

**Conference: “Derrida Today” (Sydney, July 10-12, 2008)**  
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*Some preliminary remarks:*

This is an abbreviation of what will become a published paper, perhaps, for the journal *Derrida Today*. And whilst I touch on some ideas from the work of Maurice Blanchot and Gregory Ulmer, these will not be covered in any great complexity now but rather will form, hopefully, more cogent analysis in the extended version of this paper.

Indeed the orientation of this paper delivered today has shifted emphasis to the original intent. Let me read from my original abstract published in the Derrida Today programme to open up the differences and conceptual links to what I’m about to deliver:

[ABSTRACT]

The title of this paper was to be:

*Perennially Homeless: Deconstruction—a disciplined non-belonging*

In the context of the academy today, what is it to say that we belong in a perennial condition of translation? That is, a translation *process* across, and of course internal to, the borders of [its] disciplinary borders? Perhaps, our contemporary notion of inter or trans disciplinarity constitutes and, at the same moment testifies to, a desire for something more primordially akin to Heidegger’s homelessness. A homelessness, I’m cautious to add, that is “inherent” in the forces of deconstruction — here we would want to deconstruct notions of the filial and legacy.

This paper desires to traverse a desire for (our) homelessness in relation to a constituted instituted notion of interdisciplinarity to reveal the trace of *its* (metaphysical) path. Our strategy here, via a deconstruction of sexual difference in relation to (some of) *its* contemporary disciplinary discourses, is to reveal a more originary question on the question of sexual difference today. Further we hope here to broaden a dialogue on the relevancy of deconstruction in the university today.

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In what you will here today this paper carries forward a notion of perennial homelessness into a radical questioning of belonging and identity explored via Heidegger located in his text *Identity and Difference* and furthers this relation to the notion of the proper or restricted economy that is housed within an academy’s disciplinary borders to a more primordial deconstructive question of *écriture* in the general economy. [Perhaps, I/we — or Je-Nous — find proximity to what Stephen Barker in his paper yesterday suggested via Steigler’s neologism *Default* that finds proximity to Différance. For instance, Steigler’s Default, as Barker’s paper suggested, rejects any form of disciplinarity and rather chooses to name what he does as a *hyper-philosophy* – on the basis of his thinking of technics as the originary default or in Derrida’s terms the originary *différance* as an arche-writing. My connection here will be to link up *grammatology* as that *technic* if you like, as a way of approaching the question of concepts; thinking differences, and their proper place for

discoursing constitutive of laws invented in languages housed within disciplinary borders to the question of sexual difference].

That is, this paper now takes up via Derrida's text *Spurs* its deferment of the question of woman to style for an opening up of my question of sexual difference to a grammatological one. That is to say, if there is a discipline such as feminism that it would be a category of the system of the Book (in the capital B) as a totalized encounter. In this restricted economy the discipline of Derrida (and here I evoke a question of what might constitute this conference in its titular head) and to continue, the discipline of woman are both totalized and thereby lose the impropriety or contamination of what deconstruction and grammatology can bring as a question.

[NEW PAPER FOR DERRIDA TODAY]

*The Question of Style Today: The Impossible Return*

(aka this (then) will not have been my text)

“The joyful wisdom shows it well: there never has been *the* style, *the* simulacrum, *the* woman. There never has been *the* sexual difference. If the simulacrum is ever going to occur, its writing must be in the interval between several styles. And the insinuation of the woman (of) Nietzsche is that, if there is going to be style, there can only be more than one” (Jacques Derrida. *Spurs Nietzsche's Styles: Éperons: Les Styles de Nietzsche*, 139).

The title for this paper was to have been *Perennially Homeless—a disciplined non-belonging*. However—it is *style* that will be my subject. They might however, if one wonders, amount to the same thing—or is it to the other.

You may have already recognized a debt in the opening lines to Jacques Derrida's *Spurs Nietzsche's Styles* as a text that deals with *the question of style* as a question of truth, woman and the proper. Derrida's *question of style* is also a quotation, a debt also that he suggests in the opening pages to *Spurs* that serves to recognize and add to “a new phase in the process of deconstructive (i.e. affirmative) interpretation”. In my own appropriation of the this quote, this paper hopes in its revisitation to this phase or phrase to open up the question of style today. *Spurs* quotes itself whereby *the question of style* refers to a first version of this text, which was presented at the colloquium on Nietzsche held at Cerisy-la-Salle in July, 1972.<sup>1</sup> *Spurs* initially came as a response by Derrida delivered in this 1972 symposium entitled “Nietzsche Today?” Derrida interpreted the second word of the title by choosing to speak on Nietzsche and women, “La «femme»—*le mot fait époque*,” Derrida says in 1972. The French expression “*faire époque*,” translates in English as “marks an era.” The era marked by the word “woman” was the “today” in which Derrida speaks. Jane Gallop suggests in *Derrida and Feminism: Recasting the Question of Woman*: “like the feminism with which it was contemporary,

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<sup>1</sup> It is also quoting the authors of works that raise the question of style initially as an opening onto contemporary spaces for deconstruction. *Spurs* refers to these authors in a footnote by way of acknowledging where he has appropriated this quote from. “The «authors» of these works (Sarah Kofman, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Bernard Pautrat, Jean-Michel Rey) were present at that lecture” (147).

*Spurs belongs* [italics mine MOC] to the era [1970s feminism] of ‘woman’.<sup>2</sup> Certainly Gallop’s paper engages with the question of the plurality of “women” as a way of shifting (her) perception(s) of a universalized and dated pre-suppositional thinking proffered by the singular “woman” of *Spurs*. However, my response does not entirely accord with the responses to *Spurs* by feminisms of the 70s, 80s, 90s that can be gauged via a text like *Derrida & Feminism* which has taken into consideration the “critique, correctness and seductions” perceived by Gallop *et al* as *Spurs*’ offering to feminism.

The question here that arises through a question of an era, woman and style is situated by Deconstruction on the question of the proper and its others. In taking up the challenge of speaking on the relevancy of Derrida today I have returned, as this conference title has clearly hinted at, to a question of belonging and the proper that is so poetically driven in *Spurs*. In fact, as I have pointed to, it is the question of style and its question of belonging in the context of the academy that is most pressing for my conception of “today”. It is a question that has been recently posed by others (Simon Critchley, Gregory Ulmer for instance) that it may be time to give grammatology another look in terms of its key importance to Derrida’s project and the ongoing relevancy it has for writing otherwise: To an otherwise to the law of the proper of, for instance the academy, in a move toward a general economy rather than a restricted economy that would house the proper of writings many laws of genre etc. That is, grammatologically-framed *Spurs* can be read as a question of style that activates a radical inscription that for us offers a contestation to those modes of academic writing that have been modeled on classical models of thought, to logocentric paradigms of thought. Whilst this may not be an explicit intention *stated* in *Spurs* as a text where Derrida signs Nietzsche’s styles, or other experimental texts by Derrida, certainly there have been those who have signed the work as such. For example, concerning *Glas* Gregory Ulmer suggests:

*Glas* is not composed in the conventional manner of the academic book because it is explicitly an anti-book, written as an alternative to the classical model of the book. Derrida has argued in *Of Grammatology* and elsewhere that the Book as such reflects a certain model of thought based on Platonic, and ultimately logocentric, paradigm of thought, one with which the restriction of writing to communication is consistent.<sup>3</sup>

Ulmer’s essay is addressed to those interested in “testing the replicability, the scientific value, of this experiment in a new academic writing.”<sup>4</sup> Initially *Spurs* attached itself to my *signature* for precisely how it demonstrated sexual differences across regions of style or genre and here genre and gender interlace an otherwise discourse; a desire that speaks a Blanchotian *nothing* or radical absence in language and culture, to the traditional academic model of disciplinary.

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<sup>2</sup> Jane Gallop, “‘Women’ in *Spurs* and Nineties Feminism,” in *Derrida and Feminism: Recasting the Question of Woman*, ed. by Ellen K. Feder, Mary C. Rawlinson and Emily Zakin (New York & London: Routledge, 1997) pp. 7-20; p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Ulmer, “Sounding the Unconscious,” in *Glassary*, op. cit. p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

Similar to the opening themes of Derrida's *Of Grammatology* the work of Maurice Blanchot, who will be returned to, suggests writing must pass through the Book. That is to say, occidental civilization is founded upon the Book as the condition of possibility for meaning, knowledge, totality, presence, memory, systematicity. It matters little which transcendental signified—God, the Subject, History, the Proletariat, the Nation, the American Family — is claimed as the origin of meaning; what is essential here is that the Book is a strategy for evading the radical absence at the heart of language and culture. Blanchot writes in *The Infinite Conversation*: “The book: a ruse by which writing goes towards *the absence of the book*’ (IC 424). The book is a ruse, an act of cunning, whereby what Blanchot calls the *energy* (IC 425) of writing, what we describe later as desire or inspiration, is displaced in the Book: logocentrism is bibliocentrism. It will be the task of this paper to insert this crucial frame of grammatology (the history and theory of writing) into the question of style as a way of providing the rationale for deconstruction in relating the critique of metaphysics to the apparatus of literacy.

As a return to grammatology Gregory Ulmer's work in relation to what has already been raised as the quest for a new academic writing or new theory of poetics original text *Applied Grammatology* offers, TODAY, great support. That is, *applied grammatology* insists upon a distinction between deconstruction and grammatology. This is helpful for Ulmer because his invention with deconstruction was to “reread Derrida's *oeuvre* from a perspective that turns attention away from an exclusive concern with deconstruction”. To get beyond what even Derrida suggested as the hype of deconstruction as stated by Ulmer in *Applied Grammatology* (we could elaborate on the time of this saying but I would suggest this would return it to a Levinasian said of the proper of any notion of a “today”) and sign Derrida's deconstruction in the name of *grammatology* otherwise than proper. That is Grammatology for Ulmer is to quote “a more inclusive notion, embracing both deconstruction and “writing” (understood not only in the special sense of textualist *écriture*, but also in the sense of compositional practice). Deconstruction and Writing are complementary operations. Writing is privileged in Ulmer's study, as he suggests “in order to explore the relatively neglected “affirmative” (Derrida's term) dimension of grammatology, the practical extension of deconstruction into decomposition. It is both the affirmative and decompositional elements of writing's relation to grammatology although here attempted through readings of experimental texts by Derrida and signed otherwise to restricted propriety that guide our aims as previously stated in making the question of sexual difference a grammatological one.

Further, Ulmer has suggested, “Western metaphysics, *that is*, is a synonym for “literacy.” Heidegger himself rarely acknowledges this frame, acting at times as if the pre-Socratic philosophers invented “thought” out of some pure moment at which nature (physis) revealed itself, when the fact is that physis (and the categories created to name it) is an emergent effect of writing.” However, as we know, Derrida is indebted to Heidegger's “destruction” in relation to the question of language to the metaphysical truth. If our question here is on style we need also to acknowledge Heidegger's own experimentations with writing (see *Contributions to Philosophy (from Enowning)*). In this important but unreadable attempt, in which he tried to follow his insights into poetry as the “other beginning” of Western thought, Heidegger recognized that not just certain terms, but

every word in the dictionary is a concept. Western metaphysics, and ontology specifically, is in the first instance the classification system of literacy as an apparatus (technology, institutional practices, identity formation and so on). Philosophy, in other words, is to literacy what ritual is to orality. There is no “end” to metaphysics, but only another metaphysics, native to the emerging apparatus of post-literate technologies. Heidegger’s insight was that his philosophy of transition out of literacy required some compromises. His advice was to follow the lesson of Heraclitus, to write after the manner of the oracle of Delphi, which was neither to show nor conceal, but to intimate (not inspection, but circumspection).

Derrida’s own work pushes to the extreme this circumspection by taking from the materials of language and rhetoric an extraordinarily evocative quality of thought. Whilst this paper draws on some of what can be conventionally classified as some of his most poetical works, certainly his most experimental texts (such as *Cinders*, *Glas*, *Spurs*, *The Post Card*, etc) all of his writing reveals a rigour with respect to a style of circumspection that activates its scenes of textual controversy. That deconstruction must be performed in order to be comprehended makes a question of *its* styles (there is never only one) as they shift face according to the con-textual sites located in each work, an ongoing demand for the reader. In this framing of style via a revisitation today of grammatology I aim to reveal the relevancy of style as the post-metaphysical response of deconstruction. Further to activate the question of style, as has Ulmer, as the other to the proper of academic writing firmly in the grasp of what he has pointed to as the category system of the alphabetic apparatus otherwise known as metaphysics. As suggested in the preamble, this paper folds in the ethico-political-poetics of Maurice Blanchot as a way of an approach to the ethics of style activated in deconstruction via both Blanchot and Emmanuel Levinas (the latter’s ethics being implicit in the former’s work). In this sense style grammatologically framed brings a question of the ethical and political into poetics. But first to the question of the proper through Heidegger’s thinking on *belonging* as we return to the scene of *Spurs* and its contemporaneity.

*Return 1—The improper proper of belonging* [The paper does a series of returns although we only get today to hear about the first with the rest having already been alluded to]

My focus returns to the notion of belonging in Gallop’s statement, which I will refresh: “like the feminism with which it was contemporary, *Spurs belongs* [italics mine MOC] to the era [1970s feminism] of ‘woman.’” Our emphasis here on the word *belonging* of woman rather than the “women” who “belong” to the discourses of feminism(s), activates a critical otherwise thinking on the notion of the proper via Heidegger. In the *Principle of Identity* in *Identity and Difference* we note Heidegger’s shift in emphasis on this notion of *belonging* in its relation to the concept of *together*. Heidegger emphasizes the belonging rather than together in relation to identity, being and the same, essentially that the same does not co-inside with the identity of being, and that precisely because we emphasise *belonging*, it may emerge only out of the most radical encounter with what does not as yet belong. That is to say, our belonging as an event of identity (and not difference or *différance*) only becomes a question when we are threatened by a not-belonging constitutive of a monolithic and metaphysical understanding of identity as self-

presence. Feminism, it could be suggested via Gallop's proposition, like the feminism on which she is looking back [70s — she classifies herself as belonging to 80s feminism] together with *Spurs* belongs to the era of "woman". How much has it shifted in this respect? Perhaps the disciplines of Derrida and Feminism, in their encounter or confrontation, over the grounds of *Spurs*, for example, throw up critique, correction and seduction as the institutionally determinable and determined responses on behalf of securing the margins. Indeed, in the for and against of Derrida, in Feminism's approach to the centres and margins, recourse to security in a philosophy of the margins is precisely to centralize the margin itself as a truth seeking, and therefore castrating move. Shoring up feminism with Derrida is equally the undermining of both. The spatial-temporal logic of "for" or "against" on the question of sexual difference are both deconstructed by *Spurs* and offer an hypothesis on the grammatological entry point (angle) on an otherwise writing on sexual difference, style, genre, gender or what could never be in terms of a discourse on metaphysical existence such as ontology, a categorical subject. Derrida's *spurian bookends* open with as I take you back to this paper's opening: "The title of this lecture was to have been *the question of style*. However—it is woman who will be my subject." (*Spurs* 35-7). To a proximal closing: "There is no such thing as a gift of Being from which there might be apprehended and opposed to it something like a determined gift (whether of the subject, the body, of the sex or other like things—so, woman, then, will not have been my subject.)" (*Spurs* 121).

**[END PAPER HERE]**

*Return 2—Grammatology as a framing of Style*

*[BELOW IS STUFF I COULD USE]*

The possibility of thinking sexual difference can no longer be thought through any disciplinary framework that simply neglects or refuses without negotiation deconstructive strategies for elaborating a critique of Western metaphysics, which includes both the philosophical tradition but also the everyday of thought and language that has structured our thinking on sexual difference. We would suggest this deconstructive critique begins with Nietzsche and Heidegger even though it is the work of Derrida that has *forged* its name "deconstruction." Thus, with chapter four, *Spurs* becomes our first angle of entry into the textual-accounting, the ledger without return, or the taking of not-taking of Derrida's textual enterprise. *Spurs* engages an opening of a fourth to the triumvirate of Nietzsche, Heidegger and Woman, who would have been both Derrida's subject and not his subject.

Are we, in our approach to the question of sexual difference, becoming filial to deconstruction? Perhaps our research is nothing more, nothing less, insofar as a method of mimesis carries on the moving chain or network of *his* work as work that frustrates the

desire “to get to the point.”<sup>5</sup> We may want to firstly, then, deconstruct this notion of what it is to follow Derrida, i.e., to be a good, loyal “subject.” We emphasise, in our reading of “ATVM” in chapter six, the necessary relations between the double stricture of deconstructive commentary and interpretation as a necessary incoherence and betrayal for opening a text’s repressed meanings. Derrida here emphasises the complicity of fidelity and betrayal as response and responsibility to the other, as a non-return of what is given to encounter. This would coincide with an impossible saturation of context as closure of meaning necessitating decision with respect to a question of meaning and the activation of contingency, accident and errancy, through which the non-intentional may be disseminated through discourse.<sup>6</sup> Derrida suggests in *Monolingualism of the Other* that one must “invent in your own language if you can or want to hear mine; invent if you can or want to give my language to be understood.”<sup>7</sup>

Are we suggesting more than just a mimetic method? It would be a peculiar mimesis, one that emphasized betrayal, grafting, parasitical hosting and supplementarity, a mimesis of the blanks emphasized in *Dissemination*’s “Double Session.”<sup>8</sup> The above quote implies that a faithful interpretation of him is one that goes beyond Derrida. He installs invention as a necessary component of any deconstructive reading. And yet we have recourse to quote him *verbatim* precisely on the question of moving from/to him in another invented language. Are any of our readings of the *four* texts deconstructions? This would suggest that deconstruction is a style, method or procedure, that something *is* or *is not* deconstructive. If Derrida once had recourse to an architectural metaphor to say the meaning of deconstruction, as the “trembling of the keystone” in the arch, not in order to bring down the structure but in order to locate the moment of structural stability as the most fragile moment, then deconstruction is an each-time engagement with assuredness, decisiveness, the naturalization of meaning, even within the texts of Derrida, and perhaps most pertinently within the texts of Derrida. Again, this is elaborated in chapter six with respect to the impossibility for knowing those precise moments where one leaves the order of commentary and moves into a more “violent” interpretative phase, where one moves from inspecting the arch to soliciting it, trembling it in order to locate the keystone. It is precisely on this notion of *not* separating out the readings that makes it impossible to actually speak of a “work” of deconstruction. That is, there is no neat border crossing between his text and my text. It is the reader who signs the author’s name, each time giving a text its propriety, authority, proper belonging to a community of questioning. We will also shortly come to speak of these undecidable borders in relation to the supplementary logic that performs its chiasmic path across the collection of these texts.

### Methods 3: Grand Styles — Textual-accounting & the Taking of Not-Taking

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<sup>5</sup> *Dissemination*, op. cit., p. xvi.

<sup>6</sup> See also Derrida, “Signature Event Context” in idem, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982) pp. 307-330.

<sup>7</sup> Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other or the Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. by Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) p. 57.

<sup>8</sup> See *Disseminations*, op. cit. pp. 173-286 but also “The Filial Inscription” in *Plato’s Pharmacy*, pp. 84-94.

*Turnover*: The “ethical” movement of writing and reading deconstructively comes from a reading that is not conventionally about, for instance, summing up a text’s themes, affirmations and so on nor looking at the biographical details of an author’s life outside the text. There is no outside to the text, as we emphasise in chapter seven with respect to the strategies of *Glas*. Rather, deconstructive reading is an impropriety to the authority of a text and in this sense is the imposition of the improper to any author, through activating precisely that which is out of *control* in the controlled forces of an authorial propriety (and its weakness) of language. In our own textual economy the attempt is for a reading both *forceful* and *weak* without hierarchy, without return. In the following *ledger* of stylistic strategies we wish to reveal our motivation for the thetic approach. Deconstructions latch on to a writer’s motivations at times forcefully and playfully but always (one hopes) for the movement of productive critical reading, which is to say to question the question of a community of questionableness. Our motivations, our intentions, perhaps our willing or our needs, are stating themselves always paradoxically, contradictorily, argumentatively, passively, obtusely. They are always intertwined with the *other’s* text which we sign and a textual economy of otherness that is beyond comprehension, truth as correctness, presence or saturation of meaning. Our stylistic ledger is somehow meant to account for a methodology that we are as yet still not able to name:<sup>9</sup>

### *Return 3—Blanchot’s politico-ethical-poetics*

Blanchot asks, in the name of the *community*, whether it is better to remain silent on what has been almost impossible to speak of without default, that is, its contemporaneous purpose. In responding, Blanchot gives and obliges his reader to not answering and at that very moment to not remaining silent. But, rather, to choose words exactly that discover a politico-ethical poetics: “That [it] does not permit us to lose interest in the present time which, by opening unknown spaces of freedom, make us responsible for new relationships, always threatened, always hoped for, between what we call work, *oeuvre*, and what we call unworking, *désœuvrement*” (*The Unavowable Community*).

Part of the aim of this paper is to unpack this quote whereby relations between Blanchot’s poetics and temporality, sites of the unknown and ethics, work and worklessness activate a relation of self to the other as his *unavowable or dissolute community*. This is not the community fosters by metaphysics but as I previously mentioned, is the community of writing; of poetics; artists; that speak otherwise through a desire that speaks a Blanchotian *nothing* or radical absence in language and culture, to the traditional academic model of the disciplinary. Blanchot’s community I would suggest here that those exacting words that open up unknown spaces of freedom that make us responsible for new relationships come from the place of the other. An other I suggest is within us already in the sense of a Levinasian and Derridean ethics; that comes before us and reduces the self to an infinite otherwise knowing of-its-self. So let us assume for

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<sup>9</sup> Deconstruction as a dual “methodology” a double gesture of reading and writing, double science, is also a deconstruction of the notion of methodology with respect to the ideal of an methodological strategy that consists of an observer being absolutely exterior to the object, text etc being examined.

expedience sake for the time of this presentation that both Emmanuel Levinas's ethics and Jacques Derrida's impossible or unconditional gift underpins the thinking for reading Blanchot's site of politico-ethical poetics. These poetics that come from the place of otherness, are exacting in their strangeness and we do not choose them in the sense of a rational and predetermined choice but rather they speak us. In this paper, I aim to show that these words are more than spoken or written and can be contextualized further as the incomplete or infinite artwork (Blanchot's worklessness) as Blanchot's community that occur through an excess of self. I, will of course, return to this notion of excess as it corresponds desire with respect to Blanchot's poetics. Blanchot's *politico-ethical poetics* opens up the unknown present conditioned by a temporality that operates between what he names work (*oeuvre*) and unworking (*désouvrement*). Blanchot's lesson for choosing exacting words for a discovery of literature's politico-ethical poetics is for a concern with time; or what we could term a *temporality of ethics* that is activated through relations of work and worklessness activated in and through *political-ethical poetics*.

### *Solitude*

Blanchot's thinking on solitude, which begins his meditation on literature, shifts from the solitude of the writer in his early thought to the solitude of the work in his later writings. That is, solitude exists in the essential solitude of the work of language that is removed from the solitude of the writer alone. Or rather in language what is to remain silent is the solitude of the writer. The paradox here is that it is in language that the solitude of the writer is expressed i.e. not alone in language. Blanchot insists on this double bind where he, as I quote him, "is not free to be alone without expressing the fact that he is alone" (from *Gaze of Orpheus*, 4). Blanchot's solitude can only be expressed by means of that which precisely denies solitude: language. The law of writing therefore is privation whereby its other is absence and so solitude is only solitude in relation to its otherness: Blanchot continues to suggest by this paradox that, to quote him, "a person who writes is committed to writing by the silence and the privation of language that have stricken him" (*Gaze of Orpheus*, 5).

To summarise this point on solitude; the condition of possibility for literature is a certain silence (what Blanchot also describes as the nothing), the silence of solitude, whereby the writer has *nothing* to express. This nothing as the writer's silent solitude is the source of literature that we come to know as the *unavowable community* or what I come to equate with the *simple facticity of being riveted to existence without an exit* (Blanchot's *essential night; essential solitude*) but driven by an insatiable desire for the origin of the artwork: As Blanchot suggests, "having nothing to write, of having no means of writing it, and of being forced by an extreme necessity to keep writing it" (*Gaze of Orpheus*, 5). The radical incompleteness of the artwork (literature), its worklessness, is its source and thus preserves the possibility of literature whereby this incompleteness prevents the artist standing back from their work and saying, as Blanchot suggests in the *Gaze of Orpheus*, 'at last it is finished, at last there is nothing' (GO 20).

In the opening quote to this paper, Blanchot's suggests a *radical otherwise knowing of community* in a performance of a *political-ethical-poetics* that gives the unconditional relation to the other as a possible way of being in today; in the contemporary.

*Time of the Récit: a political-ethical-poetics*

How does Blanchot's question of what literature is perform and otherwise poetics? If style is our subject how does Blanchot's poetics escape metaphysical subjectivity? I would like to pursue these questions further by engaging on the site of Blanchot's *récit* as a practice of his poetics (a saying otherwise) that can come to demonstrate more poignantly my concerns around a temporality of ethics in the time of his writing: A temporality akin to Derrida's time-out-of-joint or *différance* that articulates an uncertainty for the future that is both excessively predetermined or predestined and never arrived at. Or to put it another way an arrival at the destination before even having taken the journey, an arrival that defers and differs from that which was imagined once. This is the temporality of Jacques Derrida's *différance* and Blanchot's *récit*.

*Récit: Fragments and Steps (pas, step—not): The Madness of the Day*

What time I have left I would like to focus, albeit briefly, on particularly two of Blanchot's writings; the first formally a *récit* that hints at an end all such formality in *The Madness of the Day*. And the second; a form of criticism in *The Gaze of Orpheus*. What is this end to formality? The movement *roman* to *récit* appears initially in his two versions of *Thomas the Obscure* to the refinement and eventual disappearance of the *récit*; what is called in *The Madness of the Day*, the *pas de récit* (the one step more/no more of the tale), when Blanchot stops writing "fiction" altogether (or so it seems). Both Blanchot's fiction and criticism reach a point where they undergo fragmentation and pass into one another, something that can be seen particularly acutely in *The Writing of The Disaster* (fp 1980). I would suggest that we would want to read Blanchot's work as a movement toward a kind of transcendence of the distinction between fiction and criticism and form and content implicit in both genres. And further see it as the production of literature as its own theory and whose genre of expression is the fragment. This fragmentary position transcends comprehension in its refusal and produces an alterity irreducible to presentation or cognition, an alterity that can variously be named with terms already mentioned as in *absence, the essential night, community, silent-solitude, radical passivity* and *worklessness*. In an improper fashion then we suggest that Blanchot's *récit* is a site for excavating a Levinasian temporality of radical alterity, exteriority or infinity of an uncertainty for the future that is both excessively predetermined or predestined and never arrived — a site of the *unavowable community* that performs a temporality of ethics as Derrida's *différance* or time-out-of-joint.

Let us trace this temporality as the performative utterance that hides itself as it witnesses itself as an archive for its re-telling of a story; a future-passed (or future-anterior), Blanchot's *pas* or step—not. What Blanchot has elsewhere described as the *Yes yes*<sup>10</sup> as a performative utterance that implicitly marks out its temporal logic of a return to the point of departure only to find it has shifted, moved on as the demand for understanding, conceptualization, comprehension, possession of meaning would *have it*.

Blanchot's *récit* activates a space of literature where time breaks and another order of time *takes* not in the sense of a taking for mastery, possession or centrality for comprehension. But rather, a temporality of *taking* that expresses Blanchot's writerly concern in the "form" of the *récit* as an exhaustion around the mere condition of possibility of narrative and in this same moment its impossibility. In *The Madness of the Day* the narrator recounts, that is, he gives *us* the possibility of narrative; a story of his existence that does not add up to those who see him otherwise. The other as Law of reason cannot understand why this man has ended up where he has, when he had so much promise. A promise that lay in the task of story-telling and yet contradictorily for these representatives of the Law, they cannot understand why a man who has such ability in telling cannot recount an orderly narrative of his own existence. Likewise the protagonist/narrator confesses this is beyond his capacity: "I had to acknowledge that I was not capable of forming a story out of these events. I had lost the sense of the story." (Blanchot: *The Madness of the Day*, The Station Hill Reader, 199) Blanchot's protagonist/narrator activates the impossible-possibility of narrative by frustrating the story; in starting it over-again at the end. That is to suggest narrative is a recounting of experience that knows the experience only through a retelling. Here, *Augé's* self-posed-solitude is not far from such an experience. All narratives are a rehearsal, an archiving, a retelling, a repetition as iteration. Narrative impossibility (and possibility) is in its "recounting facts that he [the writer] remembers". The remembrance is another story in terms of why he might be retelling at all, which I have linked earlier, and aim to make stronger, to an insatiable desire for the source of the artwork as worklessness: The radical incompleteness of the artwork (literature), its worklessness, is its source and thus preserves the possibility of literature whereby this incompleteness prevents the artist standing back from their work and saying, 'at last it is finished, at last there is nothing' (GO 20).

Blanchot's *récit* enters into the space of literature where no more stories happen as they depart from their sense. This space of literature or Blanchot's ethico-political-poetics between the possibility and impossibility of narrative or *récit* activates this relation between work and unworking. The temporal logic (or madness) of Blanchot's *pas* (step—not) is of the story "of what never happens," or the impossible narration that is the whole story of the non-story of Blanchot's *récit*. This temporal *pas* (step-not) is conditioned by the impossibility for the narrative to continue too rapidly in order to give into the demands of a metaphysics of presence; into the clear and direct light of day.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> We hint here at Maurice Blanchot's, "Madness of the Day," op. cit., pp. 189-200. This short *récit* has been discussed by Derrida extensively in "The Law of Genre," and also in "Living On • Borderlines," in relation to Blanchot's *Death Sentence*. What for Derrida is hidden, we have suggested already, is the temporal gift of the not-yet, the Law's hiddenness as abyssal difference in the story "of what never happens." We have alluded to the impossible narration that is the whole story of the non-story of Blanchot's *récit*, his "The Madness of the Day."<sup>11</sup> The law in Blanchot's story appears as a *feminine* "silhouette" that is neither a man nor a woman and is a companion to the quasi-narrator who is before the law. What is impossible to narrate is the story of the law, an impossible story recounted and demanded by the law's representatives (policemen, judges, doctors). The story recounted, that is "put forward," as appearance, to the representatives is on the impossibility of recounting as correctness, as presence, and hence its impossibility. Derrida suggests this union of an *impossible story* or story as the *impossibility of possibility* is where literature begins. It is made impossible before the representatives of the Law ("language is the elementary medium of the Law").<sup>11</sup> This is the union bringing together an "I/We" of the "remarkable truth" of truth as more adventurous and risky. At

A belonging-not-belonging we would want to call a poetics of the self-in-ruin or in Blanchotian terms the site of the *unavowable community* of “the never-subjected subject as the very relation of the self to the other”: in this sense infinite or discontinuous, in this sense: relation always in displacement and in displacement in regard to itself, displacement also of that which would be without place (non-place).

For Blanchot writing engages a movement towards the nothingness opened by the experience of dread or anxiety. Literature is an attempt at saying nothing; dread is nothing that can be expressed and yet the only thing that causes me to desire expression, writing is useless and yet nothing is more serious. We must return to the theme of solitude to make clear that Blanchot’s freedom or autonomy of the writer in the privation of language “is not free to be alone without expressing the fact that he is alone” (from *Gaze of Orpheus*, 4) is an autonomy that can never achieve complete self-identity through the alterity of the artwork. Blanchot makes the distinction between essential solitude and the solitude in the world (*Space of Literature*, 251-53). Essential solitude is not the worldly, artistic solitude as in the mythic artists alone. Such solitude for Blanchot is existential solipsism, which is self-relation or self-communion. Rather, the essential solitude is that of the Work, a solitude upon which the writer is dependent but to which he necessarily has a self-deceptive relationship, mistaking the Work for the Book he writes etc. This is in short is a totalized view of the artwork. This is what is at stake in *The Gaze of Orpheus* between law of the artwork and the lawlessness of desire that

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that point it would be a truth without end, abyssal, as random drift. Yet, more significantly, it is the “I/We” not of its representatives, but of the law *herself* who, throughout a *récit*, forms a couple with me, with the “I” of the narrative voice.<sup>11</sup> Further, as we know not *what* or *who* the law *is*, as in the neutrality of its non-gendering, the law opens up the impossible “atopology” that annuls oppositions:

The law is silent, and of it nothing is said to us. Nothing, only its name, its common name and nothing else. In German it is capitalized, like a proper name. We do not know what it is, who it is, where it is. Is it a thing, a person, a discourse, a voice, a document, or simply a nothing that incessantly defers access to itself, thus forbidding *itself* in order thereby to become something or someone?<sup>11</sup>

“Before the Law,” op. cit., p. 206. However, “the fictitious nature of this ultimate story which robs us of every event, of this pure story, or story without story, has as much to do with philosophy, science, or psychoanalysis as with literature.” (ibid.). “The Law of Genre,” op. cit., p. 249. The law is being made by both the “I” and “We” coming to light in the madness of the day where the one who brings forth law to the light of day is given by the “I” of the writer as also “author of the law.” (ibid., p. 250.) This union’s singular act is eventing before institutional, academic law engenders the law: “There is no general device. In some situations you have to behave in a very conservative way, in tough conservative ways, to maintain, and at the same time or the day after to do exactly the contrary.” (“Women in the Beehive,” op. cit., p. 155.) But also: “He who engenders her, he, her mother who no longer knows how to say “I” or to keep memory intact. I am the mother of law, behold my daughter’s madness. It is also the madness of the day, for day, the word *day* in its disseminal abyss, is law, the law of the law. My daughter’s madness is to want to be born—like anybody and nobody [*comme personne*]. Whereas she remains a “silhouette,” a shadow, a profile, her face never in view.” (“The Law of Genre,” op. cit., p. 250.) For Derrida, the temporal gift of the “Not-Yet” (the Law’s hiddenness as abyssal difference in the story “of what never happens,” or the impossible narration that is the whole story of the non-story of Blanchot’s *récit* or “The Madness of the Day”) is an affirmative excess and not a sacrifice. (ibid.) This hiddenness as abyssal difference (interminable *différance*) as the affirmative quality of the Law, we will come to name as the madness of the law. And it will be her who comes.

exceeds this totalisation of Work. What is clearly mistaken in Orpheus' *gaze* is the relation between the work and the capital W-Work as a totalized form. To skip rather rapidly over the story: It is — the moment when Orpheus turns around to look at Eurydice in the night, as the night he transgresses the law (of the underworld) through the movement of desire. Desire as I've suggested for Blanchot is always in excess of the law. Orpheus' desire is not to see Eurydice in the daylight, in the beauty of a completed aesthetic form that has submitted to the passage by way of the law of concealment, but rather to see her in the night, as the hear of the night prior to daylight, 'her body closed, her face sealed' (GO 100). Orpheus does not want to make the invisible visible, but rather (and impossibly) to see the invisible as invisible. Orpheus' 'mistake', as it were, lies in the nature of his desire, which desires to see Eurydice when he is only destined to *sing* about her. He loses her through his desire and is forced to forgo both his art — his song — and his dream of a happy life. The paradox of Orpheus' situation is that if he did not turn his gaze on Eurydice he would be betraying his desire and thus would cease to be an artist. Thus, the desire which destroys his art is also its source.

The ambiguous zone of source and destruction or the work's failure by now should be easy to locate with Blanchot's notion of work and worklessness. *Orpheus' gaze* traces out this ambiguity that we have attempted to locate or at least open up in the space of double-gap between a knowing self and self-in-excess through our ethical relation to the other. What we have suggested as a temporality of ethics activated in the politico-ethical poetics of Blanchot. In what possesses the self in this excessive zone of retelling, rehearsal, acting-out of self is the gaze of the other from which our poetic-desire is sourced and exceeds ourselves. And further, what drives us to keep producing "new" work whether this be the constant retelling of ourselves in our posed-solitude, is what Blanchot terms *community* or the "other night" that is "a dying stronger than death in our self riveted to existence. This energy and desire of worklessness or 'the other night' always works against the law of metaphysical truth fueled by energy of the lawlessness of writing's desire as primodality of difference. Blanchot's *le mourir* (or other night) is the stronger night that gives the origin of the writer's experience in the impossible experience to control one's death. Rather this origin is something stronger than death, namely the simple facticity of being riveted to existence without an exit. The desire that governs Blanchot's work has its source elsewhere from the dialectical movement of self-consciousness. This experience of *le mourir*, the essential night, where one cannot find a position is the experience of the *other* as source of *nothing*.

Why are there so few readings on these four Derrida texts by women, or men for that matter, included in our work? We have mentioned both Chanter and Sandford already with explicit reference to our reading of "ATVM." What is it to suggest a moment of "originality," already deconstructed as an archive-effect, which would come from stepping beyond the *proper* boundaries for cultivating a deeper enquiry into the unknown of sexual differences. If not "originality," then invention or eventing as an opening to a possibility that has eschewed the technique of conscious exclusion of what would be

otherwise than that which Heidegger would suggest as the “present-at-handness” of “woman”. This becomes for this writer an ethico-politico-poetics of responsibility to feminism and its others, the other feminisms yet to come or become recognizable. This ethico-politico-poetics of responsibility extends to deconstruction and its law for an otherwise logic to the binary metaphysical oppositional thinking of “man” and “woman.” We have by now exhausted this question of propriety and yet we feel a necessity to suggest that for all our impropriety we end our thesis with, perhaps, the most ontic and accessible engagement on the question of sexual difference in our bringing *together* deconstruction and feminism. Is this our default, our betrayal of our betrayal, which would then be fidelity to our non-fidelity? You might want to consider in your assessment, adjudication or judgement of our faults what we say on the matter in relation to the logic of the fault discussed in chapter six. Are we still in debt? Have we returned toward another scene of reserve? Then again, a reserve is also an enclosed and partitioned property, often set aside for non-productive ends, also in some places called a close.

The Möbius strip is a powerful figuration of the economy, of the law of reappropriation, or of successful mourning-work that can no longer, in the writing of *Glas*, toll a knell {*sonner un glas*} which is its own (its *glas*) without breakage {*bris*} and debris. The *debris* of this band is not even the last or the first; it repeats and scatters the debris of a *bris de verre* {glass breakage} or of a mirror {*glace*}, and it has a multiple occurrence in the book (impossible to count them: it is always, at least, once again a piece of the name of Jean Genet’s mother: *Gabrielle*, of my name, of all the numerous brilliant objects and words, or of that which bridles and unbridles the horse and the “cavalier phantasm” of the *genet*, the Spanish horse that plays a very important role in all of this {*ça*}—the last words are “debris de,” of all the *dé, dés* {die, dice, or sewing thimbles}, *dais* {dais, or canopy} [for example “dais de l’oeil révolvé” {canopy of the upturned eye}—<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Derrida, “*Ja*, or the *faux-bond II*” in *Points ... Interviews, 1974-1994*, ed. by Elisabeth Weber, trans. by Peggy Kamuf & others (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) pp. 51-52.