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The Secret Life of Loss in the Work of Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous

By

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A research report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts by Coursework and Research Report in the field of Clinical Psychology, in the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand.

Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

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Date

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Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction 1

Chapter Two: The Interminable Mourning of Jacques Derrida 6

Chapter Three: Hélène Cixous and the Poetics of Loss: Writing Death *into* Life 21

Chapter Four: Conclusion 35

Reference List

Chapter One: Introduction

Loss is a universal, human phenomenon that is integral to an understanding of psychological development and experience. Indeed, Krell (2000: 2) suggests that most thinkers would affirm that "there is nothing more human than mourning, or the capacity to mourn, and that to ignore that capacity is to overlook what philosophers love to call the *essence* of human being". Mourning for a loss is a complex and deeply challenging process and it seems to resist circumscription or the assignation of any ultimate and final meaning. Krell (2000: 4) rather astutely questions whether mourning is an emotion or a process, an affect or an event, a fatality or an achievement; he intimates that while mourning involves a combination of affects, it seems somewhat different from regret, sorrow or sadness. The experience of having lost someone so completely "defies telling and incites the labours of mourning" (5), so that, as Spargo (2004: 6) proposes, one of the functions of mourning is a "belated protection of the dead, and therefore this retrospective effort always pertains to a question about the place the other still holds in the world". While the question of mourning seems to resist resolution and clear understanding, its experience as an event or an affective process of working through brings to the fore in an intense and urgent way the fact that everything from now on "will come to be reflected quivering, reflecting disappearance itself" (Derrida, 2001: 107).

In recent years, and circumstantially prompted by the death of Jacques Derrida in 2004, several scholars working on his considerable oeuvre (Gaston, 2006; Davis, 2007; Royle, 2009; and Bennington, 2010) identified the question of mourning as a profound ethical concern in his writings because it alludes to the complex relationship to otherness within the self, as well as to other persons. The impetus for singling out the theme of mourning is located in the active struggle that these scholars continue to face in responding to the significance of Derrida's legacy. This struggle encourages a number of questions that are not necessarily accompanied by any easy answers: How does one mourn? What is mourning? When does it begin? To whom does it belong? How does one survive mourning? The process of mourning, as a response to loss, seems to capture in all its complexity the ethical challenge and necessity of responding to, whilst resisting any complete appropriation of, the other. Mourning is a process which profoundly affects our capacity to know and understand what is at stake in the loss of a significant other. It is

as if the process of mourning takes on a secret life that is not readily available to the conscious mind.

The gradual movement towards the topic of mourning finds its inspiration in the late work of Derrida when he enters into a number of exchanges with Hélène Cixous; they explore their friendship, their philosophies and their experience of each other's work and life[1]. This research project has selected texts which highlight Derrida's and Cixous' concern with experience of loss and survival. The theme of loss is scattered throughout the body of writings by both Derrida and Cixous; this project aims to extract and explicate relevant excerpts from various monographs and essays that deal specifically and explicitly with this theme in order to provide a more substantial and coherent version of such complex approaches to loss. This endeavour will give significance to the project, because very little work has previously been done on collating and integrating such material from these two writers[2]. It should be emphasized, however, that this project is exploratory in the sense that it will map and interpret an intellectual field (French poststructuralist approaches to loss) without seeking to arrive at definitive answers or conclusions.

Davis (2007: 131) suggests that the terms *mourning* and *melancholia* have been almost inevitably linked to each another since the publication of Freud's important metapsychological essay in 1917. Indeed in "Mourning and Melancholia", Freud (1917) explores how mourning and melancholia present in a similar way in that both conditions are a response to the loss of something significant, whether that be a person or an ideal; this in turn leads to cessation of interest in the outside world, an inability to love and the inhibition of activity and performance. Mourning, however, can be brought to a gradual end after a certain lapse of time. It begins to lose its traumatic force as the grieving subject disinvests from the deceased person or lost ideal and makes space for the ego to reinvest in new objects. Melancholia, on the other hand, occurs

[1] The textual dialogue between Derrida and Cixous is documented in six monographs. Derrida published two texts: *Geneses, Genealogies, Genres and Genius: The Secrets of the Archive* (2006c) and *H.C. for Life, That is to Say…* (2006). Cixous has published four texts so far: *Portrait of Derrida as a Young Jewish Saint* (2004); *Dream I Tell You* (2006); *Insister of Jacques Derrida* (2007) and *Hyperdream* (2009).

[2] The primary texts for Derrida are: *Memoires for Paul de Man* (1989); *The Work of Mourning* (2001); and *Learning to Live Finally: The Last Interview* (2007). The primary texts for Cixous are: *Hyperdream* (2009); and selected essays, vignettes and interviews from *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* (1993), *Rootprints* (1997), *Stigmata* (1998) and *White Ink* (2008).

when the process of grieving and disinvestment is obstructed. Affect remains attached to the lost object, yet the subject "cannot consciously grasp what he has lost" (312). The melancholic subject may know *who* it is that s/he has lost but not *what* it is about this significant other that s/he has lost. Consequently, as Butler (2004) points out, the lost, beloved object continues to haunt and inhabit the melancholic ego and is made co-extensive with it. Melancholic identification attempts to avert complete loss by preserving (incorporating) the lost object as part of the ego; it is this internalization that forms part of the mechanism by which the melancholic subject refuses to abandon the lost object. Incorporation disavows or postpones the recognition of suffering for a loss. Melancholia as a psychic economy is, therefore, both the refusal of grief and the incorporation of loss[3].

Davis (2007: 132) proposes that it is fair to assume that Freud's account of mourning and melancholia "is at least to some extent lurking in the background" (131) of Derrida's understanding of mourning for a loss. This notion is reiterated by Miller (2009: 309) who suggests that Derrida's account of mourning frequently involves an implicit reference to Freud's influential essay. However, as Davis (2007: 132) continues, "it would clearly be a mistake *simply* to apply Freud's account of melancholia to Derrida's melancholic subject". Both scholars are aware of the very tenuous, and potentially reductive, links that one could make between Derrida and Freud. While citing the allusion to Freud, they prefer to treat Derrida's ideas on interminable mourning as separate and independent from Freud's so as not to risk either pathologising Derrida's treatment of the subject matter, or using Freud's ideas as an index or measure against which Derrida's version is assessed. This research project concurs with Davis's notion that Freud's account of mourning and melancholia cannot simply - without considerable qualification and modification - be applied to Derrida's reading of such processes. While Derrida may draw inspiration from, or play off, Freud's essay, he offers a complex response that diverges considerably from Freud's ideas. Moreover, it is not an explicit aim of this project to make direct links between Freud's and Derrida's accounts of complicated mourning as a condition of melancholia, thus exploring similarities and differences. Instead this study will use Freud's important essay as a guide or broad mapping of a psychological terrain, which will facilitate the

[3] For an interesting account of incorporation (and its supposed opposite, introjection), the reader is referred to Derrida's (1986: xvi) essay, "*Fors*: The Anglish Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok", where he examines what is "played out on the borderline that divides and opposes the two terms".

unfolding and explication of Derrida's philosophical musings on the problematics of mourning for a loss. In the next chapter on Derrida's account, however, there will be a brief consideration of the ways in which he broadly reworks Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia. While it is possible to offer some comparison between Freud and Derrida on mourning and loss, it does not seem possible to do so between Freud and Cixous. Cixous writes in her own unique and poetic way, so that any possible identification with, or reference to, Freud seems oblique, or at the very least, deeply repressed. There are, however, illuminating parallels to be drawn between Derrida and Cixous; these will discussed in the conclusion. It should be emphasised that this enquiry carries no expectation of arriving at clear-cut resolutions or distinctions, such as neat definitions of, and final pronouncements on, normative ways of responding to the loss of a significant other. Instead, as already noted, it is an exploratory study that attempts to carve out possible ways of theorising the terrain or domain of loss.

At stake in a consideration of mourning is the movement of getting over, or recovering from, the loss of a significant other. But one needs to investigate what happens if it is not possible to lose this loss. Derrida and Cixous each have a unique approach to considering the complex and challenging patterns of response that emerge in the face of such loss, or as a consequence of such loss. Chapter 2 will explore Derrida's contribution to the interminable process of mourning. For Derrida, reckoning with the dead is extremely demanding and we risk consuming or colonising the other by attempting to internalise the other within the self. Moreover, our encounter with the other also alludes to experiences that may not necessarily be readily available to our conscious minds. Derrida focuses on how best to honour this unique and intricate engagement with the dead other. Indeed, he is interested in the scope of our responsibility to the other and how we can create renewed exchange even though the other is now dead. Derrida sides more closely with what in Freudian terms would be regarded as a 'melancholic' position, one that protests against mourning which attempts to return the subject to a normal state of functioning as before the loss. In his version of melancholia, the subject is responsible for carrying the other, for keeping the other within the self alive, and for actively engaging with the questions of life, death and the vicissitudes of existence.

Chapter 3 explores Cixous' approach to understanding and experiencing loss. She suggests that we are never quite prepared for the moment of the death of a loved one. In fact, we frequently

‘die’ the death of a significant other out of fear. Cixous is interested in finding ways to reclaim (for life) what we have lost in the death of another. She views the other’s death as an opportunity for us to live life more productively and vitally; the loss of a loved one gives occasion to start thinking more creatively about our existence. With the aid of writing and dreaming, we can pass over to the (other) side of life which affirms surviving and living in the aftermath of death. Cixous proposes that writing and dreaming take us further than we thought it possible to go. In short, writing and dreaming hold out the hope that we may begin to confront death from within life, which in turn affirms the immensely creative work of living.

The Conclusion will attempt to sum up the key, exploratory findings of the previous two chapters. While it falls beyond the scope of this necessarily circumscribed enquiry to explore the life-death debate that Derrida and Cixous raise in their own writings and in their textual exchanges with each other, the closing paragraphs will nevertheless offer the reader a taste of this exchange, since the themes of mourning and loss encourage a questioning of, or grappling with, life, death and their impact on the course of existence.

Chapter Two: The Interminable Mourning of Jacques Derrida

In his text, *The Work of Mourning*, Derrida engages with the theme of loss in response to the deaths of some of his close colleagues and contemporaries, such as Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Jean-François Lyotard. He addresses the question of loss by placing himself "amidst his own ghosts" as he quotes from characteristic writings and calls on a "growing throng of dead colleagues and friends" to enter into an exchange with him, to "maintain a dialogue, knowing that they cannot" (Davis, 2007: 128). Derrida opens himself up to the dead other through letters of condolence, memorial essays, eulogies and funeral orations. The aim of this chapter is to extract relevant passages from these various forms or genres of narration, which provide insights into, or shed light on, Derrida's philosophy of loss (which is also a philosophy of life and death) in order to develop a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of his approach to this subject. It will also offer a brief exposition of Derrida's reworking of Freud's ideas on mourning and melancholia, revealing the ways in which Derrida diverges from Freud's understanding.

For Derrida, mourning is not a process delimited in time, but is rather interminable. It is difficult to resolve because the process of mourning is not inaugurated by the death of a significant other. Instead, it has already begun before the death of the other and it is never to be ended. Moreover, the fact of one's own mortality is foreshadowed in the multiple losses occasioned by others, even if it is placed in temporary abeyance (Davis, 2007: 129). Brault and Naas (2001: 2) point out that Derrida is deeply interested in what it means to reckon with death and with the dead, "with all those who were once close to us but who are no longer, as we say, 'with us' or who are 'with us' only insofar as they are 'in us'". For Derrida (1989: xvi), the death of a significant other may be unthinkable or unspeakable, but we are nonetheless called upon to break the silence and participate in the rites of mourning: "Speaking is impossible, but so too would be silence or absence or a refusal to share one's sadness". Yet mourning risks the danger of narcissistic appropriation of the other, especially since the dead other can no longer respond to us. It seems as though we face a "paralysing double-bind" in which, as Royle (2009: 70) suggests, it becomes impossible to speak yet impossible not to speak.

Derrida (2001: 34) interrogates the notion of the dead "in" us and problematizes this supposed interiority of mourning, since the absolutely other, who once dead is reduced to images for us,

"resists the closure of our interiorizing memory". "Each time", writes Derrida, we need to recognise "our friend to be gone forever, irremediably absent...for it would be unfaithful to delude oneself into believing that the other living *in us* is living *in himself*: because he lives *in us* and because we live this or that in his memory, in memory of him" (1989: 21)[4]. The other might be within us but, as Derrida reminds us, "it is not ours; we do not have it available to us like a moment or part of our interiority" (44). This seems to suggest, as Brault and Naas (2001) write, that a reckoning with the dead can now, from the moment of death, be only in us, the living[5]. This intractable reality of the dead who are now only "in us", who are now only images "for us", however, does not assume that we can take ownership of the images and memories of the other for the process of interiorization, however inevitable, is never complete and remains in the end, impossible. Moreover, the process of interiorization offers no easy indication of the limits between the inside and the outside, between the self and the other. Indeed, while "the veil must be torn toward the other", the "other dead *in us*" is "other still" (Derrida, 2001: 52), so that something of the alterity of the other is preserved even as it is internalized. What we are left with are perhaps "memories and monuments" which are reducible to "*visible* scenes that are no longer anything but *images*" (159). These images speak to the "visibility of the body, a geometry of gazes, an orientation of perspectives" which are inevitably interiorized since the dead other can no longer be but in us (159). That the other, having disappeared or having passed away, leaves 'in us' only images suggests that the dead are recollected or represented primarily through the medium of the visual or the modality of thought and language. However, it should be noted that the dead cannot always be represented properly through images and they may ultimately resist any medium which attempts to grasp at their memory.

Derrida is interested in the "possibility of an interiorization of what can never be interiorized" (Brault and Naas, 2001: 11); this is also the impossible which "can no longer be interiorized" since it resists reappropriation and exceeds and traverses "mournful memory" while

[4] Brault and Naas (2001: 25) remind the reader that the phrase "each time" marks a site of iteration and substitution as it punctuates a singular time and place. While we may experience the loss of numerous others during our lifetime, it becomes important to respond to the singularity of the significant other, to respond to his or her death uniquely.

[5] In reckoning with the death of Roland Barthes and the desire to dedicate his thoughts to him, Derrida (2001:35) is forced to consider how his thoughts "will no longer reach him, and this must be the starting point of my reflection; they can no longer reach him, reach all the way to him, assuming they ever could have while he was still living". Derrida is forced to concede that his friend, Roland Barthes, is no longer there, with him, and that he "must hold fast to this evidence, to its excessive clarity, and continually return to it as if to the simplest thing".

simultaneously, paradoxically, constituting it (Derrida, 1989: 38). The impossible alludes to the paradox of what is taken in by the subject after the death of another, but not necessarily registered or absorbed by the subject's conscious mind. For Derrida, it is this aspect that is somehow central to the process of what we internalise during mourning even though we cannot name or understand it. Indeed, it is the aporia of taking in what cannot be taken in (by the conscious mind) that becomes the locus and source of our (ethical) responsibility and the "unbearable paradox of fidelity" (Derrida, 2001: 159)[6]. What is "in us", properly speaking, is not ours, as the images within us might seem to be, so that what is in effect before and beyond us becomes the source of our responsibility (Brault and Naas, 2001: 11). There is no symmetry in the gaze between the self and the dead other but rather "dissymmetry that can be interiorized only by exceeding, fracturing, wounding, injuring, traumatizing the interiority" (Derrida, 2001: 160). The infinite alterity of the other is already beyond us, at an infinite remove, so that while something (images, memories, feelings, qualities) of a significant relationship with another (who is now deceased) can be interiorized, the full import or significance of this relationship cannot be readily grasped by the conscious mind. As Derrida (1989: 34) puts it: "death constitutes and makes manifest the limits of a *me* or an *us* who are obliged to harbour something that is greater and other than them; something *outside of them within them*". In this way, the "possibility of the impossible" commands the "whole rhetoric of mourning" (34), so that mourning "would have to fail in order to succeed" (Derrida, 2001: 144).

If it were at all possible to interiorize the other faithfully, then the other would no longer quite seem to be other; the other would be appropriated in terms of sameness and the success of interiorization would fail. On the other hand, "an aborted interiorization is at the same time a respect for the other as other, a sort of tender rejection, a movement of renunciation which leaves the other alone, outside, over there, in his death, outside of us" (Derrida, 1989: 35). And it is in this latter instance where failure succeeds, that is, where interiorization is interminable and ultimately unaccomplished. Mourning is necessary but impossible: it is both necessary *and* impossible so that, as Royle (2009: 135) writes, mourning "fails to happen, it fails in happening,

[6] Deutscher (2005: 72) rightly suggests thar the trope of mourning provides a useful forum for thinking about the question of the self's relation to the other and questions of identity and difference. The self is never fully autonomous and cannot thoroughly take leave of the other, so the notion of 'getting over' the other "belies the fact that we are always in relation with the (dead or alive) other". Mourning can therefore become a consideration and determination of the "most respectful, most grateful, and also most giving way of relating to the other and of relating the other to the self" (Derrida, 1995: 281-282).

it never completely finally happens, except in failing. To the extent that it succeeds in happening, mourning fails, it fails to happen". Royle's elucidation is apt and subtle, yet inherently paradoxical and complex. It alludes to the aporetic movement at work in Derrida's version of mourning. Deutscher (2005: 71) offers a clearer exposition of this paradox of fidelity:

> For mourning to fully succeed, we should be able to get over the loss of the other in question. But if we can get over him or her, something seems to have failed in the mourning....From this perspective, a truly appropriate mourning would be a mourning we couldn't accomplish, that continues until our death. Derrida claims that if mourning succeeds, it fails, and it must fail in order to succeed. In this sense, mourning is impossible.

In a dialogue with Elizabeth Roudinesco, Derrida (2004: 159-160) considers this impossible (failed-therefore-successful) mourning as follows:

> Mourning *must* be impossible. Successful mourning is failed mourning. In successful mourning, I incorporate the one who has died, I assimilate him to myself, I reconcile myself with death, and consequently I deny death and the alterity of the dead other and of death as other. I am therefore unfaithful. Where the introjection of mourning succeeds, mourning annuls the other. I take him upon me, and consequently I negate or delimit his infinite alterity....Faithfulness prescribes to me at once the necessity and the impossibility of mourning. It enjoins me to take the other within me, to make him live in me, to idealise him, to internalise him, but it also enjoins me not to succeed in the work of mourning: the other must remain the other. He is effectively, presently, undeniably dead, but, if I take into me as part of me, and if, consequently, I "narcissise" this death of the other by a successful work of mourning, I annihilate the other, I reduce or deny his death" [translation slightly modified by Royle (2009), see p. 135].

Elsewhere, Derrida (1995: 152) sums up rather usefully this "terrible logic of mourning", this unbearable paradox: "I cannot complete my mourning for everything I lose, because I want to keep it, and at the same time, what I do best is to mourn, is to lose it, because by mourning, I

keep it inside of me". For Derrida, this schema of mourning is a "hard and undeniable necessity" that renders the possibility of "*true mourning* impossible" (Derrida, 1989: 35), so that "whoever thus works *at* the work of mourning learns the impossible – and that mourning is interminable. Inconsolable. Irreconcilable" (Derrida, 2001: 143). The unbearable paradox of fidelity thus suggests that the process of interiorization should not be regarded as complete since, there is "an inconsolability or irreparability that no work of mourning shall ever come to mend" (221). Loss is perceived as irreducible In short, impossible mourning, as Krell (2000: 17) suggests, is mourning which is "eminently *unsuccessful*"; it is "being unable to be done with one's mourning" (Royle, 2009: 78).

The work of mourning is the "name of a problem" (Derrida, 2001: 50) and it speaks to the difficulty of tolerating the aporia, the "impossible choice between two infidelities" (Brault and Naas, 2001: 12). In *Memoires for Paul de Man*, Derrida (1989: 6) foregrounds the conundrum as follows:

> Is the most distressing, or even the most deadly infidelity that of a *possible mourning* which would interiorize within us the image, idol, or ideal of the other who is dead and lives only in us? Or is it that of the impossible mourning, which, leaving the other his alterity, respecting thus his infinite remove, either refuses to take or is incapable of taking the other within oneself, as in the tomb or the vault of some narcissism?

Derrida is sensitive to the ethical implications of the process of internalising the other who has died. He is aware of the risks of 'successful' mourning which may indicate that the other is internalised within the self and the very possibility of alterity is threatened by sameness, by a cannibalisation of the otherness of the other. The question of interiority, of the other in the self, of the self's responsibility to the other who has died, is inextricably tied to the process of mourning. Brault and Naas (2001: 22) focus the prevailing uncertainty in the following questions: "To whom or what are we responsible in mourning? To the friend, him–or herself? To his or her words? His or her memory? What is the best way of remaining faithful?". Derrida is interested in our responsibility to the dead other, and ways of honouring the other through our responsibility, so that we are able to engage with the other "without pluralizing the unique or generalizing what is most irreplaceable" (Derrida, 2001: 59).

Derrida (2001: 38) concedes that it is necessary, to some extent, to take the other into the self, to identify with the other in order to let him/her speak within oneself, to make the other present and faithfully represent him/her. Yet the temptation to take in the other is also extremely dangerous, potentially "indecent and most murderous" (38), in that the singularity of the other may be threatened or subsumed by the self's appropriating powers. For Derrida, the subject in mourning, "this being at a loss" (95), has an (impossible) duty to let the other speak, "to turn speech over to him, his speech, and especially not to take it from him, not to take it in his place...to allow him to speak, to occupy his silence or to take up speech oneself only in order, if this is possible, to give it back to him" (95). Moreover, the subject who is mourning becomes responsible for negotiating a precarious process which entails a respect for the alterity of the other while managing the "most vivid desire"; the "most forbidden desire from now on", which has been "most cruelly battered", would be a desire to speak, still, to the other, "to hear him and to respond to him...not just within ourselves...but to speak to him and to hear him, himself, speaking to us". For Derrida, however, this desire is a desire for the "impossible" and we "can no longer even take the measure of this wound" (72). It seems as if, as Brault and Naas (2001: 27) astutely perceive, the "drama is not so much that we lose the friend after death but that we can no longer lose them; they who were once so distant become all too close, too close because now only within us – in us as a part of us and of history and no longer as the singularity that called us out of ourselves and first made us responsible before them".

What is at stake in loss is "some thing other, an even more singular thing" (Derrida, 2001: 96) which endlessly hollows out the "depths of our memories" (95). This something other lies "beneath the phenomenal or public scope of our destiny" and behind the "fleeting, inapparent moments, those without archive or words" (95). It is associated with the "essence" or singularity of an encounter or event that is experienced (as a feeling, sense or fleeting impression perhaps) rather than explicitly thought about – "a meeting in a café, a letter eagerly torn open, a burst of laughter revealing the teeth, a tone of the voice, an intonation on the phone, a style of handwriting in a letter, a parting in a train station" (95). It is a "seal of a secret affirmation" that is difficult to circumscribe, limit or name (Derrida, 1989: xvi), a "singular incandescence that no volume and no memory can contain" (Brault and Naas, 2001: 30), a "secret language" or "hidden intimacy" that is "clandestine, coded, held back, discreetly held in reserve, held in silence" (Derrida, 2001: 228). Derrida (2001: 38) longs for the impossible which would appear and

develop almost photographically before his eyes, as if the "pace, step, style, timbre, tone, and gestures" of the other, "so many obscurely familiar signatures...were all of a sudden going to yield their secret to me as one more secret hidden behind the others (and I call *secret* not only what is intimate but a certain way of doing things: the inimitable)". Effectively, Derrida requests, impossibly, the "ecstasy of revelation", "instantaneous access" to the other and the other alone, a "free and easy access requiring no labour". However, while the movement of interiorization "keeps within us the life, thought, body, voice, look or soul of the other", it does so only as "lacunary fragments, detached and dispersed", only as "'parts' of the departed other" (Derrida, 1989: 37).

The complexity of mourning is linked to the way in which we interiorize experience, the memories we have. As Derrida (1989: 6) puts it: "What does it tell us, this impossible mourning, about an essence of memory?". It seems as though experience (and thus memories) cannot always be represented by and through images. Indeed some of our experience forms part of what the psychoanalyst, Christopher Bollas (1987), terms the "unthought known" - that which is 'known' not so much as an object of representation, but rather as a recurrent experience of being, an existential as opposed to a representational knowing; however this cannot necessarily be thought about in a conceptually accepted sense. The *unthought known* is "where knowledge unravels from its own self-possession, from its pretension *as* knowledge" (Rose, 2003: 151), functioning as "a force of dissemination that moves us to places beyond thinking" (Bollas, 1992: 17). It takes into account the "wordless" element in the adult and alludes to existential, as

opposed to cognitive, memory, which is conveyed not through visual or abstract thinking, but through the effects of being. Such moments "feel familiar, uncanny, sacred, reverential, and outside cognitive coherence" (Bollas, 1993: 40-41). Moreover, these moments ultimately resist memorialisation through images, so that what is internalised (of the other) in and by the self is not always easily retrievable from the archive of memories as a "totalizing summary – the exhaustive narrative or the total absorption of a memory" (Derrida, 1989: 11). In this way, the death of the other on each occasion uniquely brings to a close a world that was 'experienced' between (the) two (of us); a "long, rich, and intense stretch of [the] living self" is interrupted (Derrida, 2001: 115).

Derrida (2001: 95) proposes that, each time uniquely, the loss of an other signals the end of "nothing less than an origin of the world, each time the sole world, the unique world" (95). Elsewhere, he describes the end of this unique world in the following way:

> For each time, and each time singularly, each time irreplaceably, each time infinitely, death is nothing less than an end of *the* world. Not *only one* end among others, the end of someone or of something *in the world*, the end of a life or of a living being. Death puts an end neither to someone in the world nor to *one* world among others. Death marks each time, each time in defiance of arithmetic, the absolute end of the one and only world, of that which each opens as a one and only world, the end of the unique world, the end of the totality of what is or can be presented as the origin of the world for any unique living being, be it human or not (Derrida, 2005: 140).

What comes to an end is a world in which the self and the other have "lived a unique story", an irreplaceable story which "will have had one meaning or another for the two of us, even if this meaning could not have been the same" (Derrida, 2001: 115). The death of an other marks the disappearance of a unique world which from now on "sinks into an abyss from which no memory...can save it" (115). As a result, we can only but struggle with words in our attempt and desire "to discover and to invent a language capable of sustaining a dialogue with the dead" (Davis, 2007: 137), to produce a "discourse of mourning that encapsulates the singular, secretive existence" of the beloved deceased (136).

Derrida (1989: 56) proposes that there is an "eclipse or ellipsis in the movement of interiorization" which has less to do with the finite limitations of memory and more to do with the "structure of the relation to the other" which makes the "inscription of memory an effacement of interiorizing recollection". Between what is recalled after the death of the other and what was experienced during a (unique) life with the other, there is "rupture, heterogeneity, disjunction", so that memory can no longer merely signify a "mental 'capacity'" (56). Instead, the finitude of memory is coloured by experiences of "discontinuity and distance" which attest to something different from the self, of the difference of the other from the self. The absolute singularity of the dead other addresses itself to the self, it "pierces, strikes me, wounds me, bruises me", so that the self can no longer suspend the death of the other, even though "its 'presence' forever escapes me, having already receded into the past" (Derrida, 2001: 39).

Effectively, the other "comes to me without being directed towards me, without being present to me" (39).

The work of mourning is virtually in process from the very start of a significant relationship; it begins long before the "unqualifiable event called death" so that "interiority (of the other in me, in you, in us) ha[s] already begun its work" (Derrida, 2001: 46). Mourning "takes its place in advance" (146)[7]. Derrida suggests that we cannot escape this scenario of anticipation, which marks any relationship, because there is "mourning that follows death but also [the] mourning that is prepared and that we expect from the very beginning to follow upon the death of those we love. Love or friendship would be nothing other than the passion, the endurance, and the patience of this work" (146). In this way, there is no relationship (except through denial) without "this knowledge of finitude", so that "everything we inscribe in the living present of our relation to others already carries, always, the signature of *memoirs-from-beyond-the-grave*" (Derrida, 1989: 29). There is an attempt to imagine, before the fact, a world without ourselves or significant others, a "world that will have absorbed either absence". However, when this event finally does come, an event which we have perhaps anticipated and prepared for, it still strikes us uniquely – each time it feels like the end of the/a world (Brault and Naas, 2001: 15). Death comes to the other, and "comes to us through the other" (Derrida, 1989: 28), leaving in its wake "terrible solitude" (33) and a contemplation of our mortality. This contemplation of our own inevitable death is also, however, an approach to "learn(ing) to live" which is taught "from the other and by death", "from the other at the edge of life" (Derrida, 1994: xvii-xviii). As Derrida (1994: xviii) puts it: "To live, by definition, is not something one learns. Not from oneself, it is not learned from life, taught by life. Only from the other and by death". To learn to live, "alone, from oneself, by oneself", is, according to Derrida, "ethics itself", a certain responsibility, in that it is important to come to terms with death – both one's own and that of the other (xviii)[8].

[7] As Derrida (2002: 132) writes: "Just because the dead no longer exist does not mean that we are done with spectres. On the contrary. Mourning and haunting are unleashed at this moment. They are unleashed before death itself, out of the mere possibility of death". For Davis (2007: 158), the subject is "haunted even before it is bereaved; its engagement with others already exposes it to the reality of loss". In this way, and rather interestingly, as Miller (2009: 307) suggests, "to live is to be a survivor. It is to be a survivor not so much of the death of others as of one's own death". As Derrida (1995: 321-322) writes: "But I can have this experience of 'my own death' by relating to myself only in the impossible experience, the experience of the impossible mourning at the death of the other...In the experience of impossible mourning, I anticipate my own death, I relate to myself as mortal".

[8] The topic of ethics includes a vast and complex body of ideas, and it falls beyond the scope of this study to explore the terrain of the ethical in any detail. For the purposes of this project, the ethical is concerned with the relation that

For Derrida (2001: 175), "the affirmation of life is nothing other than a certain thought of death; it is neither opposition nor indifference to death – indeed one would almost say the opposite if this were not giving in to opposition"[9]. Learning to live is inextricably linked to learning how to die, "learning to take into account, so as to accept, absolute mortality (that is, without salvation, resurrection, or redemption – neither for oneself nor for the other)" (Derrida, 2007: 24). And surviving the dead other is not simply about remaining on after the other, but taking responsibility for the "most intense life possible" (52), which would involve an engagement with what it means to live in the face of death; rather radically, death becomes a precondition for living and it seems almost impossible to consider a life worth living without considering the fact of mortality. For Derrida (1994: xvii), learning to live can only happen "between two", such as between life and death, and it can only "*maintain itself* with some ghost". Indeed, to learn to live is "to learn to live *with* ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, or the companionship, in the commerce without commerce of ghosts". This statement seems to suggest that the dead or totally other haunts the survivor-subject like a ghost, and that the ghost is none other than "the concept of the other in the same…the completely other, dead, living in me" (Derrida, 2001: 41-42)[10].

The notion of haunting alludes to the effect of the other within the self, the other that can never be easily colonized by the self. Haunting, as a movement, refutes closure, resolution or the complete working though of the mourning process, since it disrupts the agency and control of the subject in mastering just what is at stake in the experience of loss. It speaks to an inheritance from/of the other, which, as Derrida (1994: 16) suggests, is "never gathered together, it is never one with itself". Instead, one "inherits from a secret" (16) of the ghost of the other who has been "carried off by death" (Derrida, 2001a: 58). The secret of the ghost, however, is dissymmetrical and it remains incommensurable with absolute knowledge and understanding; it seems

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the subject has with the other. Indeed, as Roffe (2004: 38) points out, "Derrida's general claim is...that the self is nothing without an other, or others, to which it has a fundamental and fundamentally constituting relationship". As Derrida (2001a: 84) puts it: "The other is in me before me: the ego...implies alterity as its own condition".

[9] Bennington (2010: 59) proposes that "a life worthy of its name" would need to be "involved in the economy of death" and most especially "'open' (i.e. *alive*) to the event of the other" and the other's death.

[10] Derrida (2001a: 89) suggests that we are "structured by the phantasmic", the spectral, so that we have a "phantasmic relation to the other" which "cannot be reduced". The ghost alludes to the "intervention of the other in me", the haunting of the other in the self. The exchange between the other (as spectre) and the self is complex and difficult. As Davis (2007: 74) writes: "What seems almost impossible is always to speak *of* the spectre, to speak *to* the spectre, to speak with *it*, therefore most of all *to make or to let a spirit speak*".

"inexhaustible, bottomless and infinite" (Davis, 2007: 136)[11]. It ultimately exceeds "my seeing and knowing (*mon voir et mon savoir*), although it concerns the innermost parts of me, right down to my soul, down to the bone, as we say" (Derrida, 1995a: 54). For Derrida, an exchange with the ghost seems ethically urgent, yet extremely complex, since the ghost is "a figure of the other, of the strange and the stranger, of that which in me is other than myself and that which outside me is more than I can know" (Davis, 2007: 76). In this way, the ghost "holds open the possibility of an unconditional encounter with otherness" (76), so that, as Derrida (1994: 176) contends, we should "learn to live by learning not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her, how to let them speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself". In short, learning to live is about learning to live "otherwise" and more "justly" with the spectres of others (Derrida, 1994: xviii). This "*being-with* the other", this "being-with spectres", is concerned with the challenge and responsibility of living with the other who is not presently living, either to us, in us or outside of us (xviii-xix).

The subject as survivor is, as Davis (2007: 129) proposes, properly "haunted" and entangled in only partially comprehended "dramas of mourning for lost others", where the surviving subject struggles to come to terms with, and relate to, the beloved deceased. The haunted subject, who cannot quite bring the process of mourning to an end or work through the process of mourning properly, since s/he is not fully in control, is also, to some extent, the melancholic subject in the sense that s/he cannot consciously grasp just what has been lost and thus seek resolution. The condition of mourning-without-end, an incomplete, suspended or interrupted state of mourning, has significant implications for the subject in that it seems to suggest that, for Derrida, the mourning subject is always already the melancholic subject. However, Derrida's notion of the melancholic subject has less to do with incapacity and immobilisation, and more to do with a sense of being haunted by, and thus responsible to/for, the dead significant other.

The notion of responsibility signals the vital interconnectedness of the self with the other, so that it becomes impossible to consider the self without considering the other. However, the relation of the self to the other is never symmetrical or reciprocal, and the ghost of the other is a

[11] Derrida (1994: 6) suggests that the ghost is "something that one does not know, precisely, and one does not know if precisely it *is*, if it exists, if it responds to a name and corresponds to an essence. One does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge. At least no longer to that which one thinks one knows by the name of knowledge".

"heteronomic figure" who "watches me, concerns me, and concerns or watches me while addressing to me, without however answering me" (Derrida, 2002: 120). Wherever there are spectres, "we are being watched, we sense or think we are being watched" (122). Yet the gaze of the other, which alludes to "another world, another source of phenomenality, another zero degree of appearing" (123), sees without being seen; "I can't meet the gaze of the other, whereas I am in his sight" (121). For Derrida, this relation of heteronomy does not, however, imply that the self is not free. Instead, it becomes the very "*condition of freedom*" – "my freedom springs from the condition of this responsibility which is born of heteronomy in the eyes of the other, in the other's sight" (122). The spectre is an opening of possible infinity, it "looks at me and concerns me and asks me to respond or to be responsible" (123). The fact that the other has died in no way absolves us of responsibility; "on the contrary, it assigns an infinite responsibility" whereby the autonomy of the self is a heteronomy "which has come from the place of the death of the other, as death and as other" (132). Davis (2007: 154) very usefully sums up the notion of responsibility when he points out that what Derrida wants to avoid in his consideration of dead others is killing them again. He seeks "to find in their legacy a potential for renewed exchange". And it is this potential for renewed exchange that broadly encompasses the ambit of responsibility to the dead other.

For Derrida, melancholia, which "subsists in the bond that links self and other" (Davis, 2007: 146), is no longer conceived of as a pathological condition, but rather, as Bennington (2010: xi-xii) suggests, as a "kind of ethics of death, whereby the other's loss is *not* lost in the interests of the self". This loss is, in some ways, maintained *as* loss and therefore the process of mourning, which attempts to resolve itself, will remain incomplete. Incomplete mourning, as an interrupted teleology, marks "mourning with a kind of impossibility" (xii). If mourning is an attempt to get over a loss, then incomplete mourning (which signals melancholic responsibility) is a "kind of structural state of not getting over it, and therefore remaining permanently somewhat short of *recovery*, surviving with a 'slash-scar, or narcissistic disfiguration'" (xii). Incomplete mourning endeavours to resist a teleological process of which the outcome is "to *lose the loss*, to turn the loss into a profit, to come back to oneself, to *show a return*, in spite of the other's definitive departure" (39). In this way, the alterity of the other is neutralised in the interests of the self and identity.

Derrida's version of the mourner as surviving and melancholic (with melancholia as an aspect of a haunted survival) challenges any simple delineation of the process of mourning, and highlights the seemingly infinite complexities of working through loss and grief. His version remains a radical statement that profoundly impacts the subject's relation to loss in that the subject will continue to carry loss throughout the course of his/her existence (rather than losing or getting over loss). The carrying of this loss functions as a catalyst for the subject to begin to think about his/her responsibility to the other, about the meaning of living - and living especially in the face of one's own death. In Derrida's version of loss, the subject must not get over loss but rather make use of loss as a (creative) spur which facilitates the thinking through of one's own existence in relation to another. It emphasises, as Bennington (2010: 39) points out, that incomplete mourning, a type of "melancholia", seems ethically preferable to mourning "proper". Indeed, Derrida seems to think that "only something that looks more like melancholia, as a kind of protest against mourning, a militant melancholia, then gives any 'ethical' dimension to mourning" (Bennington, 2010: 39). As Derrida (2005: 160) proposes:

> According to Freud, mourning consists in carrying the other in the self. There is no longer any world, it's the end of the world, for the other at his death. And so I welcome in me this end of the world, I must carry the other and his world, the world in me: introjection, interiorization of remembrance (*Erinnerung*), and idealization. Melancholy welcomes the failure and the pathology of this mourning. But if I *must* (and this is ethics itself) carry the other in me in order to be faithful to him, in order to respect his singular alterity, a certain melancholy must still protest against normal mourning. This melancholy must never resign itself to idealizing introjection. It must rise up against what Freud says of it with such assurance, as if to confirm the norm of normality. The "norm" is nothing other than the good conscience of amnesia. It allows us to *forget* that to keep the other within the self, *as oneself*, is already to *forget* the other. Forgetting begins there. Melancholy is therefore *necessary*.

In this passage, melancholia is "ripped away from pathology and transferred to ethics" so that a pathological state of being is re-designated as an ethics of carrying the dead other, as the "only proper relation to the dead other" (Davis, 2007: 148). Derrida's alternative conception of melancholia explores "the ethics of living with the dead" (150), of the haunted subject inhabited

by ghosts of the dead, so that any attempt at resolving mourning, where the other is taken into the self and potentially forgotten in order to ease the conscience of the survivor, is no longer possible. Whereas "normal" mourning may consign "the other to a second death so that life can continue undisturbed", the ethics of melancholia attempts to ensure that "the dead other-in-the-self cannot be subsumed into the survivor's re-found autonomy" (148). Melancholia thus becomes a protest against the amnesia of mourning and an ethical responsibility to the deceased other (148).

The spectre of melancholia, which haunts in the form of incomplete mourning is, as Bennington (2010: 40) suggests, an interruption of the teleology of mourning pursuing its course to the end. And it is this "radically interruptive structure" that signals a hospitality towards the other in that it "respects precisely what makes the other other (and not me)" (40). Incomplete mourning signals that mourning is interminable, that it cannot be closed off, terminated, "put to death" (137); it is this mourning-without-end or end-less mourning (as a version of melancholia) that raises difficult questions about our (ethical) responsibility towards the other, in memory of the other - of the other within us. We bear mourning – and melancholia- in "the experience that consists in carrying the other in the self" (Derrida, 2005: 159), in carrying the world of the other, the "world after the end of the world" (140). The surviving melancholic subject is thus responsible for carrying "both the other and *his* world, the other and *the* world that have disappeared" (140).

Derrida does not offer the prospect of an easy or simple exchange with the other who has died. His version of mourning the other is radical and demanding; it exacts a continual and incessant engagement with the other which the self is forced to bear or endure. This endurance may come at a considerable cost to the subject who risks being tormented, for "to let the dead speak requires a self-probing, multi-layered textuality which both strains to give voice to the dead other and remains maximally lucid in the face of the impossibility of the endeavour" (Davis, 2007: 138). We are caught in the bind of the impossible and it seems as though speaking to the dead requires a secret language to which we do not have access. Nevertheless, dead others continue to survive in us ["in me outside me" (Derrida, 1995: 321)] to the extent that we preserve them, and we need to be sensitive to this preservation in order to ensure that the alterity of the other is not compromised. The dead other is not merely a "captive of the surviving self", who has been

archived as a "compliant, passive object of memory" (138). Instead, the self becomes responsible for creating a dialogue, "the very breathing of the dialogue, of the dialogue in the world or of the most interior dialogue" (Derrida, 2005: 140), an exchange with the other, however interrupted and dissymmetrical this dialogue may be. Moreover, this dialogue is infinite and interminable. For Derrida, the melancholic position most aptly and responsibly attempts to engage with and in this seemingly impossible dialogue from which the subject will not be able to disengage him-or herself, except perhaps at the cost of not being able to reach the other within the self in any way. The subject will not recover from the impact of the other, whether alive or dead, living dead or living on as a ghost, and it is this "ineffaceable incision" (Derrida, 2005: 139) or interruption that will continue without respite during the course of our existence as a marker of our involvement with the loss of another and the responsibility that this loss demands.

Chapter Three: Hélène Cixous and the Poetics of Loss: Writing Death *into* Life

Cixous (1998: 71), like Derrida, considers how mourning begins long before the actual death of a significant other; it "begin(s) on the first day of love", once we have established an intimate rapport with another. Nevertheless, we are never quite prepared when death arrives, however prepared we think we might be, and therefore we miss the "unique chance" (71) which the moment of the death of a significant other offers to us. We cannot live this moment, "we don't manage to find ourselves there", because it is these moments "that make us feel the rigour of our limits" (70). As Cixous writes: "In the moment of my father's death, I wasn't there, I wasn't up to it, the world was falling apart above my head, an icy fire devoured space; as for me – I was below everything, no bigger than a pebble" (70)[12]. For Cixous, it is the experience of mourning that "shows us the door" where we are "dislodged from our interior habitation" (70). The very possibility of thinking about death, about our own mortality and that of significant others, is deeply troubling and unsettling. Cixous attributes this resistance to the fact that we "inhabit the country of the living" and "that which is beyond, outside – we don't have the heart to believe" (71). As a result, scenes of death and loss, of mourning, scenes which "transport us... to the other side of the world", frequently "come to pass outside of us, where we pass outside ourselves". We don't seem to be able to live these scenes but instead we 'die' them and are greeted by a "monumental Silence" (71):

> At the approach, at the evocation of the scene of my loss of you, no matter from how far away, when a thought adventures in that direction, everything is extinguished, I 'die' to me, I go away. Rather die than undergo your death. Your death I could not live.

In *Stigmata: Escaping Texts*, Cixous (1998: 72) describes her initial, shocked response to her mother's death which made her feel "immobile without movement":

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[12] This quotation aptly captures Cixous' figurative and allusive style, as well as her embrace of the conceptual through metaphor and poetic writing. There is an "exquisite extravagance" at the heart of Cixous' writing, a "carefree poetics of caring and freeing" that her writing embodies in unique and highly particular ways (Prenowitz, 1997: 248). Derrida (2006: xiv) has spoken of Cixous's "desperate love of language, the poetics of her verbal inventions, her still unheard-of vocabulary, her inspiration and her punctuation", while Cixous (2007: 12), commenting on Derrida's use of language, offers a very accurate description of her own style that is "accelerated, pushed to the limits, paroxysmized, overexcited, unloosed, frenzied, caressed, delivered, incanted, charmed, attuned, granted, not given, untameable..."

> I was immobilised, everything in me became immobilized, this didn't reach, this didn't reach me, I didn't move, I didn't go there, I didn't think, I remained inert, I didn't feel, the thing was happening beyond, over there, and beyond in the very depths of me, where, like someone who is afraid of feeling a lot of pain doesn't move at all, I didn't move a thought, I didn't move my soul, I petrified myself, I knew what was waiting for me, I wasn't living this time, I didn't live it...

It seems almost impossible to live "in the present the death of a loved one" (71) which is the "terrible hour that I cannot live", the hour "that cannot come to pass, not with me, that comes to pass besides me"[13]. The "hour" (that is, in the immediacy) of the death of a significant other seems to construct an "impassable border"[14] (an impossible border) which in turn creates an "outside in me", an "outside interior of me", an "outside-of-me in me"- the "uprooted heart in the heart" (72). Indeed, these "unlivable hours" seem to "happen in the foreign me, in the my region where I couldn't stand being me" (72), in the "strange and foreign regions of the heart...where there is no witness at all" (74). The death of a significant other seems to "eliminate us" (71) in the present and it seems as though we can only respond to it more fully at a later point in time – "elsewhere, far away, into the future" (71). The full import of the death of a significant other seems archived for a future date; it seems to defer itself to another time when we still may not be able to live it, to respond to it with more presence. Usually, as Cixous (1998: 72) notes, "the great griefs come to us disguised, long after, as ghosts, when we believe them far removed, it is then they come, slip, unrecognizable, anguishing, in incomprehensible forms, changed into vertigo, into chest pains". The scene of loss at which we could not be present, returns later, "indirect, displaced", "long after the foreign scene of the burial" (72).

In encountering the moment of death and loss, we "almost always faint away" (Cixous, 1998: 70), yet it is through the process of mourning, which death and loss initiate, that we are launched into "a space-time whose coordinates are all different from those we have always been

[13] Elsewhere, Cixous (1997: 34) suggests that we are "absolutely beside our own time". This notion seems to imply that we are "ahead of ourselves without having lived what is behind us". We struggle to live the present of an experience, we fall away from it owing to its immensity. Cixous (2009: 44) has poignantly described this experience as "an inner global collapse", the "absolute exaltation of an anguish of monstrous dimensions", and a "monstrous excavation of the cellar of the soul".

[14] Cixous (1998: 73) writes that "what does not exist manifests violently as the impassable". The death of the other, who no longer exists (physically, materially), creates an "immense wall", the "impossible", which is what does not exist, between the other on the other side and the self "on this side".

accustomed to" (Cixous, 1997: 9). Cixous considers this strange space-time as the "*entredeux*" (9) or the in-between, between a life which is ending and a life which is beginning. The *entredeux* is "a moment in life where you are not entirely living, where you are almost dead. Where you are not dead. Where you are not yet in the process of reliving". It is an event that arrives and "evicts us from ourselves" (9), which in turn contributes to a sense of strangeness. The *entredeux* is the "immense landscape of the *trans*-, of the passage" (52); it leaves in its wake instability and uncertainty while potentially instilling in us a more rigorous and tolerant attitude that leads to increased openness and that leaves passage, gives way to a passage which may lead us to reconsider the terms and experience of living. The *entredeux* is everything that "makes the course of life be interrupted" where "we find ourself in a situation for which we are absolutely not prepared" (9). We do not know how to "live" it. Yet, as Cixous reminds us, "we must" (9). And it is this necessity or responsibility (of living for life) that broadly encompasses the process of mourning for a loss which provides an "occasion to rethink the whole of human experience" (Cixous, 1993: 40), because it is as a result of death and loss and "*thanks* to death that we discover the splendour of life. It is death that makes us remember the treasures life contains, with all its living misfortunes and its pleasures" (Cixous, 1991: 137). This citation highlights how death and loss inspire or encourage an existential grappling through which the terms of one's life are reconsidered, reflected on and revised. Moreover, the experience of loss may potentially allow for a subtler and richer appreciation of both joy and sorrow, as well as demonstrating the necessity of sorrow and suffering for the development of the self, for receptivity to the vastness of experience and for hospitality (or "openness") to the other and difference. Indeed, the capacity to work through mourning signals the beginning of a passage from anguish and pain into a newfound appreciation of the challenges and complexities of existence.

The *entredeux* is what opens up a *passage* from the self to a hospitable consideration of the other. It is "to find that one has arrived at the point where the immense foreign territory of the other will begin" (Cixous, 1997: 17). However, as Cixous, reminds us, this does not mean that we will necessarily discover the immensity, the reach and the richness of the other in his or her "infinite foreignness" (17). Instead, the *entredeux* may allow for a "strange profit" in our suffering whereby there is a "whole manoeuvre of the unconscious, of the soul, of the body, that makes us come to bear the unbearable" (19). In this manoeuvre, we become the subject rather than the victim of our suffering. As Cixous (1997: 19) writes:

> But human beings try to live through the worst sufferings. To make humanity of them. To distil them, to understand their lesson. This is what the poets did in the concentration camps. And what we do, ourselves, when the pain that strikes us in our personal life makes poets of us.

Cixous (1997: 20) is interested in our inclination "to search out the noble form", the poetic form, in the most painful moments of existence, that is to say, where we "see ourselves from a point of view that raises us up at the moment we are debased" (20). The poetic gesture is what transforms "other aspects of both the soul and of human life beyond those which are modified by political action" (Cixous, 2008: 89)[15]. In moments which have a "very high index of intensity" (Cixous, 1997: 12), we are frequently afraid of seeing ourselves suffer because "we see death, we see that we are someone else, we do not recognize ourselves...and the fear becomes incalculable" (25). Fear may engender a retreat, a flight before a harrowing reality, yet, in fleeing, "it is life that we lose. We believe we're saving our life, but we lose it. Because all harrowing events are an integral part of life" (25). Cixous considers fear as the "principal enemy" of life and she attempts to think about existence as a way of making "fear retreat" (26). She does recognise the immensity of pain and suffering, the pain of the experience of mourning, which is "stronger than everything" (26)[16]. However, a close encounter with death, when "we have been brushed by death", may allow for the possibility of a "strange feeling", a jubilation that we are still living, that we have survived death (26)[17]. In this way, our true nobility, our true poetry, is an avowal or affirmation of life and living so that "even when we are reduced, when we are crushed", there is

[15]For Cixous (2002: 194), the 'poetic' is not exclusively about writing or making poems. Instead, it entails a creative engagement with suffering that transforms pain into a lived enrichment of the individual's human status. The poetic is an approach that is open to the uniqueness and alterity of experience and the poet is concerned with the question of life and death. Elsewhere, Cixous (1991: 114) writes about the poet that one "must have thoroughly rubbed and exhausted one's eyes in order to get rid of the thousands of scales we start with from making up our eyes" – "I call 'poet' any writing being who sets out on this path, in quest of what I call the second innocence, the one that comes after knowing, the one that no longer knows, the one that knows how not to know". The poetic is concerned with designating something that refuses appellation, a wordless, nameless "starry wandering about which we sense, without ever seeing it, the presence of an order other than our own" (Cixous, 1998b: 5). For Cixous, the anguish of grief and suffering offers the opportunity for a renewed and revitalised (poetic) sense of existence. As she writes: "Behind the pain, sprouts the poem" (7).

[16] In her literary text, *Angst*, Cixous (1985: 7) captures the brutality and violence of suffering in the following description: "The worst is upon me. This is it: the scene of Great Suffering. During this scene the impossible takes place: my death attacks me, life panics and splits in two; one life tears at the other which has it by the throat, biting. You struggle. The body breaks, the sky shatters, the scene bursts into flames. You fall and the earth is no longer there...Outside, frozen. Motionless. Deported. Displaced".

[17] Elsewhere Cixous (1991: 89) writes about this "pure joy of feeling that I am not the one who is dying": "Proof of life: the feeling that there is death and life and that the axe did not fall on me".

a "resource in us" which "makes the poetic genius that is in every human being still resist. Still be capable of resisting" (27). This capacity for response is dependent on the *approach* one adopts towards living and whether this approach is a poetic and hospitable reaching out towards, or consideration of, the other and the inexplicable otherness in life. In short, this approach in no way diminishes the "immensity of pain" (27). Rather, it affirms the immensity of life, that "life is greater than we think it is" (27), and that we are not passive in the face of struggle and suffering[18].

Cixous (1997: 32) suggests that we are "haunted by the question of mortality", which is effectively a question about "what it is to be human, this thing that speaks, that thinks, that loves, that desires and that one day is extinguished" (32). Being human, for Cixous, is about "not depriving oneself of the rest of the universe. It is to be able to echo – a complex but magnificent labour – with what constitutes the universe" (32). In this way, being human is about not being insular or insulated, but rather about realising that "one is part of a whole that is worth the trip, the displacing of all our ideas" (32). Being or becoming "more human" is about becoming "more capable of reading the world, more faithful...to what we can create" (30). As Cixous (1997: 33) proposes:

> As for that species of vision I often have of our era, seen by someone who could be outside of time, who could travel round it and thus sees its limits: it transforms my evaluation of the world or the relationship I have with others. I always see myself as that ant, that little letter wandering through a book whose end one cannot see. And that ant, that little letter does not see the end of the book. But someone who could see the end of the book would have a different life. I imagine that someone...

It is about choosing a *means* of living (and loving) which either signals the destruction of the other or its safety and preservation through an imaginative consideration of the immensity of existence. Living is risky as it involves "advancing straight toward the unknown to the point of getting lost" (Cixous, 1998b: 35). We risk losing ourselves, but in risking there is the possibility for infinite gain, for the gift of the other.

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[18]As Cixous (1997: 97) writes: "All that has been lived, all that has been thought, including the worst, regains its status of production, of action – if we are not in a state of passivity, if we are not rolled under the waves, crushed. So it is not so much *gaining* time; it is being active; being the subject of one's life".

Cixous (1998: 73) certainly does not eschew the responsibilities that the experience of loss brings. Instead, she welcomes the opportunities that it offers because she knows "very well that losing teaches us to live". Cixous desires "to be there when I lose, I don't want to lose the loss" (73). In her estimation, the worst part of grief is grief "that doesn't let itself be suffered", an "absolute, infinite, indolorous suffering", a "tragic experience of expropriation" through which we cannot even suffer our own suffering, "eat the bread of suffering and drink [our] own tears" (73). In the face of loss, we are "absolutely alone" and we "don't know how to be there" (74). However, in spite of this aloneness, we are faced with an ethical urgency not to renounce the "remnants of that which is without music and without words" (74). In the "ultimate hours", we are faced with the challenge of "fish(ing) in the space between the lines beyond the heart for what must return to the heart, and to make it sound once more" (74). Cixous (1998: 72) is interested in the aporetic movement of passing over an impassable border, of going where we seemingly cannot go. She views both writing and dreams as fertile avenues that allow us to glimpse what is at stake in the process of loss (and thus life and death).

Writing is what signifies "a hunger for flesh and for tears, our appetite for living, that, at the tip of forsaken fingers, makes a pencil grow" (Cixous, 1998: 74). Writing is the place where "we wander along invisible streams" and where we seek "to pass from a region of feeling to a region of...painting with words what moves us without words" (82); it is the place "where the door opens that gives access to the other side" (82). As Cixous (1998: 74) continues:

> Writing is the movement to return to where we haven't been "in person" but only in wounded flesh, in frightened animal, movement to go farther than far, and also, effort to *go too far*, to where I'm afraid to go...I write, I extend my hand; without my knowing it, this is already a prayer...it is in this modest, all-powerful way that I begin to save what is lost. When I write I ask for your hand; with your hand I'll go too far and I won't be afraid anymore of not coming back. Without my knowing it, it is already *love*. Love is giving one's hand.

Love is what "infinites me" (75), it is "where one saves what passes" (76), it is the finite seeking the infinite as a way of "holding on to what surpasses me, of adding to myself a mother or other" (75). What Cixous (2008: 26) calls love is a "renunciation of the demands of a self that wants to exert power over the other". By extending out to the other, through writing, through dreaming,

there is the possibility of transforming the impassable border into an "incalculable, deep, borderless...instant" (Cixous, 1998: 79). By losing someone significant, we are "entirely invaded by exile and bordered by solitude" (78-79). Yet, there is the opportunity, through loving the other, to transform this state of grief and loss into an affirmation of living. As Cixous (1998: 79) writes: "nothing is given except the chance, then everything needs to be wrenched with vital strength from death".

For Cixous (1991: 6), the experience of loss incites a desire to witness and understand creatively the vicissitudes of existence, to "look at life without dying of fear". She makes use of writing, which is a "life factor" (1997: 98), as a creative gesture or an instance of creativity which opens up a new space in consciousness and, by doing so, allows for the exploration of infinite possibilities. The medium of writing encourages slippages in consciousness which remain open to glimpses or eruptions of unconscious energy. For Cixous (1989: 6), writing is a "question of living and surviving. Writing follows life like its shadow, extends it, hears it, engraves it. It is a question of living to the end without losing sight of life for a minute, which is immense *work*". Writing becomes an active way of working through the process of loss. Writing thus functions as a "small trembling light in the darkness of the path" (6), for Cixous begins to write from the experience of loss, reaching towards a consideration of the impact of loss in life, moving from the "hell"[19] of loss towards the "direction of the hidden day" (7). In this way, "writing always means being saved in a certain way" (8), and it shadows or tracks the working through of loss, and thus documents or archives the immensity of experience. As Cixous (1989: 4-5) writes:

> I believe that one can only begin to advance along the path of discovery, of discovery of writing or of something else, from the point of mourning or in the reparation of mourning. In the beginning, the gesture of writing is linked to the experience of disappearance, to the feeling of having lost the key to the world, of having thrown it away. Having suddenly acquired the precious sense of the rare, the mortal, and having to regain, urgently, the entrance, the breath....We have to do the apprenticeship of Mortality.

Cixous (1997: 56) is interested in how writing takes us further, to the "further-than-myself in myself", which contains the traces of significant others both deceased and living. Writing is that

[19] Cixous (1989: 7) defines 'hell' as "incomprehension, it is dreadful mystery, and also the demonic or demoniac feeling of being nothing, controlling nothing, of being in the unformed, tiny, before the immense".

which can give passage to the possibility of the "further" and it is "a way of leaving no space for death, of pushing back forgetfulness, of never letting oneself be surprised by the abyss" (Cixous, 1991: 3). Writing may accompany us in our attempts to cross through fear. As Cixous (1991: 8) suggests: "With one hand, suffering, living, putting your finger on pain, loss. But there is the other hand: the one that writes".

Dying, rather than living, the death of a significant other may function as a creative spur for writing which attempts to relive the experience of the death of a loved one in which one had died too. Cixous (1993: 7) suggests that to begin writing, which is to say living, "we must have death". She considers the dead as the "doorkeepers who while closing one side 'give' way to the other" (7). As Cixous (1991: 37) proposes:

> And from this period of death, one retains the greatest fear and the greatest benefit: the desire to remain as close as possible to her, death, our most powerful mother, the one who gives us the most violent push of desire to cross over, to leap.

Cixous suggests that what occurs in response to the death of a significant other is "unspeakable" (36), for we experience "the greatest, the most repellent suffering" (37). And it is this decisive, "absolutely unforgettable" experience that is archived in memory; but it is memory that "doesn't know, doesn't speak, that is only furrowed scarred flesh; painful proof, but of what..." (37). Writing attempts to begin addressing this "what" so that life can emerge "crawling from the entrails of death" (37)[20]. It acknowledges death, the hell of loss – it was a "deep pain (that) dictated my first letters from hell" (41). Indeed writing is inextricably bound to a sense of having lost everything so that it begins "without knowing, without light, without hope" (38). And it is in the confusion of loss, when you are "beside yourself", when you "wander stripped down, undefined, at the mercy of the Other", that your "flesh lets strangeness come through...without resistance" (38-39). This movement of being at the mercy of the other, 'inundated with otherness" (39), begins to tailor or sketch a "body without borders" which is in fact a "garden of love", for "only when you are lost can love find itself in you without losing its way" (39). Love

[20] Further on Cixous (1991: 41) writes: "In the beginning, there can only be dying, the abyss...After that, you don't know. It's life that decides. Its terrible power of invention, which surpasses us. Our life anticipates us. Always ahead of you by a height, a desire, the good abyss, the one that suggests to you: 'Leap and pass into infinity'. Write! What? Take to the wind, take to writing, form one body with the letters. Live! Risk: those who risk nothing gain nothing, risk and you no longer risk anything".

is what seeks out an "unlimited space, the place without end that is necessary and favourable to it" (39). It is a "space without bounds" that allows us to hear the "cries of the world, the rages and the appeals of the peoples, the bodily songs, the music of tortures and the music of ecstasies" (41). Writing becomes a "gesture of (this) love", so that we write through love and love with writing (42). Loving and writing thus "unfold only in each other's embrace", so that love "opens up the body without which Writing becomes atrophied" (42). In short, the text of writing is "the flesh at work in a labour of love" (42). Writing makes use of the body and the body is an affirmation of feeling alive, which in turn retrieves the subject from a state of dying.

Cixous (1993: 10) considers writing as one of the ways of learning how to die; "it's learning not to be afraid, in other words to live at the extremity of life". The death of a significant other offers the opportunity to begin to engage with the most intense life possible, with the "extremes of experience, thought, life" (34), but death is never enough as we have to have "the courage, the desire, to approach, to go to the door" (7)[21]. The death of a significant other may provide "access to the other world" (10). It gives us the experience of "the end of the world" (10), so that we can begin to think "through death towards the recognition of love" (41). As Cixous (1993: 10) proposes:

> We need to lose the world, to lose a world, and to discover that there is more than one world and that the world isn't what we think it is. Without that, we know nothing about the mortality and immortality we carry. We don't know we're alive as long as we haven't encountered death...And it *is* an act of grace.

Cixous considers grace as "everything loss brings as it takes away" (10), that "*in losing we have something to gain*" (11). Grace is what allows things to change colour so that we can begin to "see other scenes" (12); the "hour of grace' would perhaps allow us "to say what we have never said" (48). It allows us "to learn more about ourselves more closely, in another light" (Cixous, 1998b: 30). With the help of writing, we can begin to think about and through the experience of the death of a loved one, which is also to think about the fact of our own mortality. In thinking-writing about death, we no longer forget, which is to say kill, the dead, but we become "the guardian, the friend, the regenerator of the dead" (Cixous, 1993: 13). While writing "proceeds by

[21] As Cixous (1991: 89) writes: "It's at this moment, in extremis, that we are born and enjoy the strange things that can happen during such a dangerous, magnificent, and cruel experience as losing a relative".

groping in the dark", it can become what MacGillivray (1998: xxi) calls an "edge pursuit: a pursuit of the edge, practiced on the edge; an edgy pushing at edges in an effort to feel and fall over them". Indeed, the flow and practice of writing is "in search of what constitutes the edge, what functions as the irreducible at the edge" (xxi), so that this edgy pursuit (of thinking, of writing, of living) may allow for a "magic flux full of silent words flowing from...one life to the other" (Cixous, 1998b: 3). Writing is a link which can aid us in living through the darkness and "transposing it into words" (Cixous, 1989: 1). When so much is lost, words can become a "magic door opening onto the other world" (2); indeed we "enter the country of words" (5).

For Cixous (1986: 86), "writing is working", it is "being worked; questioning (in) the between (letting oneself be questioned) of same *and of* other without which nothing lives". Writing is "infinitely charged with a ceaseless exchange of one with another – not knowing one another and beginning again only from what is most distant, from self, from other, from the other within" (86). Writing is thus, as McQuillan (2002: 47) points out, not a movement or object of possession but a process of questioning whose "only condition is its incessant relation to the other". For Cixous, dreaming also opens the door to another world; it gives us "access to this other world where the dead and the dying live" (Cixous, 1993: 59). Indeed, dreams allow "what is outside of us during the day" to take place "in us during the night" (Cixous, 1998: 72). Dreams give us "the marvellous gift of constantly bringing back our dead alive, with the result that at night we can talk with our dead" (Cixous, 1993: 12)[22]. For Cixous, if we cannot be "guests of the dead" by dying, then we can be in the "wisest of companies" by dreaming (59). In dreams, we can "hope to move closer to everything we can't say without dying of fright" (61). Moreover, we can traverse the forest and journey through the world "using all the available means of transport" (64). In dreams, we travel to "the heart of the country of the unconscious" (65); the unconscious functioning as an "inner foreign country, foreign home, country of lost countries" (70). The unconscious makes us other to ourselves and dreaming the other within ourselves may potentially give access to the other side, allow us to pass over to the other side. Dreaming brings us to the "frontier of the forbidden and helps us to trespass it" (71). It is about "going beyond, about breaking through the known, the human, and advancing in the direction of the terrifying, of our own end...there where *the other* begins" (71).

[22] Elsewhere, Cixous (2006: 7) considers how the dead return "through night's magic corridors". They "come back to us alive, right here and with no blood tax at the border".

In *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, Cixous (1991: 79-80) suggests the following in considering the "step" of dreams or the "school of dreams":

> A dream's charm is that you are transported into another world; no, you are not transported, you *are* already in the other world. The scene is that of the other world. There is no transition: you wake up in the dream in the other world, on the other side; there is no passport, no visa but this extreme familiarity with extreme strangeness...the feeling of foreignness is absolutely pure, and this is the best thing for writing.

Writing is stimulated by the dream which is a "crossing (of) the frontiers to the other world without transition" (81). Cixous (2006: 4) even insists that writing is "subject to the mercy and grace of dreams as an infant is at the mercy of the breast". She likens dreams to poems which contain "a treasure locked away somewhere" (1991: 88). Writing becomes the search for this treasure, with Cixous reminding us that "the treasure is in the searching, not the finding" (81). Indeed, the treasure of dreams, the poetry of dreams, becomes "the universe of passage" which helps us "*to pass to the other side*" (97). Writing "on board the dream" is a dream-writing of "what we are when we are no longer ourselves" (106). This dream writing is a "prophet of our traces, of our ultimate metamorphoses", of "our surviving" (106), and "it gets its strength and body back by stirring up, citing, resuscitating along the paths of dreams" (Cixous, 2009: x). In short, the power of dreams fuels the process of writing which attempts to document the immensity of suffering and grief; it holds out the hope that we may be able to live through the event of losing a world rather than sinking further (dying further) into the abyss of mourning. As Cixous (1994: 196) writes:

> Mourning unfurls its storm over the whole country, ourselves in torrents we weep joining our afflictions to the world's afflictions, deluge is our condition, but it is not our end, while it pours off our plumage, inside the dream lights a candle.

Cixous (2008: 174) defines writing, the "law of writing" as what we "write in the direction of that which does not let itself be written". Nevertheless, we "must try to write": "What I can write is already written, it is no longer of interest. I always head towards the most frightening. This is what makes writing thrilling but painful. I write towards what I flee. I dream about it". We write about what exceeds us, which suggests that "there exists inside us a force that is stronger than us. And it's precisely this which speaks, it's this which launches words" (21). This force in us that is

stronger than us is courage to "write the passage" (Cixous, 1998: 70), in all the difficulty and pain of such a gesture. It requires "extraordinary strength of the body of the soul" (70) and the realisation that "writing is not arriving; most of the time it's *not arriving*" (Cixous, 1993: 65). Nevertheless, getting there, to this foreign and unknown hour, this hour of "our most intimate foreignness" (Cixous, 1998: 63) where the passage is still dark, is the "poet's dream"; "getting there has always been the poem's hope" (62). To write, which is to say, to live, the "most difficult", the "border passage", the "most torturous" is a "dream" – "it doesn't obey us. It's a dream: it's a wind. The wind blows at its hour" (82). Nevertheless, we can ready ourselves, we can prepare ourselves, through writing that is hospitable to the other (which is to say, poetic writing), for catching something of the experience of the dream.

For Cixous, writing and dreaming (dreaming of writing, writing dreaming, dream-writing) function as approaches or ways to potentially relive what could not be lived in the immediate experience of the death of a loved one. Cixous writes in a poetic, personal and reflective way of her experience of loss, and she has found writing and dreaming useful tools in helping her to think through the question of death and death in its interaction with life. Of course, the tools that she uses are not necessarily generalisable; they offer one creative response to loss. For Cixous, we can dream-think-write *through* pain, *through* death, towards life, and dreaming and writing (poetically) are ways of coming "close to others precisely where they are most alive, most mortal, closest to death" (91); these are "powerfully alive" ways of thinking through the question of death (towards life) (168). In effect, these practices seem to side with life, to give life, to play with/between life and death, so that there is "progression from fantasy and denial to inscription, recreation" (Sellers, 2002: 97). We take a chance, we hold out hope, knowing that "in the end death will win" (Cixous, 2009: x). However, Cixous will rewrite the fact and inevitability of our mortality by suggesting that "until the end one doesn't know who wins" (x). Until the end, we remain alive by believing that we "have to live – otherwise [we] have so many reasons not to live" (Cixous, 2008: 153). Until the end, "there is something stronger than ourselves that keeps us surviving what is unsurviveable" (153).

Cixous decides not to adopt a melancholic or stoic position when faced with the experience of loss. Instead she integrates the experience of loss (that death evokes) into life and embraces suffering as a locus of self-transformation and an affirmation of living through loss and

recognising the value of otherness in/for life. Cixous begins to think through loss by writing about it; her writing takes its inspiration from the dream. She acknowledges mortality through the imaginative stratagem of staying one step ahead of death, while partially recuperating the dead through an aesthetic of unconscious encounter (via the dream) and textual recreation (with the help of writing). Dreaming and writing thus manifest as Cixous' approach to, or strategies for, shaping a response to death. These strategies, however, do not constitute an attempt to aestheticise experience in the sense of ameliorating the harshness of loss through exquisite poetry and accomplished literary creation, hence seeking to build a buffer against, or deny, the brute fact of one's own mortality. Instead, they are powerful tools (for some) to bring to light the dark, ugly and violent side of existence, the experience of loss, so that one may begin or continue the process of thinking about death, and what death has in store deep within life itself.

Cixous (2008: 154) suggests that what impels us towards survival is a "faith" or "grace" in which we "feel that something has been saved". This something is "more than yourself", "the more-than-myself", which alludes to the "in-between-us that keeps us open to the other, to otherness" (154). In this way, Cixous' goal is the creative preservation of an otherness that exceeds the self, rather than some construct of "eternal life" (because death will win in the end). This something is an affirmation that "the desert can lead to the spring", that the "air remains", that "the flood is a promise of birth" (Cixous, 1993b: 28). It is "knowing how to pass from anguish to astonishment and how to make the incomprehensible a source of wonder" (Cixous, 1989: 7). It means "loving the night, no longer dreading it, treating it like a star-flecked day" (7). The exuberant embrace of life through the passage of death is, for Cixous, difficult work, "the great work of living" (7), but it is necessary work which allows for an exchange with the exhausting and infinite richness of existence, so that living may continue in "the first hour of the next world" (Cixous, 1998: 62). As Cixous writes (cited in Sellars, 2002: 102-103), meditating on the question of death and reflecting on, or contemplating, the "living part of death" or the "mortal part of life":

> Place your hand on your death, O human, distinguish between the essential and insignificant, and from this point on, you will know in which direction life is...Who is afraid of dying, is already dying. Sometimes one has to pass through what resembles death, the terrifying stripping away of self, the circle of fire, to resume life.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

In attempting to engage with the aftermath of the loss of a loved one, Derrida and Cixous are deeply sensitive to the complexities and responsibilities that this loss evokes or incites. Both writers are keenly interested in what death holds in store deep within life itself, before the end. They express an urgent and abiding interest in the significance of death for life and in how the fact of our own mortality and the experience of the loss of significant others play themselves out or affect the course of our existence. The experience of loss is a useful marker in this life-death debate because it brings to the fore the scope of our life and the possibility of our death, which is to say the question of our existence. The full spectrum of loss incites existential grappling: how do I make meaning of my inevitable death and the death of significant others? To put this differently, how do I make meaning of my life in the face of my inevitable death and the death of significant others? Through their writing, Derrida and Cixous actively take on these compelling questions of existence. For Derrida, the process of mourning is interminable. It entails a reckoning with the dead other, who brings to the fore the fact of our own mortality[23] and questions of life and living. It is extremely difficult, and potentially treacherous, to internalise the other within the self. The other ultimately resists the enclosure of our memory and any "successful" mourning which takes the other into the self risks the threat of cannibalising the alterity of the other.

Derrida draws our attention to the intricacy of experience and what we once shared and exchanged with the other who has now died. Our encounter with the other, who is now only "with us" insofar as he s/he is "in us", also alludes to experience that may not necessarily be readily available to our conscious minds. What we shared with the other was a unique world of living which has been brought to an end by death. Derrida is concerned with how we honour, most faithfully, most responsibly, this unique and inimitable engagement. Our responsibility does not cease as a result of the death of a loved one. Instead we are called upon to respond to, and to be responsible for, the end of this unique world. Derrida is interested in the potential for

[23] While the death of a significant other brings to the fore our own sense of mortality, this provocation should not be viewed in terms of a reckoning with all deaths in light of our own imagined demise. Rather, the death of another makes us aware of our own frailty and finitude, of the fact that at some point we will die. Derrida is acutely and painstakingly aware of the difference of the other, that the life of the other is different from mine, that the death of the other will be different from mine, that the other is not me. By remaining rigorously hospitable to the differences between the self and the other, Derrida attempts to avoid the risk of a solipsistic consumption of the other.

renewed exchange with the other, even though the other is now solely for us a spectral absent presence that haunts the self. In his focus on renewed exchange, Derrida eschews the process of mourning where the self "gets over" the loss of a significant other and returns (perhaps somewhat triumphantly, and not without a fair share of forgetting) to a normal state of functioning as enjoyed prior to a bereavement. Derrida sides more closely with a melancholic position that protests against this type of mourning that attempts to lose the loss. In his version of melancholia, the self, who is haunted by the ghost of the other, attempts to carry, and actively struggles with carrying, the lost world of the other, the world between-two that has now disappeared. Carrying the other, which is to say being responsible for and responsive to the spectral other, seems a near impossible task given that the relationship with the other has been interrupted (or ruptured) and is now dissymmetrical. However, for Derrida, it remains an ethical challenge without end (or which is to be marked only by our own end). Such commitment is necessary for keeping the other alive, for keeping the other within the self alive, for carrying the other into an active engagement with - or actively considering otherness in - the questions of life, death and the permutations of existence. Ultimately, the loss of the other is irrevocable and Derrida is aware of a certain irreducibility at the heart of loss, which in turn leads to the spectral haunting of the self by the other. Effectively, we can never do what we most want, which is to speak directly to the dead other without any barriers.

Cixous suggests that we are never quite prepared for the moment of the death of a loved one. We are taken by surprise, shocked to the core, and we never seem fully present at this event. Indeed, we frequently, and out of fear, "die" the death of a significant other; we are unable to live through the sheer immensity of the traumatic event or experience. Cixous is interested in finding ways to reclaim (for life) what we have lost in the death of another. She views the other's death as an opportunity for us to live life more creatively, more vitally. Each time, death transports us into a strange and new existence that we need to pass through, to live through. Indeed, the loss of a loved one gives occasion to start thinking more creatively about our existence, and about what we treasure or value most. This consideration is inextricably linked to a responsiveness to, a hospitable and loving expansion towards, the horizon of the other. With the aid of writing and dreams, we can pass over to the (other) side of life which affirms surviving and living (living-on) in the face of, in the aftermath of, death. Writing and dreaming take us further, they cross borders to the edge of existence, so that we can begin to learn to live at the extremity of life and engage

with the most intense life possible[24]. Writing and dreaming hold out the hope that we may begin to face death; this in turn affirms the essential and vital embrace of life, and concomitantly the immensely creative work of living. While Cixous sides with life, voting "for life", she does not sacrifice death to life or undervalue what is lost in death. She realises that she will die in the end – an irrefutable fact of life. However, until her end, she is compelled by the seemingly infinite possibilities that life holds; she desires to live life to the fullest through the experiences of death in life, such as loss. Cixous is intrigued by the expanse of living on the edge through writing and dreaming. Dreaming and writing (writing informed by the dream) become her guides to living more richly and vibrantly; they have a distinctly personal resonance for her.

While one should not attempt to elide the differences in the approaches of Derrida and Cixous to mourning and loss, there seem to be points of intersection in their considerations of this theme. Indeed, both writers feel an immense responsibility to the other (and to the other within the self) who, as a result of death, risks disappearing or being colonised by the self. The loss of a loved one is an extremely painful and challenging process and it marks the end of a world formed uniquely between one and the other, between one and another. Derrida and Cixous feel a responsibility to contend with the aftermath, or fallout, of this lost world, with what it means to live in a different world, a world that is strange and unfamiliar. They are interested in creatively grappling with what is means to be a self who loses another and who must nevertheless find ways of keeping the other alive and hospitably reaching out towards the other with as little appropriation as possible.

Cixous adopts the position of the creative writer-dreamer who crosses over death into a life after death, while Derrida assumes the role of the melancholic philosopher who awaits death and, in the meantime, must live life affected by the deaths of others whose absence haunts the present. For Derrida, philosophy is learning how to die, which is to say how to live, whereas for Cixous it is writing (and dreaming) which teach us how to live and die. Having said this, though, one cannot exclude the absolute centrality that Derrrida accords to writing and textuality in

[24] Derrida (2006: 114) notes that experience for Cixous is a "performativity of a writing that travels and crosses the continental distances at full speed and on all possible rhythms". For Cixous (1998b: 3), writing involves a performance with and through the body; it is a flow of blood through the veins, a "wordless dialogue from blood to blood".

philosophy; philosophy is indelibly indebted to, and (in)formed by, writing[25]. Instead of espousing a melancholic position in relation to life, Cixous prefers an exuberant, poetic, yet extremely thoughtful and sensitive, embrace of life; however, this preference in no way creates an irreparable divide between her work and Derrida's. Instead, it is matter of emphasis or orientation, a preference for creating differently, otherwise. In her text, *Rootprints*, Cixous (1997) attempts to delineate the differences between her approach to life and death and Derrida's mode of understanding. Initially, however, she mentions how they are often both "attracted, interested, questioned, moved or disturbed by the same mysteries", and that she can only (and paradoxically) discern differences between them "from out of a sensation of resemblance" (81). As Cixous continues: "It's as if, coming from very far away, having covered the same path in the same direction for millennia, parallel, sometimes moving apart, sometimes coming together, there were the trace in us, each one on our own side, of the long path". In true deconstructive style, Cixous recognises a kinship in the differences in orientation between herself and Derrida; yet, while difference is acknowledged, there is also a recognition of closeness, intimacy, and exchange in difference.

Cixous (1997: 82) proposes that death is fundamental for both herself and Derrida – "we live, we write starting from death". However, "faced with the anguish" (81), they respond differently. For Cixous, death is past, her own death has already taken place (82); she attempts to live through the worst, live through the "deaths", the losses, that rupture existence. By contrast, death awaits Derrida - he expects it in the future. While Cixous offers the following comparison, she recognises that it is "too clean, too rigid...and undoubtedly the positions exchange themselves" (82). As she continues:

> Of course death also has a future for me. But I am not expecting death. I am expecting to cross it, to spend it. Him [i.e. Derrida]: death will bring to an end; all of life flows towards him from this ultimate term. There is an intense feeling of finitude in him – which perhaps either engenders or maintains his infinite racing...Me: life flows towards life. Between life and life there is an unknown passage. Him: he fears his own death for

[25] When Cixous (1997: 81) considers Derrida's approach to philosophy, she notes that she cannot "separate the man from the writing...because he is the-man-who-writes. He steeps his pen in his own blood. He is always in the process of writing (even when he is not writing). I ought to say: thinking with words, phrases. Writing is his nature. And that writing is an extreme fidelity".

> others. Me: I fear the death of others. My own death will arrive last. After. That is why I cannot not desire it. (But it is living that mobilizes me: living is such work) (82).

The last line of this quotation (in brackets) elucidates the differences in motivation between Derrida and Cixous. Both writers are compelled to lead the most intense life possible, but Cixous is motivated to live vitally and creatively by living, by life itself, whereas Derrida is motivated to learn to live finally by the fact the he will die, by the need to seize opportunities that will disappear with his own death[26]. Cixous feels that we die many times during our lives and she is interested in crossing over these mini or quasi-deaths, through the passage, into a life after death, into a renewed and reinvigorated sense of existence. Derrida, on the other hand, awaits his own death, as a grand event in the future, and it is this awaiting that incites his "infinite racing", his desire to live intensely before his own death arrives.

In his text on Cixous, *H.C. for Life, That is to Say...*, Derrida (2006: xiii) explains that Cixous has taken sides with life, for life, for living life. He suggests that in this siding with life she wagers her life on life as an act of faith, "beyond a death whose test and threat are none the less endured". Cixous "orients herself in relation to life, as one says to orient oneself with a compass or by the sun" (36). While Cixous never denies death - indeed she "knows and understands (it) as well as anyone" - she prefers "to turn everything and make it come round to the side of life" (36); she "mounts life...as one mounts a play" (37). For Cixous, death acts as a catalyst for living life most productively and fully. She replaces a life before death with a life after death, through which a death in life (initially experienced as loss) leads to the possibility of a renewed sense of living. Being 'for life" is "nothing else than a living of death...still living death, living it for oneself, for the other, and for life" (89). Being for life is "life in exchange for death" (129); it is bringing to life or creating in the world.

In a dialogue between Cixous and Derrida (interestingly entitled, "From the Word to/of Life") Derrida makes mention of some of the themes he explored in *H.C. for Life*, especially the "affirmative thought of life" in Cixous' writing and her "faithful and unfailing friendship", forever, for life (2006b: 7). "For life" is an "affirmation, a taking sides with life", which, Derrida

[26] In her fictional text, *Hyperdream*, Cixous (2009: 89) reports that her friend, J.D., was always having to call her back and remind her of death: "In the end I'm always having to remind you that on my side we die too fast, while you on your side live too fast".

adds, “I have never been able to share” (7). He continues: “I am not ‘against life’, but neither am I ‘for life’ like her” (7). Cixous responds to this statement rather playfully and enigmatically with the following counterstatement: “You are against death and fiercely for life. But otherwise. Dis/quietedly” (7). What can we make of Cixous’s counterstatement? Is her retort an absolute contradiction of Derrida’s statement or is it a qualification as a means of continuing (living-on) with the dialogue? In her essay, “The Flying Manuscript” (an essay which now forms a central part of the monograph, *Insister of Jacques Derrida*, which is Cixous’ response to Derrida’s text about her), Prenowitz (2006: xv) notes that Cixous offers an “extremely poetical and moving meditation-dialogue, an unprecedented act of resistance to the work of mourning”. Cixous (2007: 60) argues with Derrida, still, even after his death, and insists (as the title of her monograph indicates) that he is on the side of life: “But you think living you think of living, to live is that, I say...you hold on to life like no one else”. It seems as if this dialogue continues, will continue into the future, and any easy resolution of the question of sides for life and death remains at present impossible.

While it falls beyond the scope of this project to offer a sustained and searching analysis of the life-death dialogues between Derrida and Cixous, it seems important, however briefly, to give the reader a taste of what is at stake in the questions of life and death. Although these questions cannot be ignored or foreclosed, their ultimate meanings (if such are conceivable) are deferred to a future time that is currently beyond the enclosure of knowledge. Cixous (1997: 82) rightly points out just how central these questions are to both her and Derrida in their writings: “These ‘readings’ of death, of life, of survival, or afterlife, of time, of love, of the other, would lead me to unroll all the parchment of our works”. The process of loss is an experiencing of the secret, not a hidden, intimate secret that can be revealed, but rather, as Derrida has suggested (2001: 38), a “certain inimitable and unique way of doing things”. Such a way alludes to an honouring of the lost world that was shared with another, which in turn allows the other within the self to be recognised. In experiencing loss, we are called upon to grapple actively and responsibly with the death of the other, and more challengingly, we are asked to respect the probability that we may not grasp the full significance of this loss. This requires immense hospitality which is, according to Cixous (2008: 175), an “absolute yes to the other...you take on something of which you cannot measure the development, the effects, the destiny. You cannot do otherwise”. It is perhaps the

French writer, Maurice Blanchot (1997: 291), who most aptly sums up this demanding responsibility or hospitality to the (dead) other:

> We must give up trying to know those to whom we are linked by something essential; by this I mean we must greet them in the relation with the unknown in which they greet us as well, in our estrangement.

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