, or invert. Via Derrida’s explication of this love, it can be seen that in fact one way of understanding love itself is as a respect for inviolable distances which exist between the one and the other. Chapter 4 advances from Derrida’s engagement with texts to the engagements of others, including Lévinas, Irigaray, and Barthes, who consider love but do not necessarily posit it as a mode of textual interaction. One of the large concerns of Chapter 4 is the question of how to speak with the other; the possibility of engagement with the other comes out of recognition of their non-union with the self. Therefore, any engagement with the other occurs across a space arising between two non-assimilating beings.

Chapter 5 will continue to construct a reading of approaches to the other (and the textual other) via the work of Cummings and Rilke. In so doing, this chapter submits that such approaches are not the exclusive domain of one discipline or mode of writing; that in fact approaches to the other can be generated in many fields and in many styles, and that, therefore, these approaches are mutable, subject to repositioning, adaptable, and dynamic. The collective of voices mobilised in this dissertation is only one possible permutation of these voices, which are a subjective and limited selection of all possible such voices. Further to this, the inclusion of two poets’ voices is intended to disrupt the positivist idea, discussed in Chapter 1, that certain ways of thinking have exclusive claims on truth, authority, and ways of being. Instead, this dissertation assumes that ways of being are constructed by any relationship, regardless of the mode of knowing with which or through which it engages. The writings of Cummings and Rilke presented here are, by virtue of their freedom from the

1 Rich, Adrienne. *What is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics* (New York: Norton, 2003), p. 258.

constraints of philosophical 'authority' or scientific 'truth', able to enact something like Irigaray's more musical, haptic way of speaking, and identify in language the space between the other and the self which, when recognised, creates the possibility for a loving approach. These poets offer an authorial approach to texts that performs their own philosophies about love. As such, they offer performances of a loving approach.

B. Rilke

In the work of Roland Barthes and Luce Irigaray, the question of love involves three things: the lover, the beloved, and the space between them, across which communication takes place. This space, while potentially a physical one (the fact of skin which keeps bodies, however close, apart preserves an infinite space which cannot be transversed), is also a figure for the unknowability of the other. In terms of an engagement with the other, it is this space which functions as a reminder of the inassimilability of the other and which preserves the otherness of the other. It is across this space that relation can happen, relation to that which is assimilated being impossible. The space between two thus preserves not only the otherness of the other but the non-identity of the self with the other (the otherness of the self). A non-assimilating self and a non-assimilated other can continue in an infinite relation, because no matter how far they travel together, there is a continual expanse of unknownness arising between them.

Rainer Maria Rilke was an Austrian poet born in Bohemia in 1876, writing in German. He is best known for two works, the *Duino Elegies* and the *Sonnets to Orpheus*, but besides these and other works of poetry he also wrote letters and other prose—essays, a novel. In some of his letters, Rilke takes on a consideration of love: what it is, how it works. Although this consideration extends markedly beyond the bounds of this dissertation, there are a few instances where Rilke's discussion clarifies that of Irigaray and Barthes—or even of Lévinas in terms of the question of justice and seeing the other, as well as of love's relation to poetry and making—and these instances have to do with Rilke's conception of love as a spatial phenomenon. Rilke's consideration of love is situated in relation to a consideration of marriage, which, in "the twilight of Christianity"² from which Rilke writes, is still the authorised location for the physical expression of romantic love.

2 Rilke, Rainer Maria, ed. and trans. Mood, John J.L. *Rilke on Love and Other Difficulties: Translations and Considerations* (New York: Norton, 1975), p. 26.

Considerations of love begin for Rilke with considerations of sex, and sex, for Rilke, is something we must “creep round [...] and get into [...] in the end; like burglars and thieves”,³ a place we, by virtue of repressive ways of understanding the world (such as Christianity, with which Rilke had a fraught relationship), do not belong. The self is thus separated from “what is most mysteriously ours”.⁴ In Rilke's conception of sex, therefore, even between the self and the thing that is most self-like or most belongs to the self there is a schism. Of course, to Rilke this is not a 'natural' way of being, but one constructed by the invention of guilt and sin; it is by these that sex and the body are made “homeless”,⁵ without a place to which they belong. This sets him in opposition to the institutions of Christianity that regulate relationships, and specifically to marriage, which sanctifies sex as a union “directed only toward posterity”⁶ and which, in that union, ordains the subsumption of one self to another. Sex within the Christian sacrament becomes an instrument, not of mystery, but of order and ownership; in so becoming, it mimics the historic role of marriage itself in that context. For Rilke, on the other hand, love and sex serve to produce separation between individuals—a separation which creates the space for what he designates love to happen.

Rilke's orthogonal position in regards to the institution of marriage within Christianity can be expressed in spatial terms. In the Gospel of Matthew we find the admonition that the husband and wife “are no longer two, but one”⁷ joined by God into “one flesh”. The two bodies are, in marriage, transformed into a single flesh—one set of desires, one experience of the world. The Christian idea of a single flesh was echoed in the English, American, and French legal concept of coverture (or *couverture*), by which a married woman's rights to own property, sign legal documents, enter into contracts, obtain education, or receive a salary for herself were ceded to her husband. Coverture also prohibited husbands and wives from testifying against one another; such testimony would be impossible, since the woman was in effect now part of the man—one flesh, spiritually and legally. In both Christian sacrament and legal expression, the assimilation of the wife into the husband's physical and legal body means that there is no space between these two; the two disappear and are replaced by the (masculine) one. Spatially, there is no gap to cross, no separation across which for relation to occur. There is only the one.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Matthew 19:4-6; also Mark 10:7-9.

By contrast, Rilke insists that the most holy purpose of marriage is not to consecrate a union that effaces the singularity of two people, but instead to preserve that separateness attentively. The condition of being human is a condition of "deep isolation";⁸ occasionally, this isolating expanse is "rhythmically [interrupted]" by true sharing. What is this 'sharing' if it is not the fusion implied by, for instance, the Christian 'one flesh'? Rilke writes that the "highest task of a bond between two people" is "that each should stand guard over the solitude of the other".⁹ The word 'guard' implies not only that solitude is precious—valuable enough and delicate enough to warrant not only care but *guarding*, active protection against harm. The word also implies that there is a threat which exists against this solitude—which of course there is, in the prevailing legal, social, and moral doctrines of Rilke's time (which still resonate in the 21st century). This threat is the threat of assimilation as the means and end of marriage, an absolute 'togetherness' within which one person is lost—or both are. Assimilation is the social and religious norm to which it is easy and comfortable to turn; throughout most of the 19th century it is also the legal norm. Therefore, non-assimilation is a position of resistance, and, as such, must be undertaken with an attitude of alertness—for "if it lies in the nature of indifference and of the crowd to recognize no solitude, then love and friendship are there for the purpose of continually providing the opportunity for solitude".¹⁰ In other words: what is mandated socially, religiously, and legally is in fact oppositional to the purpose of love, which is to reinforce the difference between individuals which creates the feeling of solitude.

Marriage and friendship are, for Rilke, moments in which separation can occur. The 'sharing' he writes of is not assimilation, a sharing of one location by two bodies becoming one flesh. Instead, it is the gracious sharing by two people of the value of the solitude of each. In resisting assimilation, in keeping guard over the solitude of the other, a new space is created between the two, across which their relation can live. Moreover, Rilke writes that the work of a marriage is not to create a "quick community of spirit by tearing down and destroying all boundaries".¹¹ Again, he asserts that what makes a marriage 'good' is the "confidence" shown by each person in entrusting the other with his or her solitude.¹² In order to be with the other in the most proximate way, the first responsibility becomes the continual preservation—active guarding of the other *as* other, a "strengthening of two

⁸ Rilke, 27.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Rilke, 28.

¹² *Ibid.*

neighboring solitudes".¹³ Rather than a state of inclusion whereby one person *becomes* another (legally, physically, psychologically), the most holy relationship two people can enter into is defined by Rilke as a state of continually alert exclusion of the other by the self on the part of each person. Because of the requirement *not* to cede the self to the other, the task of love becomes "the most difficult of all our tasks, the last test and proof".¹⁴ What is lost when people are unprepared for the work of love are the "expanses and possibilities"¹⁵ which come from *not* knowing the other. Loving someone, aware that love means both acknowledging the otherness of that person and entrusting them with the acknowledgment of one's own otherness, generates space across which to relate ('expanses') and allows the future ('possibilities') to be unknown and to develop on its own, uncontrollable terms.

Rilke figures love, then, not as a way of being together tending toward assimilation, but a way of warily guarding the separateness of each member. The most vulnerable position one can enter into, in these terms, is one in which one's solitude is entrusted to another. Togetherness itself is "an impossibility, and where it seems, nevertheless, to exist, it is a narrowing, a reciprocal agreement which robs either one party or both of [his or her] fullest freedom and development".¹⁶ If togetherness is 'narrowing', then the careful guarding of each solitude must be expansive. And *expanse* is precisely Rilke's figure for this; he writes that "once the realization is accepted that even between the *closest* human beings infinite distances continue to exist, a wonderful living side by side can grow up".¹⁷ The aim is not for one being to replace another, for one to assimilate to another, or for two to merge. It is the development of a "living side by side": two lives next to one another and in relation to one another. The necessary condition for this living side by side is that the two "succeed in loving the distance between them which makes it possible for each to see the other as whole and against a wide sky".¹⁸ That is, that the distance between the two must *also* be loved—guarded, cared for—because it is this distance that guarantees the 'wonderful living side by side' and therefore which guarantees love. The love so guaranteed is what ensures the 'fullest freedom and development' of each person. Love is the existence and acknowledgement of and respect for this space between the two.

13 Ibid.

14 Rilke, 31.

15 Rilke, 32.

16 Rilke, 28.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

C. Three poems by E. E. Cummings

I would like to return briefly to the beginnings of this dissertation; it was there that W. J. T. Mitchell's statement about pictures being "'ways of worldmaking', not just worldmirroring"¹⁹ was introduced. Both pictures and texts are ways of creating the world: of revising the one we have or of imagining a new one and calling it to life. This creation is performed by *any* representations made by humans, reordering the way things are seen and felt, and therefore experienced as real or true. Cummings's poems call for a reconsideration of what rationality is, and how it is evaluated. He inverts terms and relationships in order to demonstrate the possibility of other ways of being and of being-together. These poems are concerned at their very heart with the creation of the world. The point of view from which this world is created is that of the lover, the person to whom love is the supreme consideration and reference.

Jean-Luc Marion, in *The Erotic Phenomenon*, rejects a philosophy of the 'subject' that neglects or wilfully ignores that which is not "defined by exercise of the rationality exclusively appropriate to objects and beings", in other words, a Cartesian subject "who, by thinking, *is* originally".²⁰ In other words, Marion is looking for a definition of a subject which does not stop at the rational, but which makes room for the contradiction of the irrational as well. (Mary Midgley calls Descartes' thought a "wrong place" in that it begins with the "sharp division of mind from body".²¹) For both Midgley and Marion, the Cartesian formation of worlds is flawed in its omission of the other: other ways of thinking, other minds with which to create thought. The isolated brain, without the other parts of the body to form relations, cannot be fully communicative, because it is not fully experiential. Midgley insists that what thinks "*has to be the whole person*",²² this whole person whose wholeness is guarded by those around them, not assimilated into a single way of thinking established for them by some dominant class. We are whole *bodies*—bodies that feel, sense, sing, quiver, tremble, and prickle with rising hairs, "always already caught in the tonality of an erotic disposition"²³ that the Cartesian ego and the tradition of 'objectivity' of which it is the base omit.

Marion faults the Cartesian construction of the ego for its self-containment. The Cartesian ego, that

19 Mitchell, xiv.

20 Marion, 2007: 6; my emphasis.

21 Midgley, 118.

22 Midgley, 119.

23 Marion, 2007: 7.

thing which "doubts, which affirms, which denies, which understands few things, which is ignorant of many, which wills, which does not will, which imagines, too, and which even feels",²⁴ is incomplete insofar as Descartes himself neglected to assign it any passion—it neither loves, nor hates, and thereby separates those actions from the basic and rational construction of the self. Marion takes exception with this construction, which eliminates love from "the first modes of thought" that determine the ontology of the ego, because it claims "a fundamental erotic neutrality". Love is "the phenomenon I am to myself",²⁵ writes Marion. He proposes a substitution of "erotic meditations for metaphysical ones".²⁶

The question that Marion proposes in the place of Descartes' is 'can I love first?', a question of replacing a thinking ego with a loving one. Cummings, in the poem "61" also performs this replacement. The poem is a sonnet; its form announces its position in the firmament of sonnets. As a sonnet, "61" has recourse to the tradition of writing on love, but to some extent it refuses both the formal conventions of that tradition (Cummings maintains the fourteen lines and ABAB/CDCD/EFEF/GG pattern of the sonnet but uses the lines' interior space innovatively; he also uses parentheses to block out areas of text and create separate spaces within the form) and the way love is framed within it. If, as the first line of the poem goes, "love's function is to fabricate unknownness", then the function of the love poem is to bear witness to this unknownness. Where for Rilke, love is figured *as* unknown, in this poem, love is also the site of a continually renewed unknownness: a fabrication of the unknown. Cummings bears witness to this by manipulating customary syntactic, grammatical, and punctuative devices to distort the act of reading and of creating and gleaning meanings from the poem. The poem in full:

61

1 love's function is to fabricate unknownness

(known being wishless;but love,all of wishing)
though life's lived wrongsideout,sameness chokes oneness
truth is confused with fact,fish boast of fishing

5 and men are caught by worms(love may not care
if time totters,light droops,all measures bend
nor marvel if a thought should weigh a star

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Marion, 2007: 8.

—dreads dying least; and less, that death should end)

how lucky lovers are (whose selves abide
10 under whatever shall discovered be)
whose ignorant each breathing dares to hide
more than most fabulous wisdom fears to see

(who laugh and cry) who dream, create and kill
while the whole moves; and every part stands still: ²⁷

The first line serves as a thesis for the poem altogether; that the purpose of love is not to make things clear, to establish facts, or to offer truth. Instead, love's function is to make, actively, the quality of the not-known, the continually unknowable and strange. Cummings plays with the non-instrumentality of love (love is a passion, rather than a rationality, and as such is *not* expected to be of 'use') by assigning it a 'function' and describing that function as one of 'fabrication'. Love in this figuration is like a factory, with a dedicated purpose and outcome.

However, the comparison of love to a factory is ironic. Love is *not* like a factory, because what it produces eludes quality control or mechanisation: it fabricates unknownness. Every single thing that comes from love is different from every other. There is no system for understanding or predicting what it will be; the best thing is to attempt to understand it on its own terms. The terms of love are set out in line 2, which directly compares the known ("wishless") to love ("all of wishing"). Love, being that which fabricates unknownness, must be the opposite of the known. The quality of the known is to be 'wishless'—without desire. As noted in Chapter 3 in discussion on the erotic, the erotic exists in a state of suspense. Once *jouissance* is attained, once the stripper has removed all her clothes, once the story is resolved, the erotic disappears. To be desiring is an erotic state because it exists only when there is something missing—something for which to wish. Once all wishes are fulfilled, there can be no desire. What is known is 'wishless' because it has already, in Lévinas' words, been grasped—there is no further to go once all is known. Love, on the other hand, is "all of wishing"—the totality of what is *not* present but which might be, a set that continues to expand to accommodate a greater and greater 'all'.

The terms of love are not the terms of the world that surround it, where "life's lived wrongsideout" (line 3). Because love is being set against the known, the terms of the world against which love is set must be the terms of knowing. The things of this world are time, light, measure, thought (lines 5-7),

²⁷Cummings, E.E. *No Thanks* (New York and London: Liveright, 1998). p. 74.

but each of these is treated dismissively by love, which “may not care/if time totters [...] nor marvel if a thought should bend a star” (lines 5-7). Love has no stake in ensuring that time is a continuous and steady march; in proving that light travels in ceaseless straight lines; in establishing a set of unchangeable measures; or in weighing human thought against the stars. Its worth comes not from knowing these things but from not-knowing them. The difference between not-knowing and ignorance is activity: as in Rilke’s admonition to guard the solitude of the other, the lovers in Cummings’ poem must actively not-know, not merely be ignorant. Love is a choice, a decision on how to approach the world.

Love, because it is unknown and indeed continues to create its own unknownness and the unknowability of the world, cannot be choked (line 3), or “confused with fact” (line 4), or measured (line 6). The known in this poem is related to loss of individuality (‘oneness’) to a collective being (‘sameness’) similar to Rilke’s concept of a narrowing togetherness wherein one or both individuals lose themselves. In the known, “fish boast of fishing” (line 4); that is those who are caught in the net imagine themselves to be holding it. If the net is read as a figure for the constructs of knowledge—philosophy, education, science, fact, pedagogy—the poem disparages the folly of those who are within it thinking that they control it. A net is made to keep and to limit; no matter the facility of relation between the contained and the container, it remains that one kept in a net is kept in a net. If knownness keeps fish in a net of their own device, then knowing cannot be a way out of the net. The poem proposes love—an other way of experiencing the world—in place of knowing. In fact, it inverts the hierarchy it assumes (where knowing > love) by associating knowing with delusion, confusion, asphyxiation, and love with fearlessness, freedom, and creativity/generativity.

The most instinctive movement of those who love (“ignorant each breathing”, line 11) in this new arrangement ‘hides’ more than “most fabulous wisdom fears to see” (line 12). What can it mean that the breath of lovers is described as ‘ignorant’, ‘hiding’? The breath is ignorant insofar as it is autonomic;²⁸ it occurs without a conscious direction from the brain, continuously accompanying the actions of the body. But it is also in this poem a representation of the decisive not-knowing of the lovers; the body, reduced figuratively to breath, is even at this particular level wilfully un-knowing. What is hidden in the breath is what is unknown between the lovers, a greater portion of territory than even that expanse which the known fears to approach. The smallest gesture of the loving body,

28 Involuntary or unconscious; relating to the autonomic nervous system, which governs functions such as the heartbeat, the breath.

the unconscious breath, contains more space than the greatest expanse of wisdom because love begins at the point of affirming the unknown in the other and the self. That the breath "hide[s]/ more than most fabulous wisdom fears to see" (lines 11-12) reverses our expectations about where the source of experience of the world lies; it is not in wisdom, limited by what it 'fears', but in the bodies of the lovers themselves, which, rather than being limited and knowable, continually "abide/under whatever shall discovered be" (lines 9-10). Lovers are "ignorant" (11) and their ignorance is privileged—an ignorance that is necessary to their state in love; an ignorance that descends from the very function of love to fabricate unknownness. Their ignorance is their guarantee. Cummings provides a description of the lover in the case that love is understood to be that thing which continually outruns knowledge. Additionally, it is their "breathing" which is specifically identified as "ignorant" (11); the lives of the lovers are identified with bodily processes, which are technically ignorant. When we realise that in fact "ignorant" is a positive term in "61", however, we can see that Cummings is placing value on the 'ignorant' bodily processes which provide us with feedback (raised hairs, quickened heartbeat, shallow breathing) about feelings.

The lovers' selves, which abide despite whatever discoveries come to be made about them (by one another or by others) indicate a depth and breadth to the self that echoes Rilke's wide expanse of sky and infinite distances between two people. Knowledge cannot cross the distance to the self, which continues to abide regardless of what becomes known. The condition of the lover is "lucky" (line 9) not through their own volition but circumstantially; because to love is to be "all of wishing" (line 2), their breathing/being is continually in a state of ignorance, which, rather than closing the world off, admits the possibility of always further discovery. That discovery will never lead directly to a permanent, stable centre, but always to the recognition that still more is hidden. It is lucky, then, to be in a state where desire is on-going and discovery always remains to be made.

Although the lovers in Cummings' poem abide, their abiding is not passive. They "laugh and cry [...] dream, create and kill" (line 13). In their activity, lovers, who have no recourse to final knowledge about the world, create it anyway. Where a grasping, fixative way of being in the world "chokes oneness" (line 3), for lovers in this poem, "the whole moves; and every part stands still" (line 14). The lovers here are agents of the creation of a world that centres on them, but are without the choking fixity that comes from a subjective understanding being generalised and figured as objectivity. Because their agency to move comes from the space of the unknown that love creates, this agency is a

subjective one, without the power which objective or empirical knowledge have in the poem to make measures of time, light, or thought (lines 6-7). Lovers' being is assured through something whose function—whose purpose-built use and anticipated way of working—is to “fabricate unknownness” (line 1). The whole can move and the parts can stand still because the parts are in fact also moving—dreaming, creating, killing, laughing, crying. Cummings' use of a colon in the sentence-final position is telling; it makes a space for the yet-to-come and does not close off the world of the poem (as a full stop would), effectively performing in punctuation what Cummings identifies as the role of love. The poem leads its reader out of itself and into what is *not* written yet; into continual unknownness (a pause will always follow the colon) as a representation of love. Love is the thing that writes into that space—love is the creative act.

As in many of Cummings' poems, love and wisdom are set in what appears to be opposition here—but in fact love has its own wisdom or redefines wisdom in its terms. As Marion writes, love is not irrational, but has its own rationality which “unfolds in paradoxes, which elude the most quotidian rationality, the calculations and measurements of technology that are sufficient for constituting the world's objects”.²⁹ Love as the generator of the unknown requires its own syntaxes, its own ways of creating that do not rely on, or even tip their hat to, established ways of making and communicating knowledge. The intention to put love into words “follows a logic that is completely different from the logic overseeing the management and arrangement of objects”.³⁰ That is, the creative logic of love cannot be the same logic as the logic of knowing, because knowing is a case of putting things into their places, assigning categories, naming, and fixing. Love's logic is a logic of allowing-to-be that comes from the assurance of not-knowing. The voice of the knowing subject is Cartesian; it says “I think, therefore I am”, and divides the world in front of it into classes to be arranged in an absolute order. The voice of the loving subject cannot say or do any such thing because its power to speak comes from its subjectivity and its not-knowing. Any arrangement it makes is limited and personal.

Love is therefore spoken in the voice of limited knowledge or surety; Marion's critique of much of the tradition of Cartesian philosophy is that “only phenomena [...] poor in intuition can be averred [...] rich in certainty”.³¹ This statement's assumption is that those phenomena which we experience and communicate intuitively (Brennan might say ‘affectively’) or in terms of the personal are

²⁹ Marion, 2002: x.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Marion, 2007: 13.

rendered uncertain and, because of their unverifiable nature, are excluded from the realm of thought. The voice of that which is rich in intuition is a voice speaking in terms that fabricate unknownness, because to follow intuition does not necessarily lead, via channels of trial and proof, to knowing exactly what is going on, or even having a strong hypothesis. Because the intuitive voice is inflected with the unknown, one grammatical voice that can represent it is the I-voice in its personal form (not the form wherein 'I' speaks for a generalised 'all', but the form in which I speak for my limited self). It is this voice which makes the argument for an understanding of the world which descends (or ascends) from our nerve endings, our intuition, our sense of music and warmth and being-together across a field of infinite, uncrossable difference. Cummings speaks with this voice in another of his poems:

- 1 since feeling is first
 who pays any attention
 to the syntax of things
 will never wholly kiss you;
 5 wholly to be a fool
 while Spring is in the world
- my blood approves,
 and kisses are a better fate
 than wisdom
- 10 lady i swear by all flowers. Don't cry
 —the best gesture of my brain is less than
 your eyelids' flutter which says
- we are for each other: then
 laugh, leaning back in my arms
- 15 for life's not a paragraph
- And death i think is no parenthesis³²

Again, the argument of the poem comes in the first lines—or even the first line alone. The poem presupposes that feeling is “first”: ‘first’ meaning both ‘primary, privileged’, and meaning ‘occurring before other things’. In the poem, whatever else happens, including thought (or even wisdom), is second to feeling in all senses of the word. Those who feel are compared favourably to those who pay attention to “the syntax of things”, or, in other words, those who place importance on the correct or habitual order of things that has been culturally determined to create generally agreed-upon sense. The comparison hinges on the word “wholly”, which occurs twice (lines 4 and 5) in relation to the verb ‘kiss’ and the verb phrase “to be a fool/while Spring is in the world”. This suggests that the

32 Cummings, E. E. *Poems, 1923-1954* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1954), p. 208.

appropriate behaviour of being a fool in springtime is ruled out by "the syntax of things", and that this syntax, for all its concern with appropriateness, actually misses the boat when it comes to the appropriate way to approach love.

In the world the poem creates, those who pay attention to the syntax of things are in fact ignoring a more fundamental order in which feeling is first. That this order is fundamental is gestured to by the first word of the poem, "since", which indicates that the sentence to follow it is an already-understood premise. Those who, despite this premise, pay "any attention/ to the syntax of things" (lines 2-3) are incapable of "wholly" engaging on a bodily or non-cerebral level—of kissing or of being a fool. The history of fools includes not only those who choose to behave strangely or to disobey social commandments, but also people with brains which actually function differently to those of the general population, and in the poem such being is "approved" not by any social, legal, or logical inclusion but by "my blood" (line 7), common substance of all bodies. Approval for knowing the other via the body and in a different rationality comes from the body itself, rather than from an outside legislator, and the fate of the body within this rationality ("kisses", line 8) is "a better fate/than wisdom" (lines 8-9). Wholly to be a fool is to invert a hierarchy that would value "the best gesture of my brain" (line 11) over "your eyelids' flutter" (line 12), the trappings of syntax (brains, paragraphs) over the movements of the body (laughter, flutters). But Cummings does not *only* invert the hierarchy of fool/philosopher, because both live together in the same, controlled, rhetorically complex space of the poem. He inserts this inversion into a logical proof that obeys syntactic logic. The world in which feeling is first lives in relation to a world of syntax. The tension generated by the poem's resistance to that syntax and the syntax's resistance to the terms the poem sets out is what allows both to continue in relation. Because this exchange takes place within a syntax (poem, sentence) that *is* common, however, it remains intelligible. It is the relation between syntax and expression that creates meaning as much as anything, rather than the absolute destruction of one in favour of the other.

The temporality of the poem makes it clear that whatever 'syntax' it sets up to replace the "syntax of things" (line 3) is a transient one: the poem takes place "while Spring is in the world" (line 6); the fleetingness of the season is underscored by the word 'while' which precedes it. The vow that is sworn—that "kisses are a better fate/than wisdom" (lines 8-9)—is sworn "by all flowers" (line 10), rather than by something eternal and unchanging. However, the last line of the poem, with its

unpunctuated ending, implies that in fact the vows which are made on the lovers' terms—the terms of the body and of the soft, sweet things (eyelids, flowers, kisses, laughter)—*are* more than just passing. Despite the fact that they do not go by the assumptions produced by “the syntax of things”, the vows made by the body, privately and outside of law or common logic, are not capped by death. In some way, they are infinite.

The space within which the lovers operate, their life, is “not a paragraph” (line 15); it cannot be parsed or divided into clauses, summed up. This resistance to syntax, to the gestures of the brain, is brought about by the poem's reliance on the subjective experience; that is, by its own choice of a limited scope (the scope of human life/human imaginings of afterlife) and by its dependence on experience which cannot be guaranteed by an external, positivist, empirical body (the approval by “my blood”, the privileging of feeling itself). It is communicated in the first-person singular pronoun that by way of its rejection of a “syntax of things” or a general classification system for what *is* as a way of being, manages to represent an exchange as a personal and limited exchange (the I speaks for the I and not for everyone). Cummings signifies the limits of the I by de-capitalising it, rendering it of the same weight as the other words in the poem, except those which begin sentences (“Don't”, line 10; “And”, line 16) and the word “Spring” (line 6). The lower-case “i” of the poem does not assert a hierarchical posture, invoked by a majuscule, over the “lady” (line 10) to whom it relates; instead, both first-person pronoun and title are stripped of their proper capitals.³³ This is a sentence-level poverty which has the result of offering the players in the poem a greater freedom to move and become, unconstrained by ‘proper’ being, with pre-set roles.

In many of Cummings' poems, the question of space is a question of poetics. The possibilities the space of the page offers in terms of moving words, opening them up, breaking lines, and creating movement are important characteristics of much of his work. But space is not only a poetic concern;

33 Not all of Cummings' poems use the convention of the lower-case “i”; see for example “VI” from “Three”, in *Is 5*, collected in *Poems 1923-1954*, p. 203. This implies that either this is a choice he made poem by poem or that it is an attitude that emerged as he wrote and which he began to employ as a representation of his ethics/poetics. But in any case it demonstrates that what we cannot do here is dismiss the presence of the lower-case “i” as a gimmick or as background noise signifying only that this is a Cummings-poem. In the same sequence of poems, in “V”, Cummings employs both the capital and the lower-case I/i in order to differentiate them: “(here the absurd I; life, to peer and wear clothes./ i am altogether foolish, i suddenly make a fist/ out of ten fingers” (line 14, broken to fit on page; p. 202). The “absurd I” is the I which ‘peers’ and ‘wears clothes’, an I that is ocular, worried about seeing and about being seen. The lower-case “i” is the voice of the speaker of the poem, resisting the incursion of the ‘absurd I’, and this i is “altogether foolish”—that is, operating on a different rationality—and active, making “a fist/out of ten fingers”. The lower-case “i” holds the possibility of rebellion, unpredictability, even violence. Even the deletion of the habitual upper-case mark is a kind of textual resistance. There is no tradition for the lower-case “i” and so there can be no expectations for its behaviour. In the poem spoken in its voice, anything can happen.

it is also a motif that recurs in Cummings' work. Cities, worlds, landscapes, and the space between people's bodies appear over and over. Cummings also deals with space conceptually, as in the poem called "58" from *No Thanks*.

In "58", Cummings figures love spatially as an inexhaustible resource (rather than something which can be hedged in by description). The poem itself is extremely brief, even for Cummings' work; it comprises ten lines, none of which is longer than five words. The longest words in the poem are "brightness" (line 4; ten letters, two syllables) and "skilfully" (line 9; nine letters, three syllables), but all other words, with the exception of "places" in line 5, are single-syllable words. The nouns in the poem are "love", "yes", "place", and "world"; the former two are repeated twice, and the latter two are repeated three times, giving the poem an even slimmer feel by its narrow vocabulary. Added to these are the verbs "move" and "live" (lines 3 and 8, respectively); the two adverbs noted above; two instances of "all" used as an adjective; the copula "is", twice; the demonstrative adjective "this", twice; the article "a", twice; and the prepositions "through" (once), "of" (twice), and "in" (once). There are also two ampersands taking the place of the word 'and'. The poem itself does not take up space. It is frugal with the language it uses, but the effect of this frugality is not miserliness—rather, because the poem is so slight, the nouns receive even greater emphasis from their repetition, making it clear what the poem is about:

58

love is a place
& through this place of
love move
(with brightness of peace)
all places

yes is a world
& in this world of
yes live
(skilfully curled)
all worlds ³⁴

Structurally, "58" comprises two stanzas, each of which is made up of three clauses, one contained in parentheses. The structure of each stanza is identical, and each begins with a clause containing the copula. The two stanzas can be divided into two parts each: the first line, and the rest of the poem,

34 Cummings, 1998: 70.

which is separated from the first line not only by the break but by the use of an ampersand at the beginning of the second line. In each stanza, the first line sets up the premise, and the following four lines describe the premise. In each stanza, the premise is topological—to do with place. The first stanza begins with the assertion that “love is a place” (line 1); the second with the related declaration that “yes is a world” (line 6). The two lines are not only related by their grammatical structure, but also by their components: they each begin with a positively inflected conceptual noun (“love”, “yes”), which is followed by the copula ‘is’, the indefinite article ‘a’, and a noun of a topological or geographical nature which is indefinite or large enough not to be specific (and whose generality is compounded by the indefinite article).

The parallel structures effectively act as ‘nesting-doll’ pieces; “love is a place” (line 1) becomes “yes is a world” (line 6). In the second iteration of the structure, we move from a localised feeling and a smaller expression of topos and toward a more general feeling (‘yes’) and a topos that is in fact “a world” (line 6), something large enough to contain ‘places’. But the poem, by its use of the indefinite article, ensures that neither the place nor the world it invokes are the representation of all possible worlds; they are two of many. And neither the “place” nor the “world” are themselves the finite, be-all and end-all of what *is* in the poem. Through the place that love is move “all places”; in the world that yes is live “all worlds”. The singular ‘place’ and ‘world’ are figures for greater expanses of meaning encountered upon entering the space of love or the space of the yes. The figure wherein love is a place through which *all* places move is a puzzle built to show how a loving relationship, rather than pinning the other and solving all that is unknown, continually opens further and further unknown territory such that one assumes that opening the door to one of the places within the place of love, one would only find further places (and places within those, and on and on).

Despite the notion of containment in the poem (the worlds curled within worlds, the places passing through places), what is ‘contained’ is greater than that which contains it. The logic of this poem comes from the same gesture that is at work in “61”, above. In that poem, the role of love is to ‘fabricate unknownness’. Here, it is the fabrication of the unknown which love engenders that expands the territory once one is in that place. Thus, that which might seem to be contained or containable is, if we borrow logic from “61”, exactly not that. The known opens ever further into the unknowable as further places and worlds are excavated. Where “58” represents these further spaces as “all worlds” and “all places”, “61” refers to them in the future tense, as “what shall discovered be”

(line 10), which is to say, things which continually remain to be discovered. The form that the ideas take in "58", a greater space nested inside a more limited one, is like a fractal image—but imagine that the origin point of the fractal is not in any way larger than its smaller, identical children, except in perspective.

The poem provides some understanding of the nature of the "place" and the "world" beyond their resemblance of the fractal. As noted above, in dividing the stanzas of "58" into two parts, Cummings occasions a premise and a description of the premise. To be specific: The place that love is is a place of transit—"all places" move "through this place of/ love" (lines 2-3). These places bring with them "brightness of peace". The "place", then, is occupied or transversed by love, brightness, and peace. In stanza two, the world of the yes is inhabited by "all worlds" (line 10), which, in order to fit themselves in, are "skilfully curled". The word "live" (line 8) is opposed to "move" (line 3) in the first stanza; rather than a place of horizontal transit as in the case of love, yes is a world that is deeply lived in by "all worlds". For Cummings, the 'place' of love is the place of the 'yes'—an equivalence that is borne out by the parallel composition of the poem, which makes love a place and yes "a world" (line 6) in which "live/ (skilfully curled)/ all worlds" (lines 8-10) in a structure that is mirrored across the poem's two stanzas. Cummings' valuation of love as a place in relation to 'yes' is not, however, exclusive. His choice of words ('place' and 'world') provides the reader with nesting-doll spaces, one larger set containing the next. Love as a 'place' and yes as a 'world' imply that there are more ways than loving alone to say yes—Brennan's ideas of the variety of living attention,³⁵ which includes reason as well as love comes to mind. In Cummings' poem, love and yes are permeable containers of possibility—of "all places" (line 5) and "all worlds" (line 10), which must therefore include those places and worlds that are unexpected, unpredictable, and as yet unforeseen.

The concerns of "58" are not limited to love, in the same way that its geography is not limited to a singular and relatively localised "place". The second stanza expands the terms of operation to include the word "yes". Recall that for Derrida the word yes is intrinsically linked to the idea of love—the idea of what he calls the love in deconstruction, which is primary consideration of the otherness of the other, saying yes to the otherness of the other. By setting the poem up so that its two stanzas parallel one another and so that the second expands the first, Cummings prepares us to see that the 'place' of love is the place of the 'yes'—not only in conceptual terms, but also in terms of actual

35 Brennan, 41.

sentence order. This equivalence is borne out through the poem, which makes love “a place” (line 1) transversed “with brightness of peace” (line 4) by “all places” (line 5) and yes “a world” (line 6) in which “live/ (skilfully curled)/ all worlds” (line 8-10) in a structure that is mirrored across the poem's two stanzas. In Cummings' poem, love and yes are permeable containers of possibility—of “all places” (line 5) and “all worlds” (line 10), which must therefore include those places and worlds that are unexpected, unpredictable, and as yet unforeseen. The “unknownness” fabricated by love in the terms of “61” is not referred to directly in “58” but is nonetheless part of the way that love operates in that poem.³⁶

The context of the poem provides for an understanding of this expansion—that just as “worlds” replace “places”, “love” is replaced by the similarly larger term “yes”—but so does the greater context of Cummings' poetry. This is one of many occasions on which “yes” appears in a Cummings poem. Neither, for that matter, is this Cummings' only treatment of the word ‘yes’ in terms of its spatial properties and connection to love, which are themes throughout his work. See, for example “yes is a pleasant country:”, wherein conditional tenses (‘if’) are “wintry” and call for the ‘opening’ of the year; ‘both’ (“not either”) is a generative temporal space (“when violets appear”); and love is “a deeper season/than reason”. The absolute opening of ‘yes’ here, in contrast to ‘if’, for example, allows for the possibility of any kind of growth, in whatever the conditions may be. In this case, the conditions are “April”; the kind of growth (which Cummings identifies with possibility and ‘yes’ itself) that takes place in April in countries in the hemisphere where Cummings lived and wrote should suffice as an explanatory image here.

In “58”, Cummings is recognising a relationship between distance and love; between the respect for distance and an affirmative stance. His poems are not ‘deconstructive’, but here, too, the most important thing is the distance between the other and the self, across which relationship can occur, and without which it cannot. In his poems, Cummings speaks with a voice and in a form that attempts to be musical, haptic, and artistic; that attempts to resist dominant structures that describe not only how a thing should look but how it ought to be envisioned (cliché). Although his poems predate Irigaray's call for such a language (or such languages, personal creations as they must be) by decades, they nonetheless can be read as examples of such speech, embodying the concerns that other

³⁶ And, when thinking of this in the context of Derrida's use of the words “yes” and “love” together (Interview), this is especially meaningful for the two poems when they are read together. Further discussion of Derrida's conceptualisation of love in deconstruction in terms of the ‘yes’ position will take place later in this chapter.

writers addressed in this dissertation have made their own.

D. Approaching the other via Rilke and Cummings

Both Rilke and Cummings are writing about the experience of loving another person; their approaches are not to texts, but to human beings. However, that does not mean that what they say about the experience of love cannot be taken as metaphor or analogy for the experience of love as an approach to a text. After all, it is the experience of *human* love that is, for most people, originary, not the experience of loving *texts*. The relation between the lover and beloved as it is in the works of these writers refers to human beings but does not only hold meaning in terms of relationships among people. Therefore, although the discussion of approaching the other in their work will use the words 'person' and 'people', this is not the limit of the relations proposed by Rilke and Cummings.

What Rilke and Cummings are talking about when they write about love is the realisation that the other person is exactly that—an *other* person, inassimilable and to some extent always unapproachable across those 'infinite distances' which contain 'all places' and 'all worlds' and are as such unknowable in their totality. Love, for Rilke and Cummings, must be accompanied by the tacit knowledge that the other person is known only in part, and even that part is only known in part. The fabrication—the active creation—of unknownness means that the beloved and the lover continually differ from one another (and from themselves). This difference is what necessitates the act of promise—of the "reaffirmation of the affirmation" which means a continued "affirmative desire towards the Other—to respect the Other, to pay attention to the Other, not to destroy the otherness of the Other";³⁷ the difference necessitates a renewal of the yes which was said yesterday or an hour ago in light of the changed, expanded, or differentiated being of the other. What might Rilke's definitions of love and marriage mean in terms of trying to develop an approach to texts that begins from a point of acknowledging their otherness—a point Derrida also calls love? If Derrida set the philosophical-theoretical scene for a new engagement with texts in terms of 'love', Rilke anticipated him in demonstrating how that love might be conceptualised. Rilke's work also lends nuance to the famous Derridian assertion that deconstruction is not a method and cannot be pinned down or bound to a series of steps by which one 'deconstructs'.

37 Derrida: Interview (1997).

Rilke's conception of love being a relationship where two people come to love the space between them, allowing each to be whole and unassimilated by the other, necessitates the acknowledgement by each of the separateness of the other, and, to some extent, the acknowledgement of the unapproachability of the other. Expanding what for Rilke is a "wide sky", Cummings' space of unknownness, which grows up between two people or is fabricated by love itself, is a whole world made of worlds, a compound place made of other places—the investigation of which is complicated each time it *begins* to know by the more and more complex and multi-partite nature of these places and worlds. Together, these two philosophies of love offer another facet to the approach that this dissertation has begun to construct.

Most of all, what is operative in the works of Rilke and Cummings is the presence of the unknowable in the other. It is this unknowable that defines the love relationship and makes it possible, but, paradoxically, this distance is also a result of the relationship and an outgrowth from it. For both Rilke and Cummings, the loving relationship happens in a place where the one is essentially estranged from the other, in the most literal way. The warning in Rilke is that upon experiencing the difficulty of relating via love, our tendency is to fall into convention—where in fact it is precisely the individual nature of love, and its resistance to convention (and in fact the inappropriateness of applying convention to it) that make it what it is, and that make it so difficult. It is as an individual that one meets one's life, despite the fact of the existence of social, cultural, and epistemological convention (to which one resorts if one cannot bear or has not learned to live in the space of not-knowing). The fact of being an individual ensures solitude and the space between the self and others, which is there whether one acknowledges it or not. If one is able to acknowledge it, however, there is the possibility for fruitful and loving relationships within which one is aware of the problems of assimilation to or of the other.

Such becomes the role of the reader, writer, or scholar when approaching a text with awareness of the text's own propensity to mean more than can be contained by a single reading; awareness that extends to the possibility of readings that contradict one's own, or readings that one cannot fathom. Instead of then attempting to draw these readings in, incorporate them, and in some way render them neuter in the face of one's absolute and domineering one, the reader who approaches the text with the kind of love Rilke and Cummings describe must be able to live with the contradictions, the negative possibilities, and the questions themselves. Love as an approach to the other cannot be a

question of fixing the other into a place that renders them knowable. Instead of a tether, it supplies a door to a field, an ever-widening expanse on which meanings, never absolute, may be constructed and taken apart and built again.

How might this be accomplished? And what role could it have in a positivist situation, structured by hierarchy? The questions posed here cannot be answered in absolute terms, and that in itself is perhaps part of the answer. If the unknowability of the other is the thing, then Derrida's assertion that there is no formula to follow to complete some manoeuvre called deconstruction makes sense. There *is* no one thing, one process, which can be called deconstruction. Instead, it seems to be a *way* of being with texts, objects, and other beings that takes into consideration their inassimilable otherness prior to any other kind of engagement. This is a frustration of the project of research as it stands, in that it does not lend itself to a demonstration of confirmed and replicable knowledge. Instead, what it offers is the possibility of reforming the way knowledge—philosophy—is produced, instance by instance, to individual specifications. It offers the possibility of dealing with the text in an unfamiliar way, which in turn frees the researcher from convention. None of this is a guarantee that what will happen will be 'deconstruction' or 'love' or a 'musical, touchful, artistic' way of speaking, or any of the other names that have been given to such approaches here. In fact, no guarantee can possibly be offered, except that which is produced by the writer doing the work of affirming, constantly and continuously, the otherness of the work (object, text, being) that is approached. The guarantee of approaching the other with one's hands open is simply that: that in this case, an attempt is being made at approaching without meaning to dominate, to fix, or to know absolutely. In 'letting beings be', the writer accomplishes the creation of a space between herself and the other that not only allows for unknownness but necessitates it. It relaxes the stringent hold the need to be sure has on academic work, and opens up the possibility of gaining wisdom from sources other than what is observed empirically or proven materially.

None of this, however, is a recommendation of an approach derived from Rilke, Cummings, Irigaray, Barthes, Derrida, Lévinas, Marion, and Brennan over any other. What it is is an entering of this approach into the field of other approaches, to live in relation to them and to be adapted, changed, approached by others. The point is not to abandon other ways of working, but to imagine new constellations, new patterns of being-together from the things that exist. This means that these constellations are unfixed, always available for new eyes to arrange newly. In keeping with this, the

approach proposed in this dissertation does not come from nowhere, springing fully-formed, arriving as a redeemer; it comes by a careful and diligent rearrangement of pieces (*écriture féminine*; deconstruction; textual erotics; Rilke and Cummings's poetics) which are already in play and as such are already engaged with by others in other ways.

This chapter has shown that the approaches recommended, invoked, and ascribed to other writers in this dissertation have also been enacted in the work of Rainer Maria Rilke and E. E. Cummings. The intention of so doing has been, firstly, to demonstrate that the location of such an approach is disparate and diffuse, rather than locatable and centralised; secondly, it has been to complicate the terms by which the dissertation considers philosophy, demonstrating that the poetry philosophy has historically been called to repress in fact participates in its construction. That such an approach is necessarily incomplete is one of the challenges in writing about it. Its openness can be compromising, making it seem vague or noncommittal. But in its best—which is to say its most attentive—forms, such an approach leaves space for other approaches to coexist with it, as well as allowing for the possibility of that which is studied to have its own life, whether literal or figurative.

The chapter which follows this one, and with which this dissertation comes to an end, will attempt to demonstrate such a way of approaching texts. In form, such an approach resembles a close reading—an enactment of attention to the text, in textual form. Its questions are ontological (how) rather than ontic (what). Its attitude is curiosity that must remain vigilant against coming to understand the other in terms of the self. In short, it can be accused of attempting the impossible—of attempting to let beings be via interference. Thus the importance of attention to the other, and indeed of love for the other, which both affirms the otherness of the other and commits to guarding the solitude of the other. Impossibility is no reason not to begin to approach; in fact, the impossibility of such an approach is its spur. Calling such an approach impossible implies the limitlessness of the field of what is unknown, and provides a starting place for the approach itself. In terms of an intellectual engagement with the world, failure to grasp in the first instance is not necessarily an ultimate and total failure; failure can be an indication of the otherness of things (*I have failed to understand you because I embarked on understanding via the idea that you were like me; you are not; I did not arrive at understanding that way*) and failure can also be the impetus to further exploration, experimentation. Failure to grasp something can, of course, simply be the manifestation of intellectual or emotional laziness or of ignorance. But in Rilke's and Cummings' terms, the failure to completely reach or grasp

the other inheres in the act of loving with attention (with on-going and continual interest in the other)— by affirming the unknownness or otherness of the other.

A coda: reading the burning bush in *Exodus*

A. Introduction

"We can find no scar/ But internal difference/ Where the Meanings are—"

Emily Dickinson

The approach aimed at in this dissertation is about difference, otherness, disjuncture, unbinding, about the otherness of the other as a starting point for relation. However, this approach is more than a restating or rearrangement of one theory of text or another; it activates extant theories which have to do with the other, the text, and the relation between loving and knowing in order to disturb their boundedness and show the ways in which they are implicated in one another. Although it finds a precedent for reading texts in terms of otherness in what is generally called deconstruction and found in Derrida's works, it supersedes a Derridian deconstruction as it has been explored by Culler and others in that it incorporates a concern for the body, affect, and the feminine which has not appeared in those explorations. In constellating the voices of many thinkers, I have aimed to mark "an incompleteness in the internal coherence"¹ of each discipline or area, opening them to outside issues which trouble their boundaries and demonstrate their relatedness.

In this coda, I want to reengage with the question, 'How does this approach work?', by providing a second exemplary case that bookends the 'opening foray' and its reading of Twombly's painting. To reiterate, the choice of the word 'example' to describe these two pieces is purposeful: an example is

neither general (as is a system of concepts) nor particular (as is the material to which the system is applied). It is 'singular'. It is defined by a disjunctive self-inclusion: a belonging to itself that is simultaneously an extendibility to everything else with which it might be connected [...] . In short, exemplification is the logical category corresponding to self-relation.²

As noted in the introduction to this dissertation, the example as a form is inseparable from a layered and active attention to details because its "success [...] hinges on the details. Every little one matters".³ The example is, therefore, a particularly apt form in terms of this dissertation's concern with a non-systematisable way of being with texts.

1 Mitchell, 339.

2 Massumi, 17-18.

3 Ibid.

The reading of Cy Twombly's *The Ceiling* that began the dissertation, and that of the story of Moses and the burning bush that makes up this chapter are radically different. They mark the edges of the dissertation's concerns: one centres on law; the other on emotion. The first exemplary case, which looked at *The Ceiling*, argued on behalf of an understanding of the relation between feeling, affect, and knowledge, and also argued that in this case the former two are, at least in part, generative of the latter. When Mitchell writes that "[v]isual culture entails a meditation on blindness, the invisible, the unseen, the unseeable, and the overlooked; also on deafness and the visible language of gesture; it also compels attention to the tactile, the auditory, the haptic, and the phenomenon of synesthesia", it is perhaps this kind of reading he indicates; a reading that includes information gleaned from all kinds of sources, using and acknowledging all of the body's receptors.⁴ This coda and the second exemplary case it presents—a reading of the story of Moses and the burning bush—finds within a narrative of absolutes and fundamentality a gesture toward openness and the unknowable that undermines a reading of the story that would place it exclusively in the domain of that which is ordained, unchangeable. Speaking together from one end of the dissertation to the other, the exemplary cases show the space reserved in law for the unknowable—in what is arranged, set, known, and commanded for what is uncontrollable and other—and in knowledge for the unknown: what comes from the 'irrational' centres of the body, the heart (what is felt or sensed). They provide touchstones within the dissertation for models of thinking about authority in the collective voice, authority deriving from both law and affect; the field over which a loving approach is played out is the space in each which is contaminated or disturbed by the other.

B. On Exodus, naming, and the void: a secular midrash (מדרש).

Although what I write in this section is *not* a midrash, I invoke the word midrash for several reasons: first, because the example which is approached in this section features, like most other Torah stories, in the rabbinic interpretations and hermeneutic treatments of texts that is the midrashic tradition. As such, it takes part in drawing the boundary between written law and oral commentary; between fixed meaning and fluid interpretation. Secondly, the midrash as a homiletic mode is a figure which suits the approach developed in this dissertation. Thirdly, the midrash already appears in the literature of critical theory, which makes it a resonant figure in the landscape into which this dissertation makes its way. Elisa New calls midrash the

⁴ Mitchell, 343.

"non-legal, often highly imaginative writing that comprises a large part of the Talmud and indeed of the whole Jewish exegetical corpus [...] . In midrash we find what is antic, wayward and even perverse in Jewish writing. In midrash one discovers an intrepid delight in word play, an imaginative precocity and a resistance to what is nowadays called closure akin to the most daring of deconstructionist acrobatics",⁵

identifying in one movement the tendencies which most closely align the two ways of reading, despite fundamentally different attitudes toward, for instance, the absolute presence of the divine. However, the aim of this section is not reading the midrash themselves; the midrash is a figure for what I am doing here (investigating a Torah story) because of the precedent that exists in critical theory for seeing midrash as a way of reading that is sympathetic to the concerns of much poststructuralist or deconstructionist writing and reading. The most basic reason that the textual interactions in this section only use midrash as a figure is that, as Beth Sharon Ash writes, midrash is "restrained by the requirement to respect God's words".⁶ There is no such divine requirement to be respected here; thus the midrash as a figure only inflects my reading insofar as it models an approach to the text which is contradictory, open, possible. *Midrash and Literature*—the 1986 result of a series of seminars which brought Derrida, Hartman, Bloom, and other literary critics from the U.S. together with scholars of the Hebrew University, and the most obvious precedent for work like this—engages with the question of the possibility to find in the form, figure, or texts of the midrash a way of understanding some literary works or ways of being with texts. Essays in *Midrash and Literature* "interpret literature, including authors such as Milton, Defoe, Kafka, Borges, and Agnon, guided by the critical assumptions of midrash", further providing a precedent for midrash as a way of reading even non-religious texts, or the reading of religious texts in a non-religious circumstance (as in Derrida's atheistic reading of kabbalah and midrash).

Furthermore, that midrash in the Jewish tradition a homiletic form lends nuance to this dissertation's argument that wisdom does not only come from empirical, 'objective' observation: a homily is a kind of religious teaching which is intended primarily for *spiritual* education rather than for doctrinal or dogmatic instruction. As such, it has potential as a mode of investigation which does not rely exclusively on the known and fixed, and which is open to anomalous understandings of or

5 New, Elisa. "Pharaoh's Birthstool: Deconstruction and Midrash". *SubStance*, Vol. 17, No. 3, Issue 57 (1988), pp. 26-36. This quotation, p. 27.

6 Ash, Beth Sharon. "Review: Jewish Hermeneutics and Contemporary Theories of Textuality: Hartman, Bloom, and Derrida". *Modern Philology*, Vol. 85, No. 1 (Aug. 1987), pp. 65-80. This quotation, p. 70.

approaches to the world. The homily is a space of interpretation. Not only that, it is a space of interpretation that opens the listener or reader up to things which cannot be proven but must be felt, intuited, or taken on faith. It does not align itself with a rational positivist understanding of the world. The homily's spiritual aim means that it—as a way “of ‘worldmaking’, not just world mirroring”⁷—takes its understandings and meanings from things which cannot be seen, proven, or demonstrated, not only from the empirical.⁸

The midrash is part of the tradition of Jewish education; it is an name for both a way of studying and for compilations of homiletic teachings themselves. The midrash complements the central biblical texts, and tests the “notion that knowledge of reality is absolute, static, and eternal”, instead “convey[ing] a plural, contextual, constructed, and dynamic version of reality [...] a heretical multiplicity of answers”.⁹ To see the midrash in relation with the biblical texts is to come to an understanding that “the gaps, repetitions, contradictions, and heterogeneity of the biblical text must be *read*”,¹⁰ which is to say that the ‘errors’ or ‘misreadings’ or openings—the eroticism—of the text to the reader *cannot be discounted simply because they go against some singular, fundamental reading*. The fundamental reading is biased (in the way that Mary Midgley describes positivist science or ‘objectivity’ as biased—partial in every sense, without acknowledging its partiality). Moreover, such a reading ignores what it professes, which is a complete and immersive faith in the book *as written* (by God), which must *include* its contradictions, gaps, and fallings out of the tradition of the rationally sensible.

Sartre writes,

How can anyone choose to reason falsely? It is simply the old yearning for impermeability [...] there are people who are attracted by the permanence of stone. They would like to be solid and impenetrable, they do not want change: for who knows what change might bring? [...] They have no wish to acquire ideas, they want them to be innate [...] to adopt a

⁷ Mitchell, xiv.

⁸ There is no denying that the writings of the homiletic tradition of various faiths can be and have been used to doctrinal and dogmatic ends. But that they *have* been so used does not mean they cannot be otherwise approached. In addition, the tradition of homiletic writing, while it descends from religious traditions (like many pursuits of wisdom), is not exclusively a religious one; there are humanist precedents beginning in the 16th century with the work of Johannes Reuchlin and Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam. This section locates itself to some extent within that tradition. However, this section does not, and this approach is not meant to, identify itself as a form of religious or secular humanism. That is, there is no investment in the tradition of humanism beyond its figurative appropriateness for the approach taken here, in this exemplary instance; nor is there any attachment to particular religious implications.

⁹ Zornberg, Avivah. *The Particulars of Rapture* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), p. 5.

¹⁰ Ibid, 6; quoting Daniel Boyarin.

mode of life in which [...] nothing is sought except what has already been found, in which one never becomes anything else but what one already was.¹¹

Here, he is talking specifically about antisemites, people who adopt an attitude which goes against their 'higher' senses—reason, intellect, logic. But the 'yearning for impermeability' he cites here is likewise part of the orthodox resistance to 'contaminating' readings of a holy text. There is no 'logical' or 'rational' reason to reject them, if the matter at heart (the existence and desires of God) cannot be proven empirically. Since it cannot, can it really be threatened by such alternate readings? Clearly the feeling that it can is there, since these readings have been for the most part sidelined, suppressed, or punished. But the midrash is a reading of multiplicity, of negative space, which in fact falls within the tradition of readings; which falls within that tradition despite its alterity. The midrash shows the space within the orthodox for the possibility of alternate readings, and of understandings or conclusions which are not absolute. As I will discuss more specifically below, this possibility for other readings both exemplifies the textuality of the stories and offers them as sites within which other ways of knowing—knowledges disjoint from the written law, from rationality, and from absolutes—can take place. These other ways of knowing, which have the maintenance of the otherness of the other at their heart,¹² offer a place for a loving approach, an approach that refuses to grasp, possess, or know, but relates in fact to "the absence of the Other [...] in a horizon of the future".¹³ The specific instances in the story chosen here (Moses and the burning bush) of the unknowable other suggest it as an exemplary story. But it is also the corpus of texts which began as oral commentaries on the written Torah (law), the midrash itself as a way of reading, which suggests such an approach.

Because of the way that the midrash can show the incompleteness of that which represents itself as orthodox, absolute, or unchangeable, there are certain parallels which have been drawn to the relation of deconstruction to the metaphysical tradition of philosophy. The centrality of conceptions of reading to deconstruction makes the midrash a rich figure and a space for investigation; both the midrash and deconstruction can be seen as theories of reading, or ways of reading. Likewise, the oral nature of the midrash (complement to the written text of the Torah) has obvious parallels in deconstruction; so does the interplay between law in the Torah and the revision or play of language

11 Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Anti-Semite and Jew*, trans. George J. Becker. (New York: Schocken Books, 1948), no page given. Quoted in Zornberg, 2001: 103.

12 For instance the unnamedness of God—compare this to Rilke's conception of love being a condition in which each person guards the other's solitude (see Chapter 5, Section B).

13 Lévinas, 1993: 51.

in the midrash. Geoffrey Hartman goes so far as to write that "criticism and midrash also blend",¹⁴ and Ash calls Hartman's readings of midrash and his location of criticism and midrash on the same plane "a self-conscious determination to save the Bible from what he sees as the locked room of literature, the closed corpus".¹⁵

One noted similarity between midrashic texts and deconstructive or poststructural readings/writings is a mode of reading which approaches the gaps in a text—that, as Ash puts it, "hold the Talmud open".¹⁶ Another is that both deconstruction and midrash foreground reading as an act of interpretation, "as hermeneutic, as generated by the interaction of [...] readers with a heterogenous and difficult text".¹⁷ Although a reading of midrash that aligns it with the concerns of poststructuralist or deconstructionist readings is not unchallenged,¹⁸ nevertheless, writers like Boyarin, who insists that the "sovereign notion informing the reading of midrash is 'intertextuality'"¹⁹ and identifies three specific qualities of intertextuality²⁰ which inform his readings, demonstrate that a reading which figures midrash in the same vein as deconstructionist readings of other texts, or understandings of deconstruction itself, is neither unlikely nor unwieldy.

As noted above, the midrash has already been investigated as a mode with similarities to literary criticism, and in particular to deconstruction.²¹ While it is invoked in this dissertation alongside names associated with poststructuralism and deconstruction, this section does not propose to undertake a reading that primarily foregrounds an argument about the similarities or differences between a midrashic reading and a deconstructionist one. Instead, it approaches the story of Moses and the burning bush in order to find the potential, in a fundamental story for both Judaism and

14 Hartman, Geoffrey. "The Struggle for the Text" in *Midrash and Literature*. Ed. Geoffrey Hartman and Sanford Budick (New Haven: Yale UP, 1986), p.12.

15 Ash, 71.

16 Ibid.

17 Boyarin, Daniel. *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 5.

18 See the debate between David Stern and Susan Handelman in *Prooftext* (1984-85) following his review of her book, *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1982).

19 Boyarin, 12.

20 Specifically, Boyarin cites the following three senses of intertext which resonate with poststructural echoes: "the text is always made up of a mosaic of conscious and unconscious citation of earlier discourse"; "texts may be dialogical in nature—contesting their own assertions as an essential structure of their discourse"; and "there are cultural codes, again either conscious or unconscious, which both constrain and allow the production (not creation) of new texts [...] these codes may be identified with the ideology of the culture, which is made up of the assumptions that people in the culture make about what may or may not be true and possible, about what is natural in nature and history" (12).

21 See Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*; Susan Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses*; the debate between Handelman and David Stern in *Prooftext* (1984-85) about Handelman's reading of midrash; Geoffrey Hartman in *Midrash and Literature*; and Joseph G. Kronick, *Derrida and the Future of Literature*.

Christianity, for the unknown to emerge. The unknown in the story is what the approach outlined in this dissertation focuses on, because that space—space of incompleteness—is what calls for a loving approach, an approach which is not first of all or even *at* all about being able to identify and fix the other. Along the way, it would be impossible *not* to mention deconstructive or midrashic possibilities for or exemplars of reading. But the focus of the chapter is not a dissection of the debate about the relation between these kinds of reading or writing. Instead, the focus is an approach to this text via the questions set up in earlier chapters: What could this text want, where lack is construed as desire? Mitchell's question about the desire of inanimate objects relies on a way of reading that is based on what cannot be absolutely known (the desire of *any* other). The homiletic form of the midrash—a form that is composed *as* interpretation—indicates the desire of the text to be read and interacted with. This disallows the singular, fundamental reading and opens the text to continual reading and interpretation.

Investigation of the term 'midrash' and its application in or relation to recent literary theory, especially that part of theory called 'deconstruction' has not only occurred in the work of Derrida, Heisemann, Hartman, Handelman, and others who are associated with literary theory, critical theory and/or deconstruction at some historical moment which is now imagined to be past or even *passé* (the 1970s-90s). The 'how' of the interpretation of midrash, and the legitimacy of understanding midrash as a way of reading that is meaningful for literary theory, are ongoing debates. Contemporary Israeli scholar Avivah Zornberg also undertakes a study of and through midrash in order to investigate what she calls the 'Biblical unconscious'. Zornberg's work is of particular interest to this section because by foregrounding the place of the unconscious—the midrash being the space in which the unconscious is given room to play and create meanings which complicate the central stories of the Torah—her work gives importance to what goes unsaid and must be sensed, felt, or drawn out by play in meanings. Because of her emphasis on the unconscious, in Zornberg's analysis of the midrash we are faced with scenes in which we can never be assured of the absolute verity or meaning of the face-to-face encounter (human with divine or human with text). There is always something inexpressible beyond what has been written on paper or carved into stone tablets. Zornberg sees the "blurring of boundaries between revelation and interpretation, between the written [i.e. absolute] and oral [i.e. ephemeral, mutable] Torah" as "a fundamental mode of the rabbinic imagination".²² The rabbinic imagination is the place of foment for the midrashic texts

22 Ibid, 2.

themselves, which, in their “hospitality to the very concept of multiple alternate narratives”²³ refuse an either/or alignment, and in so doing “destabilise the public narrative”.²⁴ In Zornberg’s words, if “fuller and richer languages for redemption are to evolve, fantasies that fetishise the past must be relinquished [...] .This is where the midrashic mode is powerful. Here, past and present interact: the original text of *Exodus* and the [supplementary] narrative” which creates meaning and interrogates the text itself.²⁵ Where a fundamentalist reading of a text reads only the ‘positive space’—the accepted history, the text as an uncomplicated, unified, and impenetrable object—the midrashic texts, and this reading, both form and read the ‘negative space’ of subjective experience, commentaries, and “a persistent intertextuality that makes it impossible to imagine that meaning is somehow transparently present in the isolated text”.²⁶

Central stories, whether those of a religious fundament or a philosophical one, are about containment; about ruling in what supports the central meaning, and ruling out the things that complicate it. In dealing with the central narratives (for the midrash, of the Torah; for deconstruction, of law, knowledge, origin), however, the centrality of these stories is acknowledged even as the contradictory or supplementary narrative unseats or repositions them. The midrash as a figure or a space of investigation is a way of playing by old rules in order to change the possibilities for understanding the world. The next section of this chapter will approach a biblical story of fundamental importance to Judaism and Christianity, the story of Moses meeting his God on the mountain, in the form of a burning bush. The role of fundamental stories in orthodox religions is to represent in stone, so to speak, the origins and beliefs of those religions. This role requires a single, stable understanding of these stories, so that ideas of origin, hierarchy, and truth of belief are not challenged from inside. The apparition of God (Yahweh or YHWH) to Moses is central because it is part of the story of the beginning of Judaism *as* Judaism, and, for Christians, the beginning of the one-God-one-People story that they trace as Christ’s genealogy. I want to reread that story to see whether something which is of rigid, central, fundamental importance in stories of religious obedience and belief might also be a call to opening, to wonder (at the unknown), to the absence of fundamental answers, and even to *dis*obedience. This rereading has at its heart a desire to understand the story in terms of its possibility, not simply its precedence; if “the terrible beauty which is born at

23 Ibid, 4.

24 Ibid, 3.

25 Ibid, 13.

26 Ibid, 2.

Sinai is to be of more than historic interest, it must [...] be continuously reexperienced".²⁷ In short, I want to approach this story asking what is lacking or what opens in it, to see whether it is possible to find in it something that runs *counter* to a fundamentalist reading: to approach this story, set in stone, and to do so in order to look for dimensions other than those which have been calcified into the strong bones of fundamentalisms. What in this story offers the possibility of reading the 'yes' to the other—yes itself being the fundamental affirmation, the 'love' of the other? Where in this story are the traces of love that call for a loving approach in return?

B.1: Dereliction of duty

The example with which this section is concerned is a story in the book of Exodus, the second book of the Torah (known in Hebrew as *Shemot*, שמות). The book itself narrates the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, beginning with their enslavement. Exodus recounts the story of Moses' birth and adoption by the pharaoh's daughter, his encounter with the burning bush, the plagues, the Passover, the flight through the Red Sea, the journey in the wilderness, and the giving of the Commandments at Mount Sinai. I choose the story of Moses and the burning bush because it is the first instance where relation happens directly between YHWH and the people. I also choose it because this is the beginning of the rule-giving relationship that most famously culminates in the handing-down of the stone tablets on which are written the commandments central to both Judaism and Christianity (at least, for the latter, until they are supposedly expunged by Christ). This rule-giving, hierarchical relationship forms the basis in orthodox versions of both religions for other such relationships, such as that of the father to his daughter or a husband to his wife. Therefore, the moment at which it begins can be, and traditionally has been, read as part of this relationship—one based on obedience.

Moses is keeping the sheep of his father-in-law near Mount Horeb, in "the farthest end of the wilderness", when something unusual happens: an angel appears to him in a fire, a bush that is burning without consuming itself.²⁸ At this point, alone except for sheep and a being who might be a hallucination or a threat, what Moses does is to turn *toward* the thing he does not understand. Moses' action, which leads to a conversation with his God, is the beginning of the split between

²⁷ Ibid, 277.

²⁸ Exodus 3:1; Horeb is generally thought to be another name for Mount Sinai.

polytheistic Egypt and monotheistic Israel.²⁹ It is the origin of a fundament which deepens in importance in monotheistic cultures, the identification of the single author, single source. But despite its position at the beginning of a story which can be used to justify an exclusive and even punishing fundamentalism, the story of Moses and the burning bush is *also* a story about the importance of disobedience, of turning away, and of paying attention to the unorthodox. In short, it is a story about saying yes to the unknown other—the importance of approaching the other with love rather than fear (i.e. without a demand for fixed knowledge or identification).

When he sees the bush burning; when the angel speaks to him, Moses' bodily gesture is a gesture of 'yes'. He says, "I will turn aside now, and see this".³⁰ This is the first part of the story. The whole first part: Moses tends his father-in-law's sheep, sees something strange, and goes to look at it. What does this story want? At its centre is a beckoning hand, the demand of the strange to be seen and considered. Moses's affirmation of this demand's validity (by his responsiveness) emphasises it: it is correct in the terms of the story to see and respond to things which are not immediately understood, or even are not part of the vocabulary of a time or place. The story must want its readers also to respond to the unknown or unfamiliar with attention. This makes sense in terms of the story as a religious text, which wants exactly that—the affirmation of the listener or reader of the existence of something which cannot be explained and which is beyond understanding (the divine). But as a text, besides its religious sense, the affirmation of the unfamiliar or unknown points to the text's own otherness. Moses' yes to the burning bush is a model for a readerly yes (of continued reading, interpretation) to the text itself.

What does it mean to make a bodily gesture of yes to the unknown (even the unknowable)? And how can we read this gesture within this story? A fundamental reading is reductive: it reduces this action to an unavoidable impulse. But there are many instances in the Torah of people 'hardening their hearts' (i.e. not paying attention to communications with their God), implying some freedom of choice in their relationship to God. So it cannot be impulse alone. In this case, what might be read as unavoidable impulse can also be seen as a conscious decision to turn aside, away from the task, and 'see this'. After all, Moses is in this moment doing work he has been assigned by a very present, and, I

²⁹ Jan Assmann: "The space severed or cloven by this distinction [between Egyptian and Israelite cultures and religion, which takes place in Exodus] is the space of Western monotheism". *Moses in Egypt: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), 2.

³⁰ Exodus 3:3.

presume, possibly threatening authority—his wife's father. Turning aside from his work tending the property of his father-in-law, Moses is not responding to a higher authority, but to his own sense of what is important or right to be doing. In the first moments of this story, Moses is deciding that in fact the rules (of family hierarchy, or obedience to one's superiors) are not what matters: this thing which is *not* part of the ordinary system is what matters. As a foreigner (despite his embeddedness in Egypt), Moses' choice to turn away from the order of his assumed family and country is especially precarious and therefore especially noteworthy *as* a moment to be read. His self-preservation (that part of himself which sees and acknowledges the things he individually, rather than socially, familially finds important) is *not*, in this instance "subordinated to something higher" in "a kind of blind automatism which drives the system".³¹ Instead the beginning of this relationship is found in Moses' rejection of his place (shepherd) and his disobedience to the known order in favour of what he does not know.

Moses' decision affirms the value of the unknown relative to the work he has been doing (for the known order). When he says that he will 'turn aside now, and see this', Moses designates two actions in response to the Other: abandonment of the known, and attention to the unknown. Moses' gesture implies curiosity, willingness, and courage: he goes to meet the unknown and unknowable Other in response to its call. He turns away from the work an authority (his father-in-law) has set for him, and goes to find out his relationship to what is calling him. Moses' yes begins with this curiosity, willingness, and courage that allows him to set aside his responsibilities and develop a relationship to the Other who appears to him. Regardless of the historicity of this story, or of Moses, this gesture is a figure for meeting any other. Moses *decides* to treat the other with belief; that is, as though the other were divine. To treat the other with belief is what allows the abandonment of the pre-ordained path, not once, but continually. The divine, which is perpetually unknowable, must require a renewal of the desire to know. Where fundament sees Moses' turning primarily as the instance in which all is solved (leading finally to the utterance 'I am the Lord your God; you shall have no other gods before me'), it is also possible to see Moses' attention to the burning bush not as a final model but as an inaugural model. In this case, the 'yes' which is signified by his willing attention to what is unknown in the place of what is known and expected (his responsibilities and role) must be reiterated in the face of an endlessly unknowable Other.

31 Havel, Vaclav. *The Power of the Powerless* (New York: Palach Press, 1985), p. 29.

To read Moses' gesture here as anti-fundament (that is to say, to read it as other than the erection of a stable and singular mode of reading and understanding the passage itself and the world as it relates to the passage) is to complicate the kind of relationship possible between the human and the unknown or unknowable, here represented as the divine. If, in turning away from the known, Moses is not entering into another version of the known or determinable but into a relation with the continually unknowable, then the nature of this relationship is also unstable and to some extent indescribable other than in its effects. If the relationship is unknowable, then it is difficult to say what forms it 'ought to' take. However, the Other with whom Moses speaks is not completely other. As the story continues, Moses is given information which both situates him in relation to that Other and underwrites a reading of that relation which sees it as continually inaugural.

The result of Moses' approach of the burning bush is a conversation with it; a conversation which is recorded in the bodily gestures of one party (Moses) and in the spoken gestures of the other (God). But, rather than fixing that relationship into place and designating each participant's being and role, the conversation offers a way of reading that renders this relationship in flux.

B.2: Unfixability, unspeakability: 'I will be what I will be'

The story of Exodus is a story which is ritually retold; it forms part of the Passover Haggadah, the stories told every year. Although the ritual retelling of a story can indicate its ossification and solidification, the nature of oral storytelling means that it *also* will tend to mutability, adaptation. The oral retelling and the ritual repetition of the story of Exodus mean that the story's being is multiple: it is also the repetition, the recreation of itself. Because of this repetition, there is space made in this story for the unknowable, for the gaps within the larger narrative. In fact, the fact of God's reluctance to self-identify leaves space for further and further readings: the meaning of the divine is (re)constructed each time the story is told; the waiting-time for the divine (the time before 'will be' becomes 'am'; the time of waiting for the Messiah) is perpetually spun out and reconfigured. In reading this story, this second part of this short story—the part where, having left his flock and stepped out of the hierarchies of domestic and working life, Moses goes to have a conversation with a burning bush—I want to concentrate on the reply that is given to Moses when he attempts to

ascertain the identity of the being with which he is speaking. The question Moses asks, and the reply he is given, are concerned with the function of the name: the place it assures, its fixative properties. Moses' name is obvious: it is Moses (brother of Aaron). The name of the being to whom he speaks, however, is another matter. The descriptive word 'God' is used, but the name God gives itself here is represented as YHWH (יהוה), which is not necessarily so easily pinned down. The inexactness of the name of God (in this story, the being with whom each other actor has an originary relation) indicates that the relation to the other always and primarily takes place on a field underwritten by the unknowable. An approach to the other which acknowledges that as such is loving.

Within Exodus, the story of Moses and the burning bush is not a long one. It has two main elements: Moses turns aside from his work, and Moses speaks to God. Moses' conversation with YHWH is short; in fact, it is hardly a conversation. YHWH speaks to Moses, telling him that YHWH has "seen the affliction of My people that are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters" and has "come down to deliver them".³² The first exchange between YHWH and Moses ends with a request: "Come now therefore [...] that thou mayest bring forth My people the children of Israel out of Egypt".³³ Moses' answer foreshadows what will come: he asks "'Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?'"³⁴ The concern with the place and nature of the self that Moses expresses (who am I [to you] to deserve this; who am I [to my family, to my nation] to do this thing) also expresses his desire to be fixed by YHWH in a place which will guarantee his actions. To some extent, this guarantee is in place: YHWH says that Moses will "serve God upon this mountain" after having brought the people out of Egypt.³⁵ But Moses' question is a question of relation (Who am I to do this: who am I to you, and who am I to them?) which relies on an understanding of the parties with whom he finds himself in relation. Even after YHWH affirms Moses' place as a servant of God on Sinai, Moses asks "'Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them: The God of your [parents] hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me: What is [the name of God]? what shall I say unto them?'"³⁶ Moses is attempting to fix the being in front of him, to find a way of referencing and encompassing it so that it, too, can act as a guarantee for his speaking. In order for the name to be such a guarantee, Moses needs one that will be intelligible to those to whom he will speak.

32 Exodus 3:7-8.

33 Exodus 3:10.

34 Exodus 3:11.

35 Exodus 3:12.

36 Exodus 3:13.

The answer given to Moses does not necessarily conform to this desire. The words spoken by God, אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה (YHWH asher YHWH), can be and have been variously translated. Typical English translations include 'I am who I am', 'I am who am', 'I am that I am', or 'I am what I am'. All of these translations have in common a certainty of being which, despite its non-taxonomic stature, still gives a sense of *how* the being is which is speaking. That which 'is what it is' creates by this tautology a sense of permanence, actuality, presence, and stability. It makes sense, in a reading that looks for a solid foundation, to translate the utterance in this fashion, because such a translation casts the speaking divinity in a way which renders it self-absolutising. The divine itself, in these translations, by the pragmatics of the sentence, assures the listening human that the being of the divine is the being of the divine, a totality that pervades time and continues in an unchanging being. The fire that says 'I am what I am' to Moses is a proof, for those who take the Bible at its word, of the self-professed unchanging, absolute nature of God.

There is, however, another way to translate the answer given to Moses, and that is to read YHWH asher YHWH as 'I *will be* what I *will be*'. The imperfective verb—not the accomplished action of being in one state which is and has been always so—is a place of ambiguity. It represents a lack of commitment on the part of the divine, or a lack of willingness to fix itself. YHWH's refusal to provide a definitive name by which Moses can call YHWH means that YHWH's being remains mysterious and ungraspable. In an interview, Avivah Zornberg glossed this interaction, saying, "God is being evasive. I'm not giving you a handle [...] to say, now I've got him [sic]. That's a name. Instead God says, I am the very principle of becoming, of allowing the possible to happen".³⁷ This God is "to be encountered in the challenge of 'words', of language that asks for responsive language, that requires a 'listening to the voice' of the speaker, in all its human resonance".³⁸ In other words, the God who speaks to Moses is a God of relation and of what happens in the space between two. This is a space of the unknowable, in which the otherness of the other is a continual obstacle to fixing identity. In this story in particular, it is a space in which the possible (the unknown future tense of 'will be') can happen. The principle of allowing the possible to happen is antithetical to a reading which seeks fundamental absolutes and fixes meaning. It is, however, central to a reading which approaches the other from the position of saying 'yes' to the unknowability of the other-as-other.

37 Zornberg, Avivah. "Exodus: Cargo of Hidden Stories". Interview with Krista Tippett. *On Being*. April 14, 2011.

38 Zornberg, 2001: 45.

The ritual occurrence of the story of Exodus lends nuance to this principle, and it is also this ritual which underlines its textual nature. In being repeated, in re-incarnating in the mouths of people, in their minds, and in their spaces, the story performs the text's expansion and ceaselessness; each repetition invokes the repetition that is to come (next year). At the same time, the fact in the story of Moses stepping off the assigned track and of the God who refuses to make itself solid and understandable (graspable, fixable), seem to call for an approach to that story which also honors the places where it departs from orthodoxy, order, and nameability. A reading which is multiple (i.e. which takes place over and over by its nature, each generation reading and thereby reorganising, reordering, the meaning of the story³⁹) is already a departure from a religious metanarrative which privileges the singular and absolute. The demand for retelling, and therefore, in this context, the divine *order* for multiplicity is explicit in some passages, for example Exodus 9:16 (I have freed you so *that you may tell my name over all the earth*), Exodus 10:2 (I have hardened his heart so *that you may tell your children and your children's children* what I have done), or Exodus 13:8 (God telling future generations how to speak retrospectively about the event of liberation from Egypt, including telling them to say that the Passover Seder is celebrated because of what God did in Egypt). The story, even as it is happening, or, in the latter example, even before it is happening (the 'story' of this verse is the prediction of the celebration of the Seder) is of something being done in order for a story to be told about it. A story *can* be retold exactly as it was first told—the existence of moveable type made this not only possible, but of a dominant likelihood. But, especially with situations of oral transmission (such as pre-Gutenberg, or simply the oral repetition of the Passover story), the chances are that 'errors' in transmission will be made; that the story will not remain 'faithful' to a single way of being, but will mutate and shift according to who tells it. The centre of the story becomes everywhere and nowhere; it lacks a single definitive telling. Likewise, the God at the centre of it, in refusing to provide a fixing, graspable Name, eludes the human desire for affirmation of the permanence of what is known. The God who says 'I will be what I will be' in the context of a story which is *made to be retold* is a God who rests in the certainty of uncertainty, whose being is not attached to a single authorised way of telling the story, and indeed whose identity (such as it is) is founded on the space of what cannot be known.

In the story of Exodus, a story concerned with the liberation of a people, the central, liberating figure

39 Zornberg, 2001: 12.

(God) refuses to tell all the story and in fact anticipates the recreation of the liberating events in language. It is therefore in the adaptability of human storytelling that liberation happens; freedom, rather than being 'out there,' waiting to be attained, is achieved *through* retelling the story. The creation and recreation of a text on liberation shows that "language is the very means by which the imprisoned heart gains freedom".⁴⁰ The story of the liberation happens by being told—by God, by humans. The role of language is its possibility for 'corruption', for change, for being what it will be. What truth there is is generated by speaking, each time the story is spoken. Each speaker is in Moses' place—asking 'Who am I to tell this story?', speaking, in Zornberg's words, beyond their means. But speaking beyond one's means, beyond the limits of reason or of what is *already* known, does not delimit this speaking from the generation of affective, spiritual, or emotional truths; "one does not have to *possess* or *own* [...] truth in order to effectively *bear witness* to it".⁴¹ 'Truth' in a story where the locus or origin of truth refuses to reveal itself is necessarily shaky and decentred, hard to find. In such a story, it makes sense for truths to be generated multiply.

In this reading of the story of the burning bush and its relation to the context of the liberation story of Exodus, the relationship of the human to the divine is a continual deferment of knowing. The relationship is not an absolute, static, ready-formed thing which can be objectified, described, and formulaically undertaken. This deferment renders both the relationship and the parties involved to some extent in the dark. But this dark is not empty, unapproachable, or itself absolute: it is the space between two which is fruitful, full of desire to know, full of obstacles to knowing which provide for the continuance of desire. A reading which suggests that all is already present in the positive spaces of this story neglects the negative spaces, the unwritten ways in which the story represents a turn away from absolute, known orders, and toward a relationship with the unknown, which refuses to *be* known, and also toward an understanding of that relationship as renewable, mutable, and unorthodox. The possibility of reading the story of the burning bush as the story of the unknowable Other, and of a relationship to the other based on turning away from the established order does not necessarily replace any other reading of this story. But it can exist alongside other readings, especially other readings that might fix and concretise the relation and its parties, troubling them. Where fundamental readings require absolutism, a reading of the spaces here—the space between the unknowable and the known, between the self and the other who speaks, the space one crosses to say

⁴⁰ Zornberg, 2001: 16.

⁴¹ Felman, Shoshana. "Education and Crisis, Or the Vicissitudes of Teaching", in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, Chapman, and Hall, 1991), p. 15.

yes to the other via the gift of one's attention—requires the opposite: it calls for a willingness to allow the unknown to rest as such. Unfixed and ungrasped, the unknown can still teach, effect, and make us feel. What it cannot do is dictate a single way of being with it. Without such dictation, we are free to approach it via an acknowledgement of its unknowability; that is, perhaps, to approach it lovingly.

C o n c l u s i o n

A. On the way: via Derrida

"Between our responsibility and our actions, the passage is never given in advance, but must be reinvented with each welcome—right there on the threshold.... deconstruction as hospitality, would be neither as science nor a method, but, to use Derrida's words, an art or a poetics that attempts to invent new ways of inviting or welcoming the unexpected into a particular language and context without immediately subjugating it to them, without immediately making it conform to them"¹

I want to close the dissertation with a return, rather than a straight passage out: a return to Derrida which is at the same time not a return, since although I am returning to his writing, I am returning to writing that is not considered elsewhere in these pages. Throughout the dissertation I have been writing about the text as an other among Others, something which can be approached and which approaches us. Implicit in the idea of approach is the encounter on one's own or foreign territory, and the question of hospitality—of welcoming the foreigner and of being welcomed—is integral to that encounter. A reading of the transcriptions of Derrida's lectures titled *Of Hospitality* complicates the approach to texts I have tried to develop and demonstrate in this dissertation. I hope it also shows, pointing backwards through *this* text, the importance to my writing of Derrida's thinking, both in terms of concepts and in terms of process, and I hope it demonstrates where my writing might make a small movement onward.

Derrida opens *Of Hospitality* with the question of the foreigner. That is, with an examination of that question: "the question of the foreigner is a question *of the* foreigner, addressed *to* the foreigner. As though the foreigner were first of all *the one who* puts the first question or *the one to whom* you address the first question. As though the foreigner were being-in-question"² The question of the foreigner: that is to say, what to do with that outsider over there, the one who doesn't belong or isn't from here? The one whose very being-as-foreigner is assigned the moment she speaks or makes any motion that renders her intelligible, visible, part of a scene that is the sort of scene requiring response. Whose being-as-foreigner and whose being-there is an implicit question or first move itself (precipitating the public movements of law and the intimate movements of emotion). *As though*, he says. The question of the foreigner is *as though* the foreigner were (were summed up as, were definable as) 'the one who puts []/'the one to whom [] is put', where [] = 'the first question'. That *as*

1 Naas, 2003: 165.

2 Derrida, Jacques. *Of Hospitality*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 3.

though. Meaning that the clauses that follow it are not necessities. Instead of statements of truth about the foreigner, they are statements about how the foreigner appears: both at the moment of apparition (the foreigner appears by) and the way the foreigner looks (to those who look at or respond to or read her). "But also the one who, putting the first question, puts me in question,"³ Derrida writes. Where arrival on the scene is a question for the arrivant, it is as much a question for the one who is already present, because the foreigner changes the order as it exists: where before it was (x), now it is (x+1). An arrival from outside makes the inside recognise itself as inside, and puts the inside in question: what can it accommodate? How can it be itself-as-it-was now that this new element has arrived? Or does the as-it-was only exist as a backwards projection, visible because of the foreigner whose arrival has made the host the host? So it is that the outsider, the foreigner, defines the one who is at home. The arrival describes not only the one who arrives but the one who is arrived-to.

The most intimate home is the one we carry with us, which is to say the body. Or language. But

what in fact does language name, the so-called mother tongue, the language you carry with you, the one that also carries us from birth to death? Doesn't it figure the home that never leaves us? The proper or property, at least the fantasy of property that, as close as could be to our bodies, and we always come back there, would give place to the most inalienable place, to a sort of mobile habitat, a garment or a tent? Wouldn't this mother tongue be a sort of second skin you wear on yourself, a mobile home? But also an immobile home since it moves about with us?⁴

Language as a second skin is a home one step removed from the body, which with its first skin covers the soft and penetrable insides, both of which move around with us, rendering us always 'at home' or at least in a fantasy of 'at-home-ness' regardless of where we are. Rendering also the world into concentric rings of at-home-ness and foreignness? The self at home in the body, language at home in the self, language foreign in contact with others' at-home languages (even while at-home to the self), the foreign body in its host country (speaking the language [with an accent] or [badly] or [not at all] or [with the wrong inflections] or [with regional vocabulary], giving itself away). And in giving itself away, which is to say revealing itself but also providing itself as a gift to the other (to the host in the case of the foreigner but also, in the case of the host who reveals nativity in one way or another, including through her abilities with her own language). What are the conditions of this giving-away? Is the foreigner "to speak our language, in all the senses of this term, in all its possible extensions, before being able and so as to be able to welcome him"?⁵ That is, is the intelligibility of the foreigner's

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid, 89.

5 Ibid, 15.

speech required before the foreigner can even be recognised *as* a foreigner, i.e., as someone who is-to-be-welcomed? Or, in other words, is the foreigner only the one whom I can already see? The one who already falls within my understanding of what is not native or internal (demonstrating by marking out this limit that there is “no hospitality without finitude”)⁶? Is even recognising a foreigner an indication of some kind of unsightedness, that is, of an inability to see anyone who might be foreign but still unintelligible (invisible), foreign in ways that are unpredictable?

Derrida's address to this question is in the differentiation he makes between hospitality and absolute hospitality:

To put it in different terms, absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner (provided with a family name, with the social status of being a foreigner, etc.), but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names.⁷

To welcome the foreigner absolutely, even without knowing them as 'foreigner', which is to say without confirming one's own status as within (native, welcoming, host), is almost passive. The *I* 'gives place', 'lets come', 'lets arrive', and 'offers' without asking anything—without even asking the foreigner to identify herself. Absolute hospitality is a question of making the most intimate boundaries permeable not only to those with the correct identification and permissions, but to those who come without warning, unexpectedly, and without papers. Perhaps, then, absolute hospitality is also a question of not-knowing where the boundaries are (of leaving the border stations without guards, as it were), such that there is not even a case of permission for the foreigner to approach but simply points of entry which the foreigner may or may not take. Is it more welcoming to ask the question 'who are you'—to recognise the other standing there—or to go without the question, to perform “a double effacement, the effacement of the question *and* the name? Is it more just and more loving to question or not to question?”⁸

Derrida provides his own answer in the form of an attitude, a way of turning oneself: “say yes to *who* or *what turns up*, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any *identification*,

6 Ibid, 55.

7 Ibid, 25.

8 Ibid, 29.

whether or not it has to do with a foreigner, an immigrant, an invited guest, or an unexpected visitor".⁹ Being in the attitude of saying yes means letting the door be already-open, regardless of who crosses it or doesn't. Saying yes, that is, even without the expectation of the arrivant *being* a foreigner; with no expectation at all, even the expectation of arrival. Saying yes to what arrives without requiring that what arrives be categorised as 'foreigner' or some other kind of thing means extending welcome without needing to do so: without doing so *because* that is what one does vis à vis the foreigner. And in order to extend a welcome without the 'need' to do so (without it being called-for by the kind of relation at hand) one has to extend this welcome regardless of what it is extended to. Hospitality, in its absolute sense, must arise because it arises rather than arising only as the appropriate response to the foreigner's arrival. There can be, therefore, no 'must' about it. It is perhaps instead a question of election or decision, in each moment rather than ahead of time, to "[suspend] language, a particular determinate language, and even the address to the other", to "submit to a sort of holding back of the temptation to ask the other who he is, what her name is, where he comes from" and to "abstain from asking another these questions, which herald so many required conditions".¹⁰ Saying yes to whoever or whatever turns up might mean even not-speaking to it, not giving in to one's own desire to know (to name); it might mean acknowledging that even what one can ask about the other represents a set of expectations that in their being already limit who and what the other can be. Absolute hospitality exists in the possibility of letting the other be even as she/he/it crosses one's own threshold. In other words, maybe, it consists of not requiring the other (via one's questions) to assimilate itself to the limit or set of understandable beings/ways of being.

How can I encounter (can I?) a text as a foreigner, without anticipating what that means? How can I encounter a text without an assumption of its qualities as a foreigner or not-foreigner? If a text is a foreigner to whom I can speak, with whom I can have a relation by being-read or by being-written, what is my responsibility to it? Likewise, interrogated by a text that asks me '*who are you?*', how should I respond? Should I respond? Can I? Who I am changes in relation to where I arrive and who is there; where I arrive and who is there change in relation to my arrival. Perhaps silence is the best way to approach: unspeaking, without even the assumption of nativeness that a greeting might imply. But 'tipping one's hat' is *also* a sign of being in a space together, of acknowledging shared ways of being. To approach a text as an other, to respect its fundamental otherness and to attempt, in

⁹ Ibid, 77.

¹⁰ Ibid, 135.

reading it, not to assimilate it but to consider it as something external to, and therefore unknowable in some part by the self who reads, is, in the terms of this dissertation, to approach it lovingly. This dissertation has been my attempt to answer these questions, even though they are to some extent not answerable, or only answerable on a case-by-case basis rather than by a generally applicable law. These writers' gestures toward a language and wisdom which are corporeal as well as cerebral, ask for a way of being with the other, an approach to the other, which is relational, which takes the unknown into consideration and which makes room for it. The question of what it means to love a text or to read lovingly, and the answers that the history of philosophy and theory I encountered provide, as well as my own answers, add a small facet to the body of work that exists—from Derrida to affect theory.

B. Afterthoughts about method

"Such is the genesis of the theory of love: an accident...a desire to talk."¹¹

To some extent, I see my way of working during the writing of this dissertation as trying to perform Derrida's challenge to suspend or hold back one's questions for the other. That is not to say this was entirely intentional. I did not enter the writing with an academic background, which meant some assumptions I might have been able to make about relationships between writers/texts I *wasn't* able to make. I had assumptions about theory and about literature, not all of them thoughtful or useful; I was not (am not) an ideal encounterer of texts-as-foreigners. I have my own hangups and problematic prejudices. But at times, coming to theory, I found my lack of foreknowledge (not only of a canon but also of some of the usual ways of approaching or reading the canon) allowed me to read in ways that were different to but that complemented reading with my rational intelligence. I also read with my body that shivered and prickled, with my sense of synesthesia that colored texts gold, silver, pink, blue.

My entry into theory and into writing about it insofar as I have been able to enter these things began after an afternoon walking around in the 20th-century section of the university library and coming across *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*. It came about via my willingness to (or my inability not to) trust my sense of texture as a way of grouping things and a way of interpreting them. What I was

¹¹ Barthes 2002 [1978], 183

learning with my intellect I was also learning with my sense receptors. I put faith in the seemingly accidental—the coincidental, the felt, the intuited, the contingent—as a way of arriving, and found an ethic of reading and of writing in how accident defers (to an extent) my ability to control what will happen. Writing about love did, initially, come out of a desire to talk, and more than that, to be able to explain—to myself as much as to anyone else—what was happening in my own life. While the facts of my life while I was writing are not part of this dissertation, they form its impetus and substrate. They contributed to its formation and sensitized my eyes to the combination of words in Barthes' title. The anecdotal and theoretical, the affective and the rational, are bound up in the material life of this dissertation, as they are now in the other work I make.

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