4-8-2016

writing/trauma

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by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Philosophy
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

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Date of Approval:
March 25, 2016

Keywords: Knowledge, Embodiment, Plasticity, Poetic Language, Abjection, Accident

DEDICATION

For Marc

"With my tears go into your loneliness, my brother. I love him who wants to create over and beyond himself and thus perishes."

--Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

While undergoing such an extensive, grueling process of not only completing a dissertation but enduring the horror of trauma, I have been and continue to be so grateful for the support I received. I want to express my sincere gratitude for my committee Dr. Joanne Waugh, Dr. Stephen turner, Dr. Alex Levine, and Dr. Elizabeth Hersh for the knowledge I have gained from their instruction, constructive feedback, and their patience. In particular, Dr. Waugh, at one point shared a poem with me—just that, no explanation. But this small gesture of reaching out let me know that others understood.

I also want to acknowledge my urban family West Gurley, Joseph Peterson, Mandy Morris, Rene Sanchez, Jose Haro, and, most particularly, Sandra Ordonez and William Koch. My dear friends have provided me with such intellectual and emotional well-being, which truly sustained my ability to carry on. My ever-supportive partner, Shane Callahan, has helped me so much to stay focused in moments of doubt, and hopeful despite how seemingly impossible the process was.

Most significantly, I owe so much gratitude to my family Jocelyn, John, and Monika. We have gone through so much together. You have given me emotional strength and material support, without which, I would not have accomplished what I have. This accomplishment is as much yours as it is mine.

Finally, I have dedicated this work to my brother, Marc. I learned so much from him, especially the extraordinary resilience and fortitude it takes to endure the most miserable, abject trauma. I miss you every day.

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ABBREVIATIONS OF WORKS CITED

AB: *Abnormal*, Michele Foucault

AK: *Archeology of Knowledge*, Michele Foucault

BC: *The Birth of the Clinic*, Michele Foucault

BF: *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzalúa

BGE: *Beyond Good and Evil*, Friedrich Nietzsche

BKS: *The Body Keeps the Score*, Bessel van der Kolk

BM: *How the Body Shapes the Mind*, Shaun Gallagher

BP: *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry

BPP: *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Sigmund Freud

BS: *Black Sun*, Julia Kristeva

CD: "Cezanne's Doubt", Maurice Merleau-Ponty

DL: *Desire in Language*, Julia Kristeva

E: *Écrits*, Jacques Lacan

FB: *Interviews with Francis Bacon*

GM: *Genealogy of Morals*, Friedrich Nietzsche

GS: *Gay Science*, Friedrich Nietzsche

HM: *The History of Madness*, Michele Foucault

HPM: *The History of the Psycho-analytic Movement*, Sigmund Freud

LMD: *Language, Madness, and Desire on Literature*, Michele Foucault

OA: *The Ontology of the Accident*, Catharine Malabou

PH: *The Power of Horror*, Julia Kristeva

PP: *Psychiatric Power*, Michele Foucault

PTG: "The Last Painting of the Portrait of God", Hélène Cixous

RA: *The Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, Giorgio Agamben

RPL: *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Julia Kristeva

TCM: *Trauma: Culture, Meaning & Philosophy*, Patrick Bracken

TEM: *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Cathy Caruth (Ed.)

TI: *Twilight of the Idols*, Friedrich Nietzsche

TL: On *Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense*, Friedrich Nietzsche

TNH: *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth

TP: *Traumatic Possessions*, Jennifer L. Griffiths

TPG: *Tragedy in the Age of the Greeks*, Friedrich Nietzsche

TPP: *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty

TSZ: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Friedrich Nietzsche

TWLPH: *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman

VI: *The Visible and the Invisible*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty

WD: *The Writing of the Disaster*, Maurice Blanchot

WHWT: *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Dominick LaCapra

XI: *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Jacques Lacan

ABSTRACT

In *writing/trauma*, I address the association of trauma with knowledge, language, and writing. My discussion first works to establish the relationship between trauma and knowledge. I argue that trauma does not fit into the traditional Enlightenment model of scientific knowledge or the ontological model of what Michele Foucault calls the '*truth-event*.' Rather, I contend that trauma is unique embodied knowledge, different from that of *praxis* and normal memory. In general, embodied knowledge is a matter of prenoetic and intentional operations. The body schema and body image maintain a power of plasticity and adjust to new motilities in order to re-establish an equilibrium when disrupted or threatened. In line with this, embodiment involves a sense of temporality, agency, and subjectivity. But in the case of extreme disruption, such as trauma, these fundamental aspects of embodiment are compromised to the point that there is a corruption of the "embodied feeling of being alive." Physical pain, to some extent, produces this phenomenon. However, the distinctive function of the repetition compulsion within trauma distinguishes it as an exceptional embodied experience unlike physical pain or analogous phenomena. In the case of trauma, an equilibrium is not maintained, similar to the ontology of the accident. Instead, at best, we can say that what takes place is a *destructive plasticity*, in which the individual is transformed to the point of being a whole new ontological subject.

This phenomenon of destructive plasticity is significant in establishing the relationship of language to *trauma-knowledge* as trauma is the precise point at which language is ruptured. That is to say, purported within psychanalytic discourse, traumatic experience is observed in a break

within the symbolic order. As opposed to physical pain, then, trauma is more akin to *the abject*, sharing the same resistance to narrative language. Traumatic experience is expressed through semiotic compulsions in the body as a *revolt of being*. In light of this, I argue that trauma, rather than being treated as a pathology, is a specific embodied knowledge which can be captured in semiotic, poetic language. Moreover, fragmentary writing, the interface of fragmented knowledge and language, captures the disruptive force of traumatic experience. In conclusion, I assert that writing-trauma is valuable, not because it allows for a 'working through' of the traumatic experience, but because it is an expression of a distinctly human experience.

My work canvases nineteenth century to contemporary literature on trauma such as Bessel van der Kolk in the neurobiological discipline, literary critics including Cathy Caruth, Dori Laub, Dominick LaCapra, et al, and the psychoanalytic theorists Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. I draw from such literature to analyze the ambiguous impossible-possibility of witnessing and giving testimony of traumatic experience in history and writing, as well as the concern with trauma and language specific to the repetition compulsion and the unconscious. Yet, my primary focus is on the contribution of philosophy to the ongoing discourse of trauma. I look to philosophical thinkers such as Michele Foucault and Friedrich Nietzsche to depict the types of epistemological models traditionally addressed within the history of philosophy. My analysis of phenomenology and embodiment is mainly informed by the works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Shaun Gallagher. Additionally, Catharine Malabou's work on destructive plasticity provides an understanding of the ontology of the accident, one of the most critical pieces to my work. Additionally, the works of Elaine Scarry and Julia Kristeva help to disclose the intimate relationship between language and trauma. I also incorporate the work of Gloria Anzalúa along with Julia Kristeva to describe the multi-dimensionality of poetic language and

how this is what allows for an articulation of embodied trauma-knowledge. Finally, Maurice Blanchot's depiction of the disaster and fragmentary writing best captures *writing-trauma* as it is, like trauma, a process of fragmenting language and meaning.

My purpose is to make clear the value of poetic language and fragmentary writing in regard to knowing and writing trauma. The significance to philosophy is that my discussion bridges the phenomenological and epistemological perspectives with that of the literary in order to engage in philosophical discussion on the implications and value of traumatic experience for understanding the human condition. It is my observation that the more we experience trauma, the more valuable artistic expression becomes, and the more we are pressed within the philosophical tradition to account for an experience so many individuals suffer.

INTRODUCTION

I looked down and saw darkness,
nothing but the dark, though I knew there was an expanse of endless, beautiful, snow enveloped peaks
Darkness
no horizon where the land meets the sky,
no breaks,
no piercing lights,
or life
I watched the darkness it seemed for hours
Then a few lights flickering in the distance came into sight
more and more lights
I could suddenly see the edges of the peaks,
mammoth dark silhouettes, marked out by the glow behind
A sense of awe came over me
I looked down and saw the chilling, yet calming, white of the snow
slopes softly flowing
against the black of the exposed, jagged rocks
piercing through the soft surface
forming the images I had imagined below
in the darkness—
the mountains
Circling over the white, I noticed what was different from other images from this position:
lights scattered around,
no formations, no grids, no particular order,
until reaching the city center

This was a calm, familiar darkness
which brought contentment and anticipation of good experiences yet to come
This was unlike the deep, intense, overwhelming darkness that existed
in edges of life
In the dark past,
I had experienced life from a distance,
through a mediated, funneled vision,
from the depth of the thick darkness,
as though it was a substance that enclosed in on my body,
as dense and black as tar
The heaviness weighed me down and allowed me to only see a blurry world that

I could not reach
or touch
It is as though I saw the space between me and the world
as walls of a cone-shaped funnel,
narrow at the source of my vision
and slowly opening up
I felt as though I was experiencing life through a telescope, out of focus,
isolating me from the living, vibrant encounter with the world, others, and its pleasures
At the opening of the funnel, I could see visions of bodies, objects, furnished spaces,
all dim,
as though there was a thick transparent glaze
over the one-dimensional images
The walls of the funnel resembled smeared paint
bright reds, yellow, green, blue
blurred,
blending together like abstract artwork.
From this I sensed the feeling of movement,
free-falling,
nothing touching my back,
nothing resisting the weight of my body
As I felt myself falling deep into the darkness,
my body felt an uneasy tingling sensation
as though on the edge of a shiver
I could feel the free-fall
My heart beat quickened,
the low thundering sent ripples of warmth and tingling throughout my body,
a rush of panic and fear pulsed through my muscles,
tense,
warding off the icy-cold, prickly sensation
just below the skin
I felt light,
plunging fast into the darkness;
my arms, legs, and head fluttered as though they were made
of tissue paper
I felt heavy, as though the weight of my body,
my pain, pulled me so forcefully,
so quickly into the all-engulfing,
heavy,
tar-like
darkness

There was no tar-like substance engulfing me
Below there was nothing to catch me,
nothing at all but darkness
as black as obsidian
a content-less

abyss
In this dark time, I could sense that I was not experiencing the full energy of life,
I had numbly moved through life
unaware of the abyss
It was always in the background pulling at me,
shadowing me,
beckoning to me
At this time, I did not know the meaning of the abyss,
how it was a way to understand
the vast openness of life,
how it was overflowing
with life
and meaning

Neither darkness was permanent.

……

At the time I wrote these words, I did not know the significance, both in practice and meaning. A few years into the thick, swampy mess of trauma, I somehow developed a form of paralysis—I could not write. But then, suddenly, I wrote these words. I wrote in no particular form or style; I just wrote the images and sensations of my immediate experience.

Perhaps what lead me to paralysis in writing is that I was caught between an imperative to know and a deep resistance to knowing. That is, trauma is so horrifying, so destructive, that any knowledge is unbearable. There is always fear of flashbacks, nightmares, intruding images and sensations, as they are unpredictable, and yet, inevitable. Initiating an inquiry invites one of the most traumatic aspects of trauma: repetition. To address this experience means that I must awaken the trauma within me, haul myself back to the scene in order to understand and articulate such a weighty aspect of human experience. And thus, to engage this question of the relationship of knowledge and trauma means that I must undergo the phenomenological experience of knowing trauma.

What we know *of* trauma is distinct from knowing trauma. Currently, the leading theoretical model of trauma is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which the American Psychiatric Association included in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM*) *III* in 1980.[1] Since then there have been a number of modifications in subsequent versions of the *DSM IV* (1994), and now, trauma has received its own section in the *DSM V* entitled "Trauma- and Stress-Related Disorders" (2013). The *DSM* is held to be 'a-theoretical,' according to Patrick in *Trauma: Culture, Meaning and Philosophy*. That is to say, it is treated as an established scientific, investigative document. In each version of the *DSM*, PTSD is presented as "a 'straightforward' medical condition, which can be defined in terms of aetiology, diagnosis, psychopathology, treatment and prognosis" (TCM 47). Bracken points out that the symptoms are held as universal, not open to interpretation on the basis of any particular cultural modalities. Within the diagnosis of PTSD, trauma is taken as an "always-already-there object," and is described according to four[2] distinct diagnostic clusters: re-experiencing; avoidance; negative cognitions and mood; and arousal. The section on trauma presents criteria detailing what constitutes a traumatic event and how to identify the trigger(s) of PTSD.

The theoretical model underlining the precepts of PTSD, and similar 'disorders,' is grounded in the Enlightenment, cognitive model of knowledge. This bedrock is preserved in the various approaches to trauma theory ranging from behaviorist, cognitive, psychodynamic cognitive, appraisal/information, and processing (internal schematas).[3] Common to the various approaches, theories of trauma view conflicts and disturbances to occur within the individual's mind and are based on the way in which our ability to process information is disrupted. The

[1] It is not my intention to elucidate an exhaustive account of the limits of the specific theories, but at this point, I intend to indicate why theory's formulaic structure is viewed as limiting.
[2] This is a recent change in the *DSM V*; before there were only three diagnostic clusters.
[3] For more see Bracken, TCM.

traumatic event is seen as the central aetiological factor responsible for the disruption of mental schematas; shattering of assumptions about self and reality; and failure in cognitive and emotional processing. Other thematic elements include the inability to incorporate and assimilate the traumatic event into processing; the experience of being overwhelmed or overexcited from external stimuli; and the compulsion tendency. All of these approaches rest on the Enlightenment model of subjectivity and temporality, in which the individual is an atomic, independent agent with a coherent historical narrative.

The various approaches address the issue of meaning not as a metaphysical or philosophical problem but as something amenable to empirical investigation (TCM 57). The cognitive feature of trauma theory functions as a search for meaning and order in which human reality consists of psychological laws, and accordingly, it is universal, not determined by social or historical context. Within this framework, trauma, as an object of study, is believed to be accessible through examination and explication, both causal and symptomatic. Each theory looks to how a cause functions in order to produce the particular effects. Even within behaviorist and psychodynamic theory, the process is to observe and collect 'empirical' evidence, whether biographical or behavioral, along the basis of a temporal-causal framework. This background makes it so that the study of trauma lends itself to the scientific model of knowledge and investigation, in that the goal is to find a process that can be understood, predicted, and addressed through technical interventions.

A contending approach to understanding trauma is that of literary theory. The assertion within literary theory is that trauma is ineffable because of the way in which trauma happens too soon, too fast, to be known. Any cognitive knowledge of trauma is delayed and it lies at the very intersection between knowing and not knowing. Literary theory focuses around issues of how

trauma challenges narrative and historiography as it compromises memory. Beyond ruptures in memory, the traumatic event is not integrated into consciousness in a way that it can become understood, known, and spoken of. That is because it is not understood through the straightforward acquisition of facts gained through observation of behavior or biographical documentation. The problem of interpretation remains as the trauma is barred from conscious understanding. It is at the precise point where conscious understanding and normal, cognitive memory fail. The result is that the individual has difficulty in incorporating their experiences into meaningful narratives, and yet, the trauma continues to resonate within their body through the repetition compulsion. Any knowing trauma, thus, shows up as unpredictable and unintelligible, as well as unbearable in horror and intensity.

Literary theory, therefore, is mainly concerned with the question of memory, witnessing, and testimony. With trauma, there is a unique phenomenon of an "elision of memory and the precision of recall" (TEM 153). Leading literary critic, Cathy Caruth, explains that "The trauma is the confrontation with an event that, in its unexpectedness or horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge—that cannot, as George Bataille says, become a matter of "intelligence"—and thus continually returns, in its exactness, at a later time" (TEM 153). For this reason, the traumatic event cannot become "narrative memory." Further, Dori Laub in *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, explains, "Massive trauma precludes its registration; the observing and recording mechanisms of the human mind are temporarily knocked out, malfunction. … While historical evidence to the event which constituted the trauma may be abundant and documents in vast supply, the trauma—as a known event and not simply as overwhelming shock—has not been truly witnessed yet, not been taken cognizance of" (57). Here Laub suggests that trauma is 'known,' but just not cognized; that is, it

is not recorded within cognition. However, in tacking on "yet," he implies trauma is some form of knowledge which at some point can, in fact, be cognized.

The way in which it can come to be recognized and known, by Laub's account, is through testimony and a telling of the experience to a listener, "who is… the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time" (TWLPH 57). Similarly, Jennifer Griffiths, in *Traumatic Possession: The Body and Memory in African American Women's Writing and Performance,* notes that the testimony depends on the relationship between the survivor and witness. She remarks that "memory emerges and reunites a body and a voice severed in trauma. These fractured pieces of the survivor's self come together in the reflection of the listener, and memory comes into meaning through this bodily transaction, rather than simply by creating a narrative in language" (2). The interface of bodies, one speaking, the other listening, is what creates meaning, but this meaning, as implied, goes beyond narration through ordinary language. That is to say, the repetition compulsion in traumatic experience bars narrative closure, and thus, giving an account of and witnessing history is problematic as it is difficult to get at exactly what took place.

In regard to the possibility of bearing witness, Giorgio Agamben, in *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, explains that "not even the survivor can bear witness completely, can speak his own lacuna." Therefore, he details:

> This means that testimony is the disjunction between two impossibilities of bearing witness; it means that language, in order to bear witness, must give way to a non-language in order to show the impossibility of being witness. The language of testimony is a language that no longer signifies and that, is not signifying,

> advances into what is without language, to the point of taking on a different insignificance – that of the complete witness, that of he who by definition cannot bear witness. To bear witness, it is therefore not enough to bring language to its own non-sense, to the pure undecidability of letters. … [I]t is thus necessary that the impossibility of being witness, the "lacuna" that constitutes human language, collapses, giving way to a different impossibility of being witness – that which does not have language. (RA 39)

Given this unique disjunction of testimony and bearing witness, Caruth, Laub, Agamben, and Griffiths, (see also Claud Lanzmann, Shoshana Felman, and Eric Sundquist), focus on how literature bears witness to trauma in a way that theory cannot. Agamben explains that "the poetic word is the one that is always situated in the position of a remnant and that can, therefore, bear witness. Poets – witnesses – found language as what remains, as what actually survives the possibility, or impossibility, of speaking" (RA 161). The underlying implication in the literary turn, Dominick LaCapra asserts, is that literature somehow "gets at" trauma in a way that is unavailable in propositional, scientific, theoretical language. Trauma is in excess of theory, but within literature, it "cries" out. LaCapra notes that he does not know precisely why this is the case.

In his work *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, LaCapra makes a distinction between *writing about trauma* and *writing trauma*. *Writing about trauma* is to establish a historiography by reconstructing the past, written as "objectively as possible." *Writing trauma*, on the other hand, is a 'metaphor.' LaCapra details the distinction:

> Writing about trauma is an aspect of historiography related to the project of reconstructing the past as objectively as possible without necessarily going to the self-defeating extreme of single-minded objectification that involves the denial of one's implication in the problem one treats. Writing trauma is a metaphor in that writing indicates some distance from trauma (even when the experience of writing is itself intimately bound up with trauma), and there is no such thing as writing trauma itself if only because trauma, while at times related to particular events, cannot be localized in terms of discrete, dated experience. Trauma indicates a shattering break or cesura in experience which has belated effects. Writing trauma would be one of those telling after-effects in what I termed traumatic and post-traumatic writing… It involves processes of acting out, working over, and to some extent working through in analyzing and "giving voice" to the past—processes of coming to terms with traumatic "experiences," limit events, and their symptomatic effects that achieve articulation in different combinations and hybridized forms. (WHWT 186)

The claim that there is no writing trauma is based on how writing indicates some distance from the event. But with trauma, even though it can be related to particular events, the repetition compulsion problematizes temporality such that the past can be experienced as past (LaCapra, WHWT 186). Beyond the phenomenon of repetition, such experience lies at the intersection between knowing and not knowing. Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* explains that "…literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is, indeed at the specific point at which knowing and

not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet" (TNH 3). She further explains that "trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language" (TNH 4).

Caruth's literary approach to the issue of trauma is part of what LaCapra identifies as the recent "epistemological turn" from psychoanalytic (and historiographical) theory to discourse on the literary. The general claim is that literature goes beyond theory, exceeding limitations inherent in theoretical discourse. LaCapra explains:

> …[C]ertain forms of literature or art, as well as the type of discourse or theory which emulates its object, may provide a more expansive space (in psychoanalytic terms, a *relatively* safe haven) for exploring modalities of responding to trauma, including the role of affect and the tendency to repeat traumatic events. At times art departs from ordinary reality to produce surrealistic situations or radically playful openings that seem to be sublimely irrelevant to ordinary reality but may uncannily provide indirect commentary or insight into that reality. (WHWT 185-186)

The poetic has a visuality and sensation which stick to us. This is perhaps why literary theory has become one of the main contributing discourses on trauma, entering the wider literature

previously dominated by psychoanalysis and neurobiology. A central question I explore, then, is *how* do literature and art "get at" trauma in a way that theory and historiography cannot?

Such a claim suggests an ability to access 'additional' knowledge, which in turn, implies that the cognitive framework veils, limits, or bars access to such knowledge. Thus, what hinges on the shift to literary discourse, away from theoretical discourse, comes down to a matter of what 'truth' each one establishes and how that truth operates in the process of *writing about trauma* and *writing trauma*. With that in mind, some key questions emerge: If trauma is unassimilable, ineffable, unintelligible, can we call it 'knowledge?' If trauma cannot be captured in ordinary propositional or scientific language, then how can it be expressed, if at all? What is the relationship of this 'knowledge' and language? And most significantly, how does literature "get at" trauma in a way that theoretical discourse does not.

Neuroscience can provide maps of brain activity of what parts of the pain are engaged during a traumatic episode. Psychoanalysis and psychology provide theory, etiology, symptomatology, and attempt at understanding trauma. And literary theory can help to highlight the difficulties of knowing, speaking, and witnessing trauma, which are eclipsed by the scientific model of knowledge. Thus, I turn to philosophy to provide an epistemological and phenomenological study of trauma. It is not my intention to necessarily position my inquiry within the wider literature of psychanalysis, neurobiology, and literary theory, staking a particular claim in reference to those posed so far. Rather, I want to go behind the scenes, so to speak, in terms of the phenomenological processes of traumatic experience and writing trauma.

Frequently, trauma discourse is focused around the event—its intelligibility, meaning, and expression. Thus, I take the unit of the event in regard to knowledge as a way to investigate what knowledge, if any, can be said of trauma. In the first chapter, along the lines of Foucaultian

genealogical method of inquiry, I construct a genealogy of trauma, to some extent, to show how scientific knowledge is the predominant epistemological model in line with the development of psychoanalysis and psychiatric institutions. Through such analysis, language manifests as the meeting point of knowing and not knowing in regard to trauma. To help understand the scientific model of knowledge, I turn to Michele Foucault's description of scientific knowledge and how he pits it against what he calls the 'truth-event.' Scientific knowledge presupposes a universal, ever-present truth to be uncovered, discovered, and grasped; On the other hand, the truth-event is one in which *a* truth occurs *as* an event. It is not true at all times, nor waiting for us to discover it; it appears within a specific place and time, and further, it is a truth of "privileged agents and bearers." This distinction is drawn out through a survey of the work of Charcot, Freud, and, more recently, Lacan on the core concepts of psychoanalysis, that of the unconscious, repression, and repetition in trauma.

According to Freudian psychology, the unconscious activity amalgamates diverse materials of different origins, making it so that the expression of the repressed desire is unrecognizable. In the condensation process, a single word can take over the representation of a whole train of thought. Lacan labels trauma as the *tuché,* a Greek word meaning chance or fortune. He describes trauma as an encounter with the 'real,' that is, the raw, immediate materiality of existence; yet, it is a missing encounter it that it is inaccessible through the symbolic order. Trauma shares elements of the unconscious, which too is a gap in the symbolic order. At best, expressing trauma is done so through metaphor and metonym. Further, literary theorist Cathy Caruth notes another layer which further complicates the question of knowledge, that of temporality. Thus, despite the focus around a singular 'event' which has taken place, and continues to resound in the repetition compulsion, neither the Enlightenment model of scientific

knowledge or that of the truth event work as models for the type of knowledge we are speaking about in regard to trauma.

In the next chapter, I then offer the term 'trauma-knowledge' to capture how trauma is a unique form of embodied knowledge, where knowing and not knowing meet. The body is aware of the world in a way that we can, at times, access the privileged knowledge of the body, while at other times, are barred from it. With this in mind, I provide an investigation of embodied knowledge, detailing the interaction of body schema and body image in such experience as vision, touch, and praxis through the works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Shaun Gallagher. Trauma stands out as an extraordinary embodied experience, as it compromises the embodied feeling of being alive by corrupting agency, temporality, and identity. Elaine Scarry's phenomenology of pain helps to point out how trauma-knowledge shares some features of the embodied knowledge of physical pain. With pain and other forms of embodied knowledge, the body maintains a plasticity, the ability to arrive at an equilibrium despite disruption. But with trauma, this notion of plasticity fails to capture the ontological metamorphosis which annihilates the capacity for equilibrium.

Yet, as addressed in the third chapter, there is some element of 'plasticity' in that the individual who undergoes trauma survives. Catharine Malabou's account of *destructive plasticity* illustrates such a metamorphosis in which, out of the accident, a new being emerges, what she calls "flight identity." Taking the Freudian model of the drives into consideration along with the repetitive compulsion of trauma, the concept of "flight identity" portrays how subjectivity is compromised to the point of an "abandoning of subjectivity." Further, it is the accidental element, the traumatic memory fragment in the flashback, nightmare, or chance encounter, which distinguishes it from all other accounts of embodied knowledge.

To illustrate this point, I look to the metaphor of the body as a work of art, a painting, in particular. Painter Francis Bacon claims to seek out the accident in painting because it makes the images "fresher, not interfered with," "more organic," "raw," and "immediate." If one is familiar with his paintings, it seems strange to say that the images he creates are more organic and not tampered with—his work is a collection of haunting distortions of the human body, animal forms, objects, and obscure landscapes. It takes some time to know what you are looking at. But, his method of distortion is, what he believes, traps life "at its most living point." The annihilation of form both unveils the screens by which we engage with the world, and exposes the raw, immediate, materiality of our existence.

This is because the accident in painting damages to the point that it returns the materiality of life back—the thick, immediate flesh of the world. Likewise, trauma distorts, disfigures, and destroys the being far beyond recognition. Consequently, the individual returns to the world more violently, and the world returns to the individual more violently— at its most living point. What happens, then, is that the accident is absorbed into the body, as the paint is absorbed into the painting, though the *phenomenological* experience is one of the impossibility of flight, not absorption.

In the fourth chapter, I address how this is echoed in Elain Scarry's description of the physical pain and how it is not only resistant to language, but also destroys language. In order to address the confrontation of language and trauma, I turn to the work of Julia Kristeva, particularly on the notion of the abject. The abject is the revolt of being. She contends that the abject reaches its peak at the moment when we are called on to respond through language. But with the abject feeling of being alive at the most living moment all language shows up as trivial, supplementary, and contrived as the world of the abject is that of ambiguity and disorientation.

Gloria Anzaldúa describes such an experience as living on the borderlands. Her description of what she calls the *Coatlique state*, named after the serpent goddess, points to one unique feature of embodied trauma-knowledge: "the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface."

Chapter five investigates how, in spite of the disorienting, ambiguous *Coatlique state*, there is still a drive for truth and certainty, which continues to afflict the individual. Nietzsche pits the will to truth against the will to illusion/deception. Both factor into what counts as truth, in that it is the will to illusion, the creative drive, by which metaphor is formed, but it is the will to truth which preserves such concepts and metaphors. The will to truth is what drives our desire for scientific knowledge, and this is what the individual who undergoes trauma is able to put into question and recognize the uncertainty and free-spirited aspect of metaphor formation and language. Also, trauma-knowledge is not the type of 'truth' we mean in the will to truth. We do not will such truth or drive toward it; rather, it is rather an out-spilling of embodied knowledge. With that, trauma requires a language of its own: one of imagery, semiotic rhythm, discordance, life, flesh—*poetic language*—one that can capture life at its most living moment.

I conclude with the way in which poetic language has the ability to reactivate what the individual wants to forget, but cannot. It is possible to "get at" trauma in that poetic language itself is an interruption of language: the form and function are similar to the traumatic experience. Writing-trauma, voicing the unique embodied trauma-knowledge, not only requires a language of its own but a style of its own. Maurice Blanchot in *The Writing of the Disaster*, explains how writing the disaster is the disaster itself and that it requires, what he calls, fragmentary writing. Fragmentary writing, like trauma, does not involve aspects of agency and subjectivity, though. Instead, we are passive to it. What Blanchot means by passivity is not non-

action; rather, it is something like enduring struggle without resistance. He formulates his own neologism to capture this idea: *le subsissement*, understood as a sudden going-under the disaster. In one sense, we are passive in that we cannot resist the disaster, but beyond that, it always returns. This means that, in regard to writing, the disaster returns whether we write or not; there is an incessant interruption of the disaster. Fragmentary writing is what best captures this incessant interruption and the eternal imperative of the disaster.

The sudden going under of fragmentary writing-trauma is to *will the past* and a matter of self-overcoming. In the case of surviving trauma, and moreover writing-trauma, the notion of self-overcoming goes beyond overcoming self-limiting constructs. Self-overcoming is continuous. It is *self*-overcoming in the sense that undergoing writing-trauma, the individual has to be *willing* to annihilate the self, to return to the scene of the trauma, the immediate, abject feeling of being alive, where subjectivity, identity, agency, and temporality are demolished. It is also self-overcoming in the sense that it is the *body* of the 'self,' in the repetitive compulsion, forces a return to the deepest, darkest, most abject.

Thus, the overall project is to situate the human experience of trauma within philosophical discourse, specifically within the phenomenological tradition, and to address concerns of embodied knowledge, agency, intelligibility, and language. I assert that literary theory does contribute to an understanding of trauma as it addresses the problem of knowing and bearing witness to trauma. However, I hope to illustrate what is taking place ontologically such that this seeming impossibility emerges to begin with, and conclude that trauma is, in fact, known and can be voiced, but through a mediated process.

CHAPTER ONE:

BETWEEN KNOWING AND NOT KNOWING

1. *Scientific Knowledge and the 'Truth-Event'*

During the 1974-1975 lectures on the development of psychiatric power, Foucault pauses to insert a 'history of truth.' He proceeds by comparing two kinds of knowledge: scientific knowledge and what he calls the "truth-event." Scientific knowledge presupposes a universal, ever-present truth to be uncovered, discovered, and grasped. In that case, truth needs only to be demonstrated through scientific practices and ordered procedures. Through such practices and techniques, truth is never too distant or inaccessible; nothing is seen as small, trivial, ephemeral, or occasional (PP 236). If there is something perceived as difficult to reach, it only speaks to our own limitations, lack of technologies, and circumstantial constraints.

On the other hand, the truth-event is one in which *a* truth occurs *as* an event. It is not true at all times, nor waiting for us to discover it; it appears within a specific place and time, and further, it is a truth of "privileged agents and bearers" (PP 237). What he means by this is that only those who are witness to the event and are present as the event occurs 'know' the 'truth.' The access to knowledge is not one of method, technology, and discovery; rather, it is one of a 'shock or clash'—the privileged, exclusive agents are 'struck' by it. Foucault uses a metaphor to express this idea: the truth-event is not universally present within the "truth-sky," but rather shows up "like that of a thunderbolt or lightning" (PP 237). With this in mind, demonstrating

such a truth does not depend on "the order of what is, but to the order of what happens" (PP 237). We can think of scientific knowledge as 'knowledge of' in that it is established through an order of procedures and ongoing discourse. In the case of the truth event, it can lack such processes by which it is established. This is because it is a highly specific, unrepeatable event.

Foucault frames this scheme through the language of *geography* and *chronology*. He suggests that the truth-event has its own *geography*—the precise location of where the event takes place—and its own *chronology*—the moment it occurs. This makes the truth-event indeterminate and unpredictable, in opposition to scientific knowledge. Thus, to verify, or rather witness, the truth-event, it must be produced and observed by performed ritual, actions, and 'required words.' It occurs only through prophets, seers, innocents, the blind, the mad, the wise, etc., who are seized by this truth and possess the secret of the time and place of the truth-event, and undergo tests of qualifications. What this means is that to access knowledge in this case, it does not require a method, but rather a *strategy*. That is, the relationship is not one of knowledge, but that of power, domination, and victory (PP 237).

What is significant about this distinction is that it helps to clarify Foucault's hypothesis that truth is produced by multiple, micro-power relations and constraints. What separates scientific truth from a truth-event is not based upon the content, so to speak, or an over-simplified distinction between objective and subjective truth, but what disciplinary system authorizes it as truth. According to Foucault, knowledge is constituted within a disciplinary power system in which power is both claimed and exercised in dominion over the 'truth.' Language/speech, things, and individuals are subjected to procedures of normalization, supervision, observation, and writing. With scientific knowledge, "the image of objectivity"

serves as the sovereign by its power to classify, assimilate, supervise, and order (HM 17). The sovereign-eye of objectivity liberates truth from what may be obscure, masked, or remote.

Yet, Foucault points out, all disciplinary power has its margins (PP 53). There are necessary residues, the "unclassifiable," irreducible, inassimilable, and indeterminate in any regime of knowledge. The select privileged individuals, those who possess the secret geography and chronology of the truth-event, seize power over this domain. They exercise power to verify the truth-event as reality, while they are "seized by" the truth (PP 55). What this means is that they are subject to the event—though they play a role in verifying it as truth, the truth, once established, verifies their role. In this case, strategic performance and ritual liberate the truth-event from 'unreality.'

Discourse plays a fundamental role in the distinction between scientific truth and the truth-event. The truth-event does not require discourse, whereas scientific knowledge cannot be known without a discourse. Underlying scientific knowledge is the presupposition of stable 'things' as coherent objects of study via strategies of observation. Scientific knowledge consists of discursive domains of synchrony, series, causation, and continuity. These are rules of formation of a group of statements, in a technical sense, 'discursive relations.' Scientific knowledge has a structure, but one that is constructed through the linear model of speech. According to Foucault, "a succession of events may, in the same order in which it is presented become an object of discourse, be recorded, described, explained, elaborated into concepts, and provide the opportunity for theoretical choice" (AK 167). Synchrony and continuity operate as discursive relations, in which the coherency of 'objects' coincides with the coherency of discourse. For instance, the principle of change—fundamental to observation within scientific practices and 'discovery' of objects—is rooted in the functional domains of chronology,

succession, and series. With the concept of change, we end up fixing two points or limits—that of disappearance and emergence.

Foucault suggests, then, that scientific knowledge cannot be separated from its discourse. Discourse is *practice* and, insofar, it is not a mere intersection of things and words in which there is interplay of 'things' that are manifest through a chain of words on a single surface. As Foucault puts it, discourse is not a "confrontation between reality and language" (AK 48). The problem here is to specify and isolate the discursive relations in which an object of discourse emerges. There are multiple relations: a level of relations within *practices*, but also a secondary level of relations, that is, a system of discursive relations. Discursive relations establish something like the 'rules of the game' of discourse. We can speak of, analyze, and order a knowable 'object' because of such discursive relations. The rules of discursive practice do not define the "dumb existence of a reality;" rather, the rules in the formation of statements constrain how we speak, see, know, and examine things in a specific, transitory, local space (AK 49). Thus, discourse and the emergence of its objects "exist under the positive conditions of a complex group of relations" that operates like a disciplinary grid of intelligibility—something is made intelligible through discourse (AK 45).

This suggests that the way we come to think, know, and speak of an object through scientific knowledge involves a link of linear language. The linearity of language is constituted through formal thinking along the lines of homogeneity, unity, coherency, series, continuity, discontinuity, and emergence. Through this type of thinking, we imagine linear succession of events that speak to *a* knowledge of sorts. From this, we impose some sort of 'ground' or unitary thread in which we can see and speak of that progression. However, when we look for a

common ground, or succession that exists on its own, we (invisibly) separate such things from the discourse/practice by which they are constituted.

Coincidently, the objectivity of intelligible 'objects,' produced through procedures and practices, conceal that they are *effects* of highly specific, historical practice of discursive and social relations within localized space. The discursive relations are not "deployed when the object is being analyzed…but what enables it to appear, to juxtapose itself with other objects, to situate itself in relation to them" (AK 45). That is, 'objects' of knowledge are produced through disciplinary systems of power, such as the university or clinic. What this means is that what seeing and speaking are *doing* is invisible to us. The eye of objectivity emerges from linear, homogeneous language in which we visualize succession, series, or continuities. In performing the necessary procedures of normalization, supervision, observation, and writing according to the rules of the game of scientific discourse, we mask that very performance. This is significant to note in the sense that this is all done within a disciplinary power system in which the sovereigns are also subjected to and supervised via the same rules of the game (PP 55).

Emphasizing the interplay of vision, language, and space assists in understanding how objects in scientific discourse emerge from a network of relations at various discursive and procedural levels, the rules of speaking and seeing within a local space. With that, an intelligible object cannot be divorced from its discourse and remains under the sway of its sovereign. This is counter to the assumption of scientific knowledge, in which the object is supposed to speak for and of itself. It follows from this that scientific knowledge does not require a master, a witness, or an agent. However, what is noted above indicates that scientific knowledge cannot be effable or known outside of a specific discourse. Additionally, the discourse must be according to

particular rules of the game, namely, linear language, employing synchrony, succession, and causality.

In terms of the truth-event, the coinciding language is ambiguous, perhaps absent, which makes the 'truth' unspecified. This is especially ambiguous in the sense that what appears as a truth-event, what stands outside the domain of objectivity, classification, and universal accessibility, appears when there is a rupture, a discontinuity. In the truth-event, we cannot isolate a statement of 'what-is' as any such knowledge is centered on what is speaking *in the process* of speaking. This poses critical questions regarding the knowledge of the truth-event: How do we know the truth of the truth-event if it is not given in the symbolic order, but somehow resides in the privileged subject, or perhaps, in a performance of events? How can the truth-event gain coherency absent of linear language and the domains of synchrony, succession, and causality? By what rules can we establish the 'truth?'

Foucault offers that establishing the 'truth' is a matter of disciplinary power relations, for instance, psychiatric power relations, which I explain in more detail later. The 'truth' manifests in some locality, geography and chronology. Further, it is verified through ordered procedures. In this regard, one thing that is crucial to the truth-event is that it requires a witness, even if that witness is the sole bearer of knowledge.

2. *The Geometry of the Truth-Event*

> "The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated Self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a column in perpetual disintegration."—Foucault (*Nietzsche, Genealogy, History* 83)

Disciplinary power, as Foucault puts it, is a "game of bodies" in which "the individual is a subjected body held in a system of supervision and subjected to procedures of normalization" (PP 57). The body is vital to any conception of the truth-event. This is demonstrated through particular disciplinary systems such as medicine, psychiatry, and mental health. In the case of medicine, the body is the site and occasion for the emergence of 'disease' as a functional object in discourse and practice; but moreover, it is the *space* of this occurrence in which it can be observed, isolated, and identified. This requires that it be witnessed, specifically, within the clinic where the patient is subjected to observations and procedures for verifying the 'truth' of the disease. This procedure for identifying disease takes place under the supervision of specialists in the attempt to master over it. In this way, illness or disease is a truth-event, in that it has a chronology and a geography.

In providing a genealogy of medical perception in *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault introduces another layer of the truth-event: *geometry*. The notion of geometry goes beyond geography and chronology. The disease takes place within the individual—the geography—and at a particular time—the chronology—but, the visible, material body is the way in which one spatializes disease. Foucault writes:

> For us, the human body defines, by natural right, the space of origin and of distribution of disease: a space whose lines, volumes, surfaces, and routes are laid down, in accordance with a now familiar geometry, by the anatomical atlas. (BC 3)

According to Foucault, the development of this anatomical atlas is a rather recent historical development for understanding disease and illness, at the time when pathological anatomy was privileged during the period of nineteenth century medicine. As suggested above, we cannot easily establish clear breaks, continuities, or discontinuities within the history of medical perception, but at this time, something particular develops—what Foucault calls the *medical gaze*. This shift in medical perception is not a matter of the same game, somewhat improved, which would suggest an inherent rationality of progression, but a completely different game (BC 137). The *medical gaze* both claims and exercises the power, its right, to establish the truth in terms of specified practice of medicine: the identification, classification, diagnosis, and etiology of disease (BC 4).

The clinic, "the space in which bodies and eyes meet," is the site where the *medical gaze* is produced and generates medical knowledge corresponding to the "medicine of spaces"—both the concrete space and 'rational space' of perception. The technique of opening corpses, such as autopsies, provided a coherent anatomical view of the body in which disease was then thought to be located in the space of the individual (concrete) body. The organization of disease was first identified through the primacy of symptom. The symptom is the sign of disease which indicates an essential identity, an "original truth" of the disease that "would speak a clear, ordered language." When the symptom corresponds to a geometrical part of the body, it is mastered by language; *disease* is only visible in what could be said of it (BC 94-95). Once in this domain, the illness or disease is known as a coherent 'object' of discovery, observation, and cure. The *medical gaze*, then, is the 'eye of objectivity,' where both the discourse and objects of medicine emerge within the specific space of the clinic.

Simultaneously, 'madness' comes to be understood as an illness at the beginning of the 19th century as psychiatry is quickly concerned with constituting itself as a scientific discourse, one that is "clinical, classificatory, and nosological" (PP 133). With illness, there are techniques of discovery, identity, and cure—concrete technologies on concrete bodies. This model, then, is transposed on the bodies in the asylum. Just as the clinic is the site of knowledge and cure of illness and disease, the asylum is the site of the 'truth' and reality of madness, where bodies are supervised, observed, and ordered. At this time, psychiatric discourse takes the shape of normal clinical discourse as its model. As a field of study and practice, it is concerned with describing madness with symptomatology, development, diagnosis, and prognostic elements. Similar to the game of the medical gaze whereby the doctor seeks the site of the disease, the game becomes to hunt down the cause, origin, or 'truth' of the madness. However, there is a problem with the etiology of madness: it is not as easy as cutting open a corpse—madness itself does not have a *geometry*. Without a geometry, there is no way of distributing the illness or spatializing the disease. That is, in the case of madness, there are no visible lesions on the body, no physical manifestation, and thus, the way to identify and *know* madness is through witnessing an *event* or disrupted speech of the madman. The doctor serves as the sovereign-witness through the disciplinary power relation of doctor-patient, the one who can verify the madness.

Foucault notes that the emergence of the truth of madness is only a product of the effects of spatial arrangements (PP 101). Spatially, madness exists within the power relation: the doctor produces madness as madness through the imposition of the division and exclusion of madness and reason. In this way, the madness of the madman is actualized via the body of the doctor. That is to say, madness is not located within the patient, but through the medium of power relations in which the doctor is the witness and interpreter of speech and event. In order to verify

madness, the question of truth is revealed through performed rituals in which the doctor imposes his will on the patient to access the truth of madness. Foucault makes note of how the psychiatrist's body and the asylum form a single body as the site of the truth-event of madness. In other words, madness is measured and identified within the disciplinary power system in which the doctor (psychiatrist)—inside the 'body of the asylum'—is the occasion for the truth-event of madness. The truth and reality of madness appear within the space of the asylum at the time of the performed ritual, and thus, *through* the doctor. The gaze of the psychiatrist is analogous to the medical gaze in that it both obtains and exercises the power to establish the truth of madness within the particular space of the asylum under the gaze of psychiatrist—the 'eye of objectivity.' Thus, madness emerges from the assimilation of the body of the madman and the doctor, within the body of the asylum.

Within scientific discourse, if mental illness is to be taken seriously, then it must have some object of identification. As the body lacks the appearance of something like lesions, neurology appears in order to distinguish those who are ill at the level of the body from those whom one cannot assign an etiology at the level of organic illness. To verify madness, the method was to bring about something like the *medical crisis*. The notion of the crisis in medicine is the point at which the disease develops to its full intensity. At this point, the doctor must intervene in order to battle the disease, resolve it, and triumph over it. It is the role of the doctor, then, to distinguish when it will occur in order to resolve it. Foucault suggests that the crisis, then, is "the disease becoming truth," in that, the disease makes its appearance and confers the doctor's power (PP 243). For madness to reach the state of a medical crisis—bringing it into being as an event to witness—techniques of questioning, magnetism, hypnosis, and drugs are developed. Hypnosis, as a technique of truth, becomes a tool of the psychiatrist to get a hold on

the body of the patient by opening a way to account for the functioning and mechanisms of madness. Bringing the patient into a hypnotic state allows the doctor to perform an investigation of the causes and origins of madness, all the while, galvanizing the truth-event of madness. The doctor can then stimulate behavior through such a technique and 'bring' the madness into being (PP 287). If the doctor can 'locate' and discover the origin of madness, the details of how madness functions are finally available to the psychiatrist (PP 287). Similarly, hashish was used to enable the doctor to discover the kind of single "core" from which all symptoms of madness can spread. In this case, the introduction of hashish serves to mimic madness. This affords the doctor the opportunity to grasp and fix an epicenter in a point of the body (PP 279). These techniques coincide with the emergence of pathological-anatomy and neurology—a map of the body.

Conversely, when there is the lack of a pathological anatomy, the technique of questioning develops to locate the origin of madness. When the doctor cannot find any organic substratum of the illness in the patient, the search shifts to pathological events within the 'body' of the patient's family (PP 271). The techniques of interpretive-confession and narration serve to provide a biography which becomes a pathological history. Instead of cutting open a corpse, a material body, the psychiatrist can 'look inside' the patient's body through its pathological history. Acquiring the patient's pathological history, the psychiatrist can establish reasons (later seen as symptoms) which would justify intervention (PP 273). The body, then, is extended to the patient's historical body. This becomes a way of distributing illness—the onset of the illness can be fixed to an event, that event then being the cause or core of the madness. With this, there is a conceptual shift from curing the illness to curing the individual.

Since the body cannot speak through signs and lesions, this search for a pathological framework is what leads Jean-Martin Charcot, nineteenth century French neurologist and professor of anatomical pathology, to look for an assignable cause. And this, according to Foucault, is how Charcot develops the concept of *trauma* (PP 317). Charcot describes trauma as:

> a violent event, a blow, a fall, a fear, a spectacle, etcetera…which provokes a sort of discrete, localized hypnotic state, but which sometimes lasts for a long time, so that, following the trauma, a certain idea enters the individual's head, inscribes itself in his cortex, and acts like a sort of permanent injunction. (PP 317)

The concept of trauma, then, serves as a way of distributing illness in terms of not just the onset of the illness, but its pathology as well. The traumatic event is the origin of the illness; yet, it is also the progression by which that original event develops into a full-blown illness.

Foucault provides an example of trauma to clarify this point:

> A child is knocked down by a vehicle; he faints. In the moment before fainting he has the feeling that the wheels of the vehicle run over his body. He comes to and, after a time, realizes that he is paralyzed; and if he is paralyzed it is because he thinks the wheels ran over his body. Now this belief is inscribed and continues to function within a set of micro-hypnotic states, within a localized hypnotic state concerning this belief. What provokes paralysis of the legs is, as it were, this idea that has become a hypnotic injunction. We see here how the notion of trauma, which will be so important in the future, is established… Since if he is paralyzed, it is because he believes that the wheels

> of the van ran over him… So, a trauma is something that provokes a localized and permanent hypnotic state on just this point. (PP 317)

In this example, the initial event of being knocked down progresses into a belief which, in a sense, hypnotizes the child and the child is continuously at the will of this belief, under its spell. The child lives as if in a permanent hypnotic state, or rather, "a set of micro-hypnotic states."

What is interesting to note about Charcot's description of trauma as a permanent hypnotic state is that hypnotism becomes not only the technique by which to discover the cause of the illness, but also as a way to reactivate it in order to witness, identify, and verify it as illness. When a psychiatrist puts a patient 'under' hypnosis, it is for the purpose of identifying the original trauma or event. This is a practice of abreaction in which the patient is guided by the doctor's words to access the traumatic event by re-living it. Hypnotism, then, is a traumatic experience. Foucault explains that hypnotism is:

> a form of a brief, transitory shock which will be suspended solely by the doctor's will, but which will envelop the individual's general behavior, so that within this state of hypnosis, which is a sort of generalized and provisional trauma, the doctor's will, his words, will be able to implant ideas and images in the subject which thus have the same role, same function, and the same effect of injunction. (PP 317)

Simply put, "Trauma is what provokes hypnosis, and hypnosis is a sort of general reactivation of the trauma through the doctor's will" (PP 317).

Similar to the medical crisis, hypnosis brings the trauma, in this case operating like an illness, to the level at which the doctor justifies intervention as the illness can be confirmed. The intent of discovering such truth is to then figure out the appropriate measures for managing the madness or delirium, and moreover, the techniques of cure and domination. Trauma becomes medicalized—the game is to find the origin of madness, and what is found, through discursive and physical techniques, is an event. Rituals and practices, such as hypnosis, produce a dualism: *Trauma* emerges as an organizing principle, in accordance with the medical model of symptoms and disease, and traumatic experience is something like a truth-event, both of which are produced and exercised as the body is subjected to the doctor's gaze, will, procedures, and tools of verification and cure.

The procedure develops into an observation of both the symptoms (the pathological behavior) and the condition in which the deviation occurs (the pathological history). Thus, according to Foucault, a double search arose: "a) for the nervous diathesis which causes susceptibility to trauma; search for heredity. And then b) for the trauma itself" (PP 318 fn). The trauma is the invisible lesion, yet *visible* through the patient's pathological, disorganized, dysfunctional behavior and speech—what is abnormal. This opens the domain of vision to include all of the patient's general behavior. And thus, in terms of looking at a patient's pathological history, there is a shift to abnormality to account for the susceptibility to trauma.

3. *Trauma's Metageometry*

As psychiatry shifts from the monomania of madness to the 'norm' as a functional regularity—a principle of appropriate and adjusted functioning—Trauma gains explanatory

power to provide an etiology of pathological, morbid, disorganized, and dysfunctional behavior. In his 1974-1975 lectures on *The Abnormal*, Foucault traces the way in which psychiatry assumes responsibility for the description, analysis, and qualification of abnormal, deviant, automatized conduct. He explains this shift and adoption of the abnormal as a confirmation of madness:

> First of all, [psychiatry] had to codify madness as illness; pathologize its disorders, errors, and illusions, and undertake analyses—symptomatology's, nosography's, prognoses, observations, clinical files, et cetera—to bring this public hygiene, or social safety it was responsible for, as close as possible to function in the name of medical knowledge. However, you can see that a second, simultaneous codification was also required. Madness had to be codified at the same time as danger, that is to say, psychiatry had to make madness appear as the bearer of a number of dangers, as the bearer of risks, and as a result of this psychiatry, as the knowledge of mental illness, could function as public hygiene. Roughly on the one hand, psychiatry made an entire part of public hygiene function as medicine and, on the other, it made the knowledge, prevention and possible cure of mental illness function as an absolutely necessary form of social precaution against a number of fundamental dangers linked to the very existence of madness. (AB 118-119)

To justify intervention in order to 'protect' society, psychiatry (mental medicine) needs to detect a danger to society, even if is not visible. Thus, it serves as an authority, employing the tools of medical knowledge (AB 120).

Out of this medical knowledge, new objects emerge, or rather a whole domain of new concepts, specifically, impulses, drives, tendencies, inclinations, and automatisms. Such new objects of discourse are integrated into psychiatric discourse, establishing the appearance, construction, and regulated use of such concepts. Yet, these objects are not exclusive to the mentally ill and mad, but rather account for all behavior and conduct; that is, all behavior can be reduced to impulses, drives, and automatisms. A new discursive formation of the abnormal (dysfunctional, disorganized behavior) emerges out of the framework of everyday behavior. Nineteenth century psychiatry now has an object, an organizing principle that will "organize the whole problematic of the abnormal at the level of the most elementary and everyday conduct" (AB 132). Consequently, within the domain of impulses, drives, and tendencies, the concept of instinct emerges as a way to explain behavior and becomes the privileged object of psychiatry.

Psychiatry no longer needs just madness to establish its sovereignty and this opens the entire domain of psychiatry to include all possible conduct for all possible intervention and symptomalogical evaluation. Psychiatry spreads its net over any deviation of the norm, whether voluntary or involuntary. At this point, conduct now becomes pathological. Foucault notes that when psychiatry takes on this problematic, psychiatry is concerned with the content of the organic and functional disorder, and thus "can be connected directly at the level of their content and, more simply, at the level of the discursive form of psychiatry, to all the organic or functional disorders, and fundamentally to the neurological disorders that disturb voluntary conduct" (AB 161). Organic and neurological disorders develop as discursive formations, in which psychiatry now attaches itself to medical knowledge; there is now a language of disease found within the domain of impulses, drives, and automatisms. With that, the discourse of psychiatry shifts—new rules in a new game. The organic and neurological belong to the domain

of medical knowledge, and thus, psychiatric discourse operates along the model of medical knowledge. Foucault explains, "…psychiatry becomes firmly anchored in a medicine of the body with the possibility of a somatization that is not merely formal at the level of discourse, but a fundamental somatization of mental medicine" (AB 162). Psychiatry then functions as scientific knowledge and as medical knowledge, providing the science of normal and abnormal behavior.

Thus, the 'normal' becomes a functional regularity—the appropriate and adjusted functioning of the individual's body. It is through practices consisting of medical knowledge that the individual's body is subjected to procedures of normalization under the supervision of the doctor, the psychiatrist, and the psychoanalyst. Such practices and surveillance are the medico-epistemological production of an individual's body as an organic cause of its behavior—somatization. For this reason, if an organic account of the cause of the individual's conduct cannot be found in the individual's body, a search for a new kind of body develops. At this time, heredity in illness is the source for psychiatric pathology. Foucault notes that there is a 'causal permissiveness' which makes it possible for heredity, or anything else, to be the cause of abnormal behavior.

With practices consisting of medical and biographical knowledge, psychiatry is able to connect neurology, in terms of mental illness, and general biology in terms of heredity. This creates what Foucault calls a "metabody" with "metasomatization." The metasomatization includes any signs and symptoms that are outside the norms of how the body behaves and how the individual functions. The metasomatization is located in the individual patient's body as well as the patient's familial body. The symptoms of abnormal behavior are manifest as features in an individual's life. Such elements include an individual's biography, in terms of significant

events, as well as what the individual inherits from the family. The body of the family now becomes fundamental as causal explanation of abnormal behavior in terms of neurological traits, but also the conditions of the individual's development. Thus, the causal metabody consists of the individual's biography and heredity—the individual's family—and instincts and neurology—the individual's body.

In the case of abnormal behavior, if there is a danger toward society, it is found within this metabody, which is what justifies intervention on the part of the doctor, the psychiatrist, and the psychoanalyst. But then again, instincts, heredity, and biography do not manifest as visible lesions on the body, and, thus, in order to account for abnormal behavior, one must look to another etiology inside the body—the invisible site of the cause. Trauma becomes an economical way to capture the host of abnormal conduct and the corruption of the functional regularity. As discussed above, Trauma develops out of desire for the etiology of madness but then is the cause of symptoms of abnormal behavior, dysfunction, and pathological conduct. The traumatized individual shows up on the grid of intelligibility because of a lack of appropriate and adjusted functioning. Trauma has a symptomatology of its own: flashbacks, neurosis, maladjustment, depression, etc. With this, it adopts the language of disorder, symptoms, cause, treatment, and cure while subjected to scientific discourse and procedures. For this reason, trauma develops its own techniques of discovery and cure, namely, catharsis and abreaction. As follows, it operates on a medical model of knowledge whereby it shows up and functions like an illness.

In order to be an object of science it must exist before that science, yet, what Foucault shows is that it is produced through disciplinary power systems with a corresponding discourse. Trauma, as an explanatory power, a discursive formation, serves to account for the development

of traumatic neurosis. Trauma, however, does not firmly fit into the category of a monomania, an illness, nor a disorder, and yet it serves as an invisible etiology of madness, illness, and abnormal behavior. It is a way in which we problematize ourselves along the lines of good/bad becoming normal/abnormal (pathological). We are witness to its symptomology—the dysfunctional and abnormal body—but it lacks a geometry. It is unclear where the invisible etiology occurs. This serves as an impetus for the development of the concept of the unconscious.

4. *The Ungeometrical Unconscious*

In "On the History of the Psycho-analytic Movement," Freud briefly tells the story of the development of his own concepts of repression and the unconscious with trauma playing a vital role. Early on Freud, along with Breuer, held the position that the development of neurosis in adults was due to an early traumatic event. Specifically, psychoneurosis, as opposed to actual neuroses, was distinguished by reference to an originating sexual trauma experienced early in life (HPM 51). In line with his 'seduction theory,' therapeutic treatment—in which the hysterical symptom permanently disappears—was achieved when the patient "succeeded in bringing clearly to light the memory of the event by which it was provoked and in arousing its accompanying effect, and when the patient had described that event in the greatest possible detail and had put the effect into words" (HPM 51). At the time of the First World War, Freud witnesses soldiers returning from battle exhibiting what appears to be a pathological condition. The soldiers experienced repetitive intrusion, nightmares, and reliving of battlefield events. This condition, "war neurosis," is experienced like a neurotic pathology, but the symptoms do not

reflect such a pathology; that is, it is neither illness nor disorder. Within normal neurosis, manifestations are understood ultimately as the absolute inability of the mind to avoid an un-pleasurable event. On the other hand, in the case of war neurosis there is a return of the event against the will of the one it inhabits. This repetition is a disruption in homeostasis and moves toward painful objects, or at least, brings them inside, as opposed to avoiding them (BPP 12). This works as a rule against the development of neurosis. The patient is fixated to his trauma and, yet, the subject is disinclined to re-experience the trauma.

In addition to this development, Freud's recounting of Breuer's "discoveries" in psychoanalysis, namely that of repression and catharsis, is a result of observing the symptoms of hysterical patients. These symptoms originate as scenes from the patients' past lives that have made a lasting impression but, apparently, have been forgotten (HPM 8). Freud calls these scenes "traumas" and notes that the therapy founded on this, in terms of an attempt to provide access to these scenes, that is to remember and reproduce these experiences, produced a fragmented theory of repression with its inferred treatment—catharsis. These symptoms represent "an abnormal employment of amounts of excitation which had not been disposed of" (HPM 8). At this time, one of the latest developments of psychoanalysis was one in which the exciting causes of illness are brought into the foreground of analysis. This, according to Freud, is what Breuer and he used to do with the cathartic method. He explains:

> We lead the patient's attention directly to the traumatic scenes in which the symptom had arisen, and we endeavored to discover the mental conflict in that scene and to release the suppressed affect in it. In the course of this we discovered the mental process, characteristic of the neuroses, which I later named

> ‘regression’. The patient’s associations moved back from the scene which we were trying to elucidate to earlier experiences, and compelled the analysis, which was supposed to correct the present, to occupy itself with the past. This regression led constantly further backwards; at first it seemed regularly to bring us to puberty; later on, failures and points which still eluded explanation drew the analytic work still further back into years of childhood which had hitherto been inaccessible to any kind of exploration. This regressive direction became an important characteristic of analysis. It appeared that psychoanalysis could explain nothing belonging to the present without referring back to something past; indeed, that every pathogenic experience implied a previous experience which, though not itself pathogenic, had yet endowed the later one with its pathogenic quality. (HPM 10)

To look back into the patient’s biography is to desire knowledge of the scene which occasioned the “outbreak of the current illness” (HPM 10). This analysis of the earliest childhood experience then provides an understanding and solution of the current conflict. The theory of repression became the cornerstone on which this analysis rested. Yet, Freud remarks how this was just a “theoretical formulation of phenomenon” observed within treating the patient without the technique of hypnosis. That is, when psychoanalysis adopts the practice of hypnosis, the traumatic scenes (the traumatic event) serve as a way of accounting for neurosis. The theory of psychoanalysis is an attempt to trace back the symptoms of neurosis, observed with the patient, to their sources in past life. Thus, such theoretic formulations are produced out of innumerable observations, providing hypotheses of infantile sexuality, resistance, and

transference. This, according to Freud, is influenced by Charcot's view of the traumatic origin of hysteria.

Statements of recounting past childhood sexual experiences of the hysterics gained etiological significance, but were later put into question when they discovered that such infantile sexual traumas were not true, but *fantasies*. Thus, the inherent constitution of the patient came into question, in which disposition and experience were "linked up in an indissoluble etiology unity" (HPM 18). Freud explains that "Disposition exaggerates impressions which would otherwise have been completely commonplace and have had no effect, so that they become traumas giving rise to stimulations and fixations; which experiences awaken factors in the disposition which, without them, might have long remained dormant and perhaps never have developed. The last word on the subject of traumatic etiology was spoken later by Abraham [1907], when he pointed out that the sexual constitution which is peculiar to children is precisely calculated to provoke sexual experiences of a particular kind—namely traumas" (HPM 18). In order to verify a hysteric as hysteric, the trauma has to be identified and made coherent. Hypnosis allows the doctor to isolate and identify the repressed memory of the traumatic experience and thus becomes a practice by which the doctor could confirm that the patient experienced a trauma and not just fantasy. The theoretical consideration of the fact that the patient's resistance coincides with an amnesia leads inevitably to the view of unconscious mental activity, which is distinct to psychoanalysis in that it distinguishes it quite clearly from philosophical speculations about the unconscious (HPM 16).

The phenomena of repression and repetition of the traumatic experience lead to the development of the theory of the unconscious in psychoanalysis. Freud explains that, "The essence of the process of repression lies, not in putting an end to, in annihilating, the idea which

represents an instinct, but in preventing it from becoming conscious" (HPM 166). When this happens, we can state that the idea is in a state of being 'unconscious.' Freud conceptualizes the term 'unconscious' to refer to "any psychic process whose existence we are forced to assume on the evidence of its outward effects but of which we know nothing directly. We stand in the same relation to this as to some psychic process in another person, except that here it is one of our own" (cited in Bracken, TCM 119). Freud remarks on how the unconscious, in fact, has a wider compass in which repression is only a part of the unconscious. We can point to an 'unconscious' by observing effects of repression, effects of the work of the unconscious. The question, then, is how do we arrive at knowledge of the unconscious if it is the case that it is the precise mechanism that holds repressed ideas and instincts that are not conscious? If it is only of something conscious that we know of it, how can we even speak of it? Freud answers this by noting we can speak of it only after this unconscious has gone through transformation or translation into something conscious. For that reason, according to Freud, psychoanalysis shows that translation of this kind is possible.

The topographical view on the unconscious seems to suggest that the process of translation or transformation, in which there is a change in the state of the idea, involves the same material and occurring in the same locality. This brings up the problem of not just pure psychological ideas, but the relations of the mental apparatus to anatomy. Freud explains, however, that physical topography of the unconscious has nothing to do with anatomy; that is, it does not have a reference to anatomical localities, but two regions in the mental apparatus, wherever they may be situated in the body (HPM 174-175). That is to say, an idea does not 'move in the body' to another locality, but the same idea is in two forms in different locations or levels of the mental apparatus—namely the unconscious and conscious. Freud gives the example

of a repressed idea that the doctor, having "discovered" it in the patient, can bring to the attention of the patient. The patient, though, can be aware of this idea, but not conscious of the actual memory of the experience as it was in its earliest form. Calling attention to the repressed idea does not lift repression, as hearing something and experiencing it are quite different things.

The question then becomes how the unconscious and conscious communicate in which an unconscious thought becomes a conscious one on the part of the patient. Within the fundamental concept in psychoanalysis, that of transference, language is essential. Freud's study of schizophrenics illustrates this point. For the schizophrenic, Freud notes that their inaccessibility to therapeutic efforts; their repudiation of the external world; hypercathexis of their own ego; apathy; and incomprehensible, nonsensical language indicate absence of the object-cathexes, the object that emotional energy is concentrated on. However, Freud adds, the cathexis of the *word*-presentations of objects is retained. Freud offers some telling examples to make his point, but I can offer one of my own. A patient of the mental health clinic I worked at, who, although too young to be diagnosed, displayed 'schizophrenic' behavior. During a routine activity, the child, unprompted, once stated, "A dark man lives inside of me and tells me to kill people." When asked who the "dark man" is, the child stated, "My blood is black." Such an example demonstrates how Freud claims that the words, here, are subjected to the same process as that which makes the dream-images out of latent dream-thoughts: they undergo condensation, and by means of displacement, transfer their cathexes to one another in their entirety. He explains that, "The process may go so far that in a single word, if it is especially suitable on account of its numerous connections, takes over the representation of a whole train of thought" (HPM 199). Given the biography (the pathological history) of the child, one could identify the dark man as his father. The child repeatedly witnessed his schizophrenic father abusing and raping his

mother after breaking in the house, though he had been expelled. The grouping of words is indicative of a condensed historical biography, alluding to the way in which the child processed the repetitive events.

This example is helpful to understand Freud's assertion of the significance of language: "What we have permissibly called the conscious presentation of the object can now be split up into the presentation of the *word* and the presentation of the *thing*" (HPM 201). The latter consists in the direct memory-image of the thing, or at least in the remoter memory-traces derived from these. The traumatic experience is condensed into metaphorical language. Here, words coincide with other words which are the same, that is, 'dark man' coincides with 'dark man,' but words and things do not coincide—the "dark man" who instructs the child to kill people does not directly coincide with the traumatic event. It is not until this 'organ-speech,' as Freud calls it, is given an object-cathexes that it can become coherent. Freud distinguishes the difference between the conscious and unconscious presentation of words and things:

> We now seem to know all at once what the difference is between a conscious and an unconscious presentation…The two are not, as we supposed, different registrations of the same content in different psychical localities, nor yet different functional states of cathexis in the same locality; but the conscious presentation comprises the presentation of the thing plus the presentation of the word belonging to it, while the unconscious presentation is the presentation of the thing alone. (HPM 201)

When there is a conscious presentation of a thing, it is coupled with language. In a sense, the child is conscious of his trauma as he can express the experience metaphorically. The child, though, may not be aware of the way in which such speech is coupled with the experience. And, there may remain repressed memories. Yet, if the 'thing-presentation' is repressed, the child, not being conscious of it, cannot speak of it. Repression denies the rejected presentation in the transference neuroses: "what it denies to the presentation is translation into words which shall remain attached to the object. A presentation which is not put into words, or a psychical act which is not hypercathected, remains therefore in the unconscious in a state of repression." With that said, "[T]hey attain their capacity to become conscious only through being lined with the residues of perceptions of *words*" (HPM 202).

It is important to note this fundamental connection between repression and the absence of language. According to Freud, the presentations of objects, in this case the traumatic experience, are simulated not as the actual event, but through language. That is, as Freud explains,

> It turns out that the cathexes of the word-presentation is not part of the act of repression, but represents the first of the attempts at recovery or cure… These endeavors are directed towards regaining the lost object, and it may well be that to achieve this purpose they set off on a path that leads to the objects *via* the verbal part of it, but then find themselves obliged to be content with words instead of things. (HPM 203-204)

In the case of repression, the event is present, but any words directly coinciding with the event are absent.

The unconscious, then, can be understood as an absence. That is, the concept of the unconscious points to something, or rather indicates a lack: a lack of language. By 'locating' the forgotten memory or repressed thought of traumatic experience in the unconscious, which is inaccessible through ordinary language, psychoanalysis provides a framework for the kind of knowledge we are speaking of with trauma as a truth-event. The concept of the unconscious indicates how knowledge of trauma is thought to be inaccessible, unintelligible, unspeakable, unassimilated, while in its repressed form. The re-telling of the traumatic event, though, can speak to its chronology and geography, and thus, it presents itself to the domain of scientific knowledge in terms of causality, process, symptomatology, and even cure. We can only come to comprehend the meaning of the child's statement when we tether it to an object, event, memory, or to the trauma. This coupling is deployed when the doctor places the patient under his will in order to discover that object, or event, through biographical narrative or other cathartic techniques of hypnosis, abreaction, and narco-therapy.[4] This is not to say that there is no knowledge of the trauma, but the type of privileged knowledge of trauma, experienced as "a dark man living inside of me," for example, is indeterminate and remote. The concept of trauma stands as a missing link in a causal chain of events and processes. Yet, what is 'there' is not a link. If anything, it is a break—a tear in the tissue of linear, scientific knowledge whereby it emerges in order to preserve continuity and synchrony. Any type of explanation on our part is to refer back to some scientific explanation of a neurosis, illness, disorder, dementia, etc.—it is to position the individual in unreason and the abnormal.

Thus, within the early development of psychoanalysis, the concept of trauma is tied to the unconscious through the theoretical formulations of repetition and repression. The notion of

[4] Ruth Ley, in *Trauma: A Genealogy*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000) provides an extended 'genealogy' of trauma.

repression implies that once the traumatic experience is brought into consciousness *through language*, it is known and then subjected to techniques of analysis and cure. Trauma is discovered *in* the unconscious, absent of language.

5. *In this Gap, Something Happens*

Lacan, in his series of lectures on the four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis, proposes that the unconscious is structured like a language—it "functions spontaneously, of itself, and in a presubjective way" (XI 20). This can be better understood by explaining Lacan's account of linguistics and subjectivity. Lacan returns to Freud, for whom the unconscious is dependent on the psychic dimension of language. The unconscious is a reference to a system of signifying elements analogous to the signifying elements of language. Language is structured because it is always grounded in a set of given elements, namely, signs. Additionally, it is structured in that it presupposes laws that govern the signs. The sign is the linguistic unit, composed of the signified (concept) and the signifier (acoustic image) which can be represented through an algorithm:

$$\frac{S}{s}$$

Lacan inverts the original algorithm provided by Ferdinand de Saussure with the intent to establish the primacy of the signifier. It reads as follows: signifier over signified. The signifier and signified are two distinct orders. The "over" corresponds to the bar separating the two levels in which the barrier makes it so that signified resists signification (E 415). The emergence of the signifier is inseparable from the creation of the linguistic sign due to the fact that the sign is a

function of its context. It can only make sense retroactively since signification emerges at the end of the signifying utterance.

The barring of signifier over signified can be illustrated through Lacan's theory of the "mirror stage" of infancy, which he introduces in 1936 and returns to in 1949. The mirror stage is the moment in which the subject is disjointed from its body. An infant, looking at a mirror, sees a reflection, that is, an image of a coherent, unified object. The image "immediately gives rise in a child to a series of gestures in which he playfully experiences the relationship between the movements made in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it duplicates—namely, the child's own body, and the persons and even things around him" (E 94). The mirror stage is to be understood as an *identification* (E 76). It is at this stage in which a transformation takes place in the subject—when the subject assumes he is the image and thus desires to establish a relationship between organism (body) and its reality (*I* as image). Yet, this is precisely what the child lacks, in that it is determined by a split in the body and the representation of the body. The reference to the body, the image of what should be, is already a break. The experience is disjointed although the infant sees a unified 'self,' which is the *Ideal Image*. Lacan explains: "the interest the subject takes in his own split is bound up with that which determines it – namely, a privileged object, which has emerged from some primal separation, from some self-mutilation induced by the very approach of the real, whose name in our algebra, is the *object a*" (XI 83). The *object a* is the mediation of the lack, in which the lack is always *as* symbol; it is not as itself because it is the lack of the unified self. The infant projects himself as unified within the representation, yet the object is removed from the 'self' as an alienated symbol of the lack.

The image at the mirror stage is the first signifier, but is built out of the imaginary of unification (it is this imaginary of unification which serves as a way by which we can even think of/for a community). That is, within the mirror stage the self is seeing the (unified) self, but that self is not a 'self' until the subject sees itself. The image in the mirror is the image of coherence and becomes the process of identification of self and external image—the other—and thus represents the infant's first encounter with subjectivity, an external sense of coherence—the sense of "I" and "you." There is a feeling of being 'not that:'

> At stake here is the being that appears in a split second in the emptiness of the verb "to be" and, as I said, this being raises its question for the subject. What does that mean? It does not raise it *before* the subject, since the subject cannot come to the place where being raises it, but being raises it *in* the subject's *place*—in other words, being raises the question in that place *with* the subject. (E 432-433)

Here lies a misrecognition in which the subject encounters its own existential negativity. The "total form of his body, by which the subject anticipates the maturation of his power in a mirage, is given to him only as a gestalt, that is, in an exteriority in which, to be sure, this form is more constitutive than constituted, but in which, above all, it appears to him as the contour of his stature that freezes it and in a symmetry that reverses it in opposition to the turbulent movements with which the subject feels he animates it." The gestalt symbolizes the *I*'s mental permanence, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination (E 76).

Language becomes a higher version of this *Ideal Image*. The *Ideal Image* is identity. This identity is the subject's role in language; the position in language (in terms of personality,

aspects, etc.). Given the primacy of the signifier, the signifier governs the subject's discourse, and for this reason, governs the subject. Lacan explains, "For the signifier, by its very nature, always anticipates meaning by deploying its dimension in some sense before it" (E 419). The "unity of signification," then, "turns out to never come down to a pure identification of reality, but always refers to another signification. In other words, signification comes about only on the basis of taking things as a whole" (E 345). Language promises to make something definable and accessible through a symbolic order. This is a closed order which unfolds in a directional, what Lacan calls, signifying chain. Discourse, as per Lacan, unfolds in accordance with two types of operations: metaphoric and metonymic.

Metaphor, as we know, is a substitution through relations of similarity. In this way, it is a signifying substitution, "situated at the precise point at which meaning is produced in nonmeaning" (E 423). Lacan further notes, "metaphor's creative spark does not spring forth from the juxtaposition of two images, that is, of two equally actualized signifiers. It flashes between two signifiers, one of which has replaced the other by taking the other's place in the signifying chain, the occulted signifier remaining present by virtue of its (metonymic) connection to the rest of the chain" (E 422). This substitution is an immediate association of the signifier as signified, in which the signified obtains its coherence from the network of signifiers. The metaphor then, operates along the synchronic axis of language.

Metonymy is the exchange of a name, in which two objects are linked by relation of material to object or by container to contents. In order for the metonym to have meaning, the first signifier must be retained in the immediate contiguity of the second signifier. With that, "an effect of signification is produced that is creative or poetic, in other words, which is the advent of the signification in question" (E 429). To make sense of the metonym, then, a mental operation

is always required, in which the connection between the signifier (S) and the second signifier (S^1) is re-established.

For Freud, these two operations are extended to the formation of the unconscious. The metaphoric and metonymic mechanisms are assimilated to the functioning of the primary processes, namely condensation and displacement (E 439). The process of condensation is a metaphoric process, while the process of displacement in dreams is a metonymic mechanism. According to Freudian psychology, the unconscious activity amalgamates diverse materials of different origins, making it so that the expression of the repressed desire is unrecognizable. In the condensation process, as discussed above, a single word can take over the representation of a whole train of thought. The metaphor stands in for a successive stratification, taken as a symptom. Lacan, then, asserts that the "symptom *is* a metaphor…just as desire *is* metonymy" (E 439). In the case of trauma, "Metaphor's two-stage mechanism is the very mechanism by which symptoms, in the analytic sense, are determined. Between the enigmatic signifier of sexual trauma and the term it comes to replace in a current signifying chain, a spark flies that fixes a symptom—a metaphor in which flesh or function is taken as a signifying element—the signification, that is inaccessible to the conscious subject, by which the symptom may be dissolved" (E 431). Symptoms need a cause, and that cause is the truth, that is the truth of the event, of neurotic suffering (E 739).

Perhaps my previous example can assist in understanding these two operations within language. When the child states, "A dark man lives inside of me," the 'dark man' is an allusion to his father. The child displaces the memory of the traumatic experience and fear of the father through an ambiguous, seemingly benign, ordinary object. Without knowledge of the traumatic experience, the 'dark man' is too ambiguous of an expression. This is why the expression of the

repressed memory is unrecognizable. A mental process is required to identify the 'dark man' as the child's father. Further, condensation occurs when the child claims that the 'dark man' (father) is "living inside." The memory of the traumatic events, the threat of the father, and the child's continuous fear, for example, merge and are condensed into the single idea of "living inside." The expression is a metaphor, in that it has replaced the originating diverse material, taking its place within the chain of signifiers. The signifier of the traumatic memory remains present, though, via the connection (of metonyms) to the rest of the chain. This is likewise also the case in the expression, "I have black blood."

In the example of the child, the 'black blood' functions as a symptom of the psychosis in that there is a question of its place in reality. Yet, the 'black blood,' does signify some reality that provides some 'truth.' The symptom, then, is a return of the truth. The child's 'truth' can be interpreted only in the order of the signifier, which has meaning only in its relation to another signifier. This is how the signifier enters the signified, "namely, in a form, which, since it is not immaterial, raises the question of its place in reality" (E 417). This is what Lacan means when he states that in the case of metaphor, meaning takes place in nonmeaning. Thus, as Lacan asserts, "the dimension of truth emerges with the appearance of language" (E 436).

But it should be noted that, according to Lacan, there is no existing language which covers the field of the signified. The unconscious, then, is the truth of the subject but is used to speak about what language cannot say. Language covers over the unconscious—an absence—and emerges to patch up this lack. The unconscious is structured by language at the point where language fails. And yet, the term 'unconscious' "assures us that there is, beneath the term unconscious, something definable, accessible, and objectifiable" (XI 21). For this reason, Lacan notes that language is what guarantees the status of the unconscious. The problem is that there

cannot be a pure identification with reality, and instead, what we have is a signifier-to-signifier correlation, in which no signification can be sustained except by reference to another signification.[5] In this case, the 'unconscious' is a signifier in that it points to some*thing*. Nevertheless, if we are to grasp the constitution of an object in language, namely the unconscious in this case, we could only make note that the constitution is found at the level of a concept, at the level of discursive formations.

In trying to formulate the unconscious, it is already circumscribed in seeking it. The signifier-to-signifier correlations provide the standard for any search for signification (E 418). We structure the concept of the unconscious by looking for what is unconscious. In this particular case, though, when we search for the signification of the unconscious, the correlation of signifier-to-signifier is disrupted. The signifier 'unconscious' signifies what cannot be signified; it points to a break in the symbolic order of signifiers. Lacan, thus, interprets the Freudian concept of unconscious as a *gap*—a rupture. The unconscious 'appears' to us as a phenomenon as it emerges from a break in the synchronic order of language (XI 25). It is the missing link, incessantly sliding under the signified, eluding our grasp.

In the domain of synchrony and cause, the law of the signifier is the locus in which this gap is produced (XI 23). Lacan explains:

> It is in the dimension of a synchrony that you must situate the unconscious—at the level of a being, but in the sense that it can spread over everything, that is to say, at the level of the subject of the enunciation, in so far as, according to the sentences, according to the modes, it loses itself as much as it finds itself again,

[5] This is what Freud indicates when asserting that verbal identity, the relation of words-to-words, takes precedence over the thing signified (object-presentation), where substitutions (word-presentation) for the signified.

> and in the sense that, in an interjection, in an imperative, in an invocation, even in a hesitation, it is always the unconscious that presents you with its enigma, and speaks—in short, at the level at which everything that blossoms in the unconscious spreads, like mycelium, as Freud says about the dream, around a central point. It is always a question of the subject *qua* indeterminate. (XI 26)

The unconscious, though produced and discovered in the form of discontinuity, is indeterminate in that it is *an absence*. That is to say, when there is an impediment, a failure, a split in speech, a rupture of the symbolic order, the unconscious is produced and "discovered"—the rupture makes the absence emerge.

It is this form of discontinuity, a break in discourse, which is the essential form in which the unconscious first appears to us as a phenomenon, and yet, would not appear except for in the domain of synchrony and causality (XI 25). Lacan focuses on the prefix of *un* to make the distinction between non-concept and lack (XI 26, fn). *Un*, in unconscious, suggests a negation, but not in the sense of a non-concept, or nothing unreal, rather as a *concept of lack* (XI 26). He asserts that the concept of lack does not suggest that the unconscious is nothing unreal; rather it is unrealized: "In this gap, something happens" (XI 22). Something is there, suspended between the cause and that which it affects.

Lacan refers to this as the 'Real'—what is present, but yet, what we cannot encounter. The real is the immediate, raw materiality of our existence. Lacan says that the Real is impossible, in the sense that language marks our separation from the real. It cannot be put into language as its very entrance into language disrupts the immediate reality. Yet, the Real is what continues to erupt making us aware of our materiality and that which threatens our reality. In

psychoanalysis, the *real* presents itself in a form of the trauma—when the materiality of our existence is made known and threatened (XI 55). He refers back to an Aristotelian word, *tuché*, which he translates as "the encounter with the real" (XI 53). The Real in the encounter is *souffance*, translated from the French as 'in suspense,' abeyance, awaiting attention, pending (XI 26, fn). The encounter happens "as if by chance." In dreams, flashbacks, spontaneous memories, for instance, we stumble upon and encounter the real by accident. Lacan notes that it is only in something like a dream that this truly unique encounter occurs. Dreams are essentially a tribute to the missed reality, in that reality can no longer produce itself except by repeating itself endlessly, insisting on its existence. Repetition of the trauma likewise demands our attention, but only unveils itself as a disruption in the drive for homeostasis—a repeated disruption in the form of the remembering and reliving. Trauma can no longer produce itself except by repeating itself endlessly. Due to the repetition of the traumatic event, the event is never closed off—it has no ending, no beginning, as it is on an eternal loop. Thus, the function of "the *tuché*," similar to the unconscious, does not function in time, cannot be assimilated, and is apprehended in its experience of rupture.

However, given the primary processes (such as the pleasure principle) it is unclear how the dream (the bearer of the subject's desire) can produce that which makes the trauma emerge repeatedly. The image in the dream repeats the trauma, threatening the subject again. The subject is then fixated to the trauma—it becomes absorbed in the subject's very being. The subject, though, does not desire the trauma and is not interested in undertaking the reliving of the event. If the image in the dream is the expression of desire, then it is in at its most "cruel" form, as Lacan puts it. Lacan then asks: what then is the function of the traumatic repetition? Why

would an agent undertake such an operation? For the sake of mastery? To master the painful event? To master the self? But who masters? (XI 51).[6]

Lacan examines the word *wiederholen* (repetition) to pursue these questions. Containing the verb *hauler*, it is literally translated as "hauling of the subject who always drags its thing into a certain path that he cannot get out of" (XI 51). Taking the image of a subject dragging its 'thing' into a certain path hints at agency in the sense that the subject is mastering over itself: *it* drags. But, it is the thing which sets the path. In the case that this is a repetitious 'act,' in which the subject cannot get out of this repetition, out of this path, agency is indeterminate. It is as though the thing drags itself *of itself*. This can make sense if we take into consideration the way in which the trauma is absorbed into the subject. Taking the elusive "encounter with the real" that is trauma, what we find, then, is that the *subject* is elusive—the subject incessantly slides under the trauma in the 'act' of repetition. The event is never closed off—it has no ending, no beginning, as it is on an eternal loop, and thus, the *tuché*, similar to the unconscious, does not function in time. To take something as closed indicates a locus; however the locus is missing. The 'Real' in the encounter is *souffance*—in suspense, abeyance, awaiting attention, pending. The place of the 'Real' stretches from the *tuché* to the phantasy, in which the phantasy is a screen that conceals something quite primary, that is, the lack (XI 60). As detailed above, Lacan asserts that the dimension of truth emerges with the appearance of language (E 436). Yet, as the *tuché* is a breakdown of language, it cannot be assimilated. With this in mind, the question of its truth and its place in reality remains open.

Employing psychoanalytic discourse, the analyst reigns over this domain, and with that, a promise to make something definable, accessible, and objectifiable. However, if there is a break

[6] This is what leads Freud to later develop concepts of the death drive.

in the symbolic order, the analyst seeks a reality beyond language to fill the absence, and thus, looks to the patient's dysfunctional behavior, pathological biography, dreams, and confessional narrative. Equipped with the tools of hypnosis, confessional narrative, narco-therapy, et cetera, the analyst intends to uncover the traumatic neurosis, seize it, and then return it to the subject as a cure. Considering this, psychoanalysis rests on a law of misrecognition that governs the subject not only as observed, but also observer. The analyst tells the patient that the cause of the observed symptoms is inaccessible to him except through the discourse of the psychoanalyst, whereas, the trauma is inaccessible to the analyst except through the speech of the subject. The exchange of speech fails:

> While it is to [the patient] that you must speak, it is literally about something else—that is, about some-thing other than what is at stake when he speaks of himself—which is the thing that speaks to you. Regardless of what he says, this thing will remain forever inaccessible to him if, being speech addressed to you, it cannot elicit its response in you, and if, having heard its message in this inverted form, you cannot, in re-turning it to him, give him the twofold satisfaction of having recognized it and of making him recognize its truth. (E 349)

Through this failure, this split, the unconscious emerges—it is there to speak on behalf of the subject—what language cannot say. The psychoanalyst is only able to 'access' the truth as a witness—a witness to a truth-event; but only able to make it 'known' through language. From this we see that, "The logical term "other" makes it clear how much the truth for all depends on the rigor of each: that truth—if reached only by some—can

engender, if not confirm, error in the others; and, moreover, that if in this race to the truth one is but alone, although not all may get to the truth, still no one can get there but by means of the others" (E 173). Trauma is the other living within. Through witnessing, in some regard, psychoanalytic discourse is able to "get at" some unconscious material—pieces of truth—in a particular geography and chronology of the event. This is the meeting point where the body of the analyst encounters the body of the patient. However, the *tuché*, being the rip in the symbolic order, repeatedly returns the 'subject' to where language and body *do not* meet—language is absent, the unconscious is a lack; but, the body is present.

6. *The Horror of Survival*

> "What does it mean to transmit and to theorize around a crisis that is marked, not by a simple knowledge, but by the ways it simultaneously defies and demands our witness?" –Cathy Caruth

Caruth, echoing Lacan, also suggests that trauma is a missing encounter, while also claiming that trauma is in 'having survived.' The trauma is not so much an "effect of destruction," whether it be destruction of the 'self' or the loss of an assumptive world; rather, it is "an enigma of survival" (TNH 58). That is to say, what is so traumatic is that one comes close to their own death, and yet survives it. This is not to single out violent events as solely what is traumatic, meaning that the individual physically encounters and yet survives their own death, but also, it could be experienced as the death of the assumptive world, or death of the self. The individual

repeatedly returns to their survival and with that, repeatedly comes back to their death. For this reason, Caruth views trauma as a break in the mind's experience of time:

> It is not simply…the literal threatening of bodily life, but the fact that the threat is recognized as such by the mind *one moment too late*. The shock of the mind's relation to the threat of death is thus not the direct experience of the threat, but precisely the *missing* of this experience, the fact that, not being experienced *in time*, it has not yet been fully known. (TNH 62)

Caruth refers to Freud's discussion of traumatic neurosis as a reference point in her argument, in which repetitive dreams are endeavoring to master the stimulus retrospectively. What she gathers from Freud's work is that trauma is much more than a pathology, an illness of a wounded psyche. She argues that the power of trauma is not the direct experience of it, so to say, but rather of the attempt to overcome the fact that it was *not* direct—the attempt to master what was never fully grasped in the first place (TNH 62). This is because at the time of the traumatic experience itself, similar to Lacan's notion of the missing encounter, we do not experience trauma as such, but come to know of this experience by separating from the real and entering the symbolic order. That is to say, trauma is not fully perceived as it occurs, and further, a history of trauma can only be grasped in its inaccessibility of its occurrence (TNH 8). What this means is that we do not have access to its occurrence in the moment of that occurrence taking place. The trauma is experienced "too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and so it is not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly" (TNH 8).

Caruth not only highlights the mechanism of repetition within the traumatic experience, but also draws our attention to the correlate of that repetition—forgetting. It is only through the dynamic force of forgetting and repetition that trauma is first experienced at all. For trauma to interrupt, as it does, it must veil itself, recoil into the unconscious, into the gap of knowledge and time, to be forgotten. This is what makes it traumatic—the trauma victim is shocked back into this 'reality,' or rather shocked via the reality after having forgotten it, repeatedly, and yet, can never assimilate it. Caruth's specific use of the language of "*inherent* forgetting" and occurring *within* repetition, suggests some type of topology of trauma—repetition (forgetting and remembering). But, what might appear as some 'structure' of trauma, whereby we could predict and understand it, becomes more an indication of how we cannot predict and fully grasp the experience. That is, because trauma is not a closed-off occurrence—it stands outside of time and consciousness—it does not have any such chronology, geography, or locality—trauma is *not* the event.

According to Caruth, trauma is not located in the original, inaccessible event, but in the way it is unassimilated, in, what we could call, its *un*event. It is not experienced in linear time and thus has not yet been fully known. Yet, she indicates there is some type of 'truth': "This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language" (TNH 4). The "voice" of the trauma "cries out." With this, we are made aware of the 'other' within trauma: "the otherness of a human voice that cries out from the wound"—a voice witness to truth that one cannot fully know. In this way, it defies and simultaneously demands our witness. Psychoanalytic theory listens to what cannot fully be known, but must, at the same time, be witness to it (TNH 9). Therein implies a responsibility, or at least, a demand on our part to

answer this call. Yet, the very language that we would do so is the language that defies its claims. For these reasons, Caruth looks to the literary text as a way to respond to the voice of trauma. Caruth claims that the literary, whether text or theory, is not straightforwardly referential. With trauma, the transmission of knowledge can never be asked in a straightforward way, and so must be in a language that is literary—"a language that defies, even as it claims, our understanding" (TNH 4-5). What propositional, scientific/psychoanalytic language resists is what literary theory "gets at." —"situated at the precise point at which meaning is produced in nonmeaning" (Lacan, E 423).

What we find is that these narratives point to how one cannot remember, express, or know of trauma except through some self-representation. The remembering almost, substituting for itself, approaches ever nearer to some sort of focus, or center, namely, the memory. Repetition vacillates, swings around the missing encounter, in which the *subject* does not encounter the traumatic experience. As it is apprehended in its repetitive rupture, trauma is positioned in a non-temporal locus. This compels us to posit another locality, another space, another scene, in which trauma, held in abeyance between forgetting and repeating, pending its emergence and disappearance, steps out of the wound (XI 56).

7. *The Missing Encounter*

Born where madness and the abnormal meet—where bodies are surveyed, observed, governed, and subjected to the sovereign's gaze—psychoanalysis responds to a call, a call emanating from the soldier's nightmares, from the child's speech. As witness to this voice, what unfolds is a discourse that both bares and veils what this voice is saying; provides and denies a language;

knows and does not know. Returning to Foucault's history of knowledge, the traumatic experience at first glance shares the qualities of the truth-event: it is the privilege of a select few; it takes place in a highly specific, temporal space which can never be repeated. We can isolate a single individual as experiencing the truth-event of trauma, although, we can also say that a select few can experience the same event, though their traumatic experiences are radically different. Yet, in regard to the other criteria of the truth-event, the above analysis suggests that trauma does not quite fit into this model of knowledge in the sense that it *cannot* have a chronology and geography. That is, although the event(s) happens in a specific time and location, trauma is indeterminate as it does not have a recognizable beginning or end, and is on an eternal loop—it is not closed-off. Language points to a missing memory, an inherent forgetting, an irretrievable experience, an inaccessible occurrence, which laps through time. But, all in all, it points to a gap between two indeterminate geographical points—the real and the subject.

Freud offers a dark space, an indeterminate *geometrical* domain—the unconscious—wherein repetition unveils a missing memory, an inherent forgetting, an irretrievable experience, an inaccessible occurrence—absent of language—only by *chance*: a chance that breaks the symbolic order; emerges from the gap; happens too soon; yet, recognized is one moment too late. The unexpected shock is precisely the missing encounter, not being experienced in time, and not fully known until it intervenes again, repeatedly. This renders the question of how if trauma cannot be known through chronologic, synchronic, geographic, geometric, symbolic order, then how do we *know* it.

CHAPTER TWO:

THE EMBODIED FEELING OF BEING ALIVE

While reading Catharine Malabou's *Ontology of the Accident*, I am struck with the words: "A smashed up face is still a…" The image of a face—*his* smashed up face—flashes, shocking me, like the unpredictable electric current of a lightning strike that cracks the sky. I squint, shudder, my heart beat quickens, and I impulsively look away from the page. There was no warning, even though I was reading about *the accident*, even though I had just read the words, "No one thinks spontaneously about a plastic art of destruction" (OA 4). But, the moment my eyes touch the words, unfolding letter-by-letter, stacking on each other to create (no, conjure) the image, I am flooded with sensations and memories, all of which happen *as if by chance*. The *tuché*, the encounter with the 'real,' appears by accident.

I can describe the scene that flashes 'in my head.' I can describe the overwhelming sensations. And perhaps you can imagine what it looks like and how it may feel, similar to images in film or art. Perhaps the words I use in my description 'ring true' for you. But what I describe is not equivalent to my encounter—it vanishes as it enters into language; it disrupts the immediate, raw materiality of being; it happens "too soon, too un-expectantly to be fully known and so it is not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly" (TNH 8). And yet, this does not at all erase the certainty of the experience—the image is as real as the flesh that bore the destruction. How is the accident (trauma) unassimilable, but, somehow, still 'there,' unveiling itself, insisting on its existence, and making itself *known*?

1. *Those Who Know*

> "After trauma the world becomes sharply divided between those who know and those who don't"—Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps Score*.

We can grant that there is always some private knowledge: I have direct access to my own experiences and memories which others do not, and these memories make up the content of what I can say I know. But, what is implied in van der Kolk's statement is that there is some type of privileged knowledge, shared between those who experience trauma. This shared, private knowledge creates a community, in which others outside this domain, those who have not "shared the traumatic experience cannot be trusted, because they can't understand it" (BKS 18). To say that anyone who has not experienced trauma cannot understand it defies the very inquiry into what is known and how we can even speak about trauma. If it is the case that some are outside the experience, then how is trauma at all communicated? Notice here, van der Kolk says "can't," employing language of potentiality, not impossibility. The issue at hand is not to silence such discourse, but to address the potentiality of understanding the distinction between what is known and what is not.

Notably the task of understanding trauma is what motivates psychology, and more recently, the disciplines of neuroscience, developmental psychopathology, and interpersonal neurobiology, with the belief that it is possible to understand (BKS 2). And this is not just for those who conduct studies, practice therapeutic techniques, record testimony, but also the trauma-individual who seeks refuge in explanation and cure. Since discourse of the diagnosis of PTSD made its way into the DSM III, psychiatrists and physicians attempt to verify traumatic

experience by way of scientific, medical apparatuses, emboldened with the power to diagnose, treat, and cure. This profuse scientific discourse, circulating and dissimilating beyond the scholarly and scientific text, is now easily accessed and available for common consumption. A simple example that I have observed is the way in which some veterans are quick to use such language as if to account for and verify their experiences. Their 'symptoms' now are just that: 'symptoms' of a disorder—"I have a hard time concentrating; I get enraged at the smallest things; I feel numb; I don't feel like myself...That's just my PTSD."

But, being able to propose "That's my PTSD" or explain the highly, technical neurological processes does not capture the *phenomenological* embodiment of trauma. This is where the line is drawn between those who know and those who do not know. I may be told what is happening in my body when I have a flashback: areas of the 'rational' brain shut down and both the 'emotional' and 'reptilian' parts light up, and my body is flooded with cortisol and stress hormones which have failed to return to equilibrium. But that is not how I *know* the flashback. We do not *know* trauma by way of the independent neuro-physiological processes, neurobiological, or psychoanalytic narratives.

One aspect of this is that traumatic memories differ qualitatively from normal memory. Traumatalogist Van der Kolk discusses the difference between normal, stressful memory and traumatic memory (2015).[7] In the case of normal memory, given subsequent experience and the passage of time, often it is the case that the memory and its meaning are altered. For example, someone can remember a time of heartbreak and feelings of anguish, lament, and loss. But, several years later, that memory may have a different meaning than before. Perhaps, the

[7] There is vast literature on traumatic memory, dating back to Jenet and Charcot, working its way through Freud, psychoanalysis, neurology, etc. I am focusing on van der Kolk's distinction as it is succinct and targets the specific element related to my discussion here.

individual sees the heartbreak as an event in life that contributed to their development. The pain and anguish associated with the memory may not be entirely stripped, but it no longer carries the intense emotional sensations felt before. Perhaps it may even evoke a sense of empowerment and pride in overcoming the pain of the heartbreak. Or, perhaps, the individual is indifferent to the experience as it does not show up as meaningful in their present condition. Van der Kolk also points out that two different individuals can give different testimony of a singular, shared, past event. Normal memory is malleable in how meaningful it is to someone, the emotional response, how the individual incorporates it into their narrative and current sense of identity.

On the other hand, with traumatic memory, scenes are played over and over without any modification. The traumatic memory is preserved and remains intact despite the continuation of time. Moreover, it is not just an image or scene which is preserved. In his research, Van der Kolk describes traumatic memories as "fragments of sensory components of the event: as visual images; olfactory, auditory, or kinesthetic sensations; or intense waves of feelings […which are] representations of elements of the original event" (*Traumatic Stress* 1996, 287). Notably so, this indicates that there is a particular 'materiality' of traumatic memory. That is to say, trauma is "primarily remembered not as a story, a narrative with a beginning, middle, and end, but isolated sensory imprints…" (BKS 70). These sensory components of the original event(s) are what live in the body. Van der Kolk thus proposes that trauma is "imprinted" in the body—"*the body keeps the score*."

This indicates that there is a continuous interaction of the body (sensory fragments) and the external world (sensory stimulants). But, the knowledge of the trauma, preserved in memory, goes beyond just cognitive memory—it dwells in the body *and* world. For instance, when I smell hand sanitizer, it is not just a slightly unpleasant smell; it is the scene and ritual of entering

and exiting the hospital rooms. I am hauled back *into* the hospital room, with all of the smells, sounds, colors, objects, etc.: the beeping of the heart monitor; the blue of the nurses' scrubs; the sage green walls; the stifling, unrelenting, haunting, dominate, ugly, abject, utter sensation of fear; and, his smashed up face. Hand sanitizer has a distinct *meaning* and *sensation*; the image, odor, and sensation overlap in a palpable, distasteful memory.

This means that traumatic experience does not just 'take place' in the individual's psyche or body, but extends into the world, and that world is hauled back into the individual. There is a cohabitating of objects and body, as evidenced by Merleau-Ponty's account of embodiment. This is not to suggest that odors and sounds only remind trauma-individuals of a past event. The distinction, though, is in most cases, normal memory remains a memory, subject to change or fading away; it is a part of the individual's narrative; but, it does not continue to occur as an event taking place in the present. And yet, traumatic memory does not have to require an external stimulant. In the cases of flashbacks, the sensations of the trauma reawaken, as if on their own—there is no warning, no anticipation, no visible or auditory stimulant. The past still lives as sensory fragments of the event, in which there is no beginning, no present, and no end; the trauma takes place in the present. During the flashback or traumatic memory, the individual is wrested out of the present, while still present.

The introduction of the embodied experience of trauma here shows where neuroscience and psychoanalysis are both lacking in describing what 'takes place' in traumatic experience. According to Malabou, in the case of plasticity in psychoanalysis and in neurology, "the plastic brain or plastic psyche is one that finds the right balance between the capacity for change and the aptitude for remaining the same, between what is to come and memory, between the giving and receiving of form" (OA 5). But in the case of the accident (trauma), there is an entirely

different force, not one that brings the mind, body, and world back in balance, but one that annihilates equilibrium. She notes that this "destructive and disorganizing explosive power is present virtually in each of us, ready to manifest itself, to take body or self-actualize at any moment" (OA 5). For this reason, we could say it is part of our ontology. And yet, Malabou emphasizes, it has not been given a name, and certainly not the name of plasticity (OA 5).

Although van der Kolk provides a medical interpretation of trauma, he also acknowledges this essential aspect of embodiment. He states that, "We now know that trauma compromises the brain area that communicates the physical, *embodied feeling of being alive*" (BKS 3, emphasis mine). I want to focus on the *embodied feeling of being alive*. What provides us with an '*embodied feeling of being alive*?' How does the accident, specifically trauma, compromise this sensation?

2. *Caught Up in the Tissue of Things*

Embodiment can be thought of as overlapping worlds: the world of objects and others, the world of the self, and the world of the body. Merleau-Ponty states that "to be a body is to be tied to a certain world" (TPP 171). He specifies that, "The body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be intervolved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and be continually committed to them" (TPP 94). We dwell in a definitive world of sensible things—palpable things—in which the body is one such 'object.' We are aware of our own bodies by way of the world, enacting our bodies within a specific environment through intentional and non-intentional action. He explains,

> Whether it is a question of another's body or my own, I have no means of knowing the human body other than that of living it, which means taking up on my own account the drama which is being played out in it, and losing myself in it. I am my body, at least wholly to the extent that I possess experience, and yet at the same time my body is as it were a 'natural' subject, a provisional sketch of my total being. (TPP 231)

We primarily operate without bodily awareness to accomplish intentional activity, though. This is because the body has a world of its own, always operating in the background. It is the very material and space for such intentional and non-intentional activity. In this way, the body shapes consciousness though we are not directly conscious of this. However, the body can become the focus of attention and become an object of consciousness in which it appears as a 'thing' or 'object' during certain circumstances, such as exercise, exertion, illness, stressful situations, pleasure, or pathologies, for example. Even so, the body does not remain a permanent object of thought.

Thus, the body has a double reference, or rather a double 'belongingness,' to the order of the 'object' and to the order of the 'subject.' On one side, it is a thing among things; on the other side, it is what sees them and touches things. Merleau-Ponty explains that to know the body does not require having to leave "itself." This is because the body serves as "a tangible-standard to all those whose resemblance it bears and whose evidence it gathers, by a magic that is the vision, the touch themselves" (VI 136). Through perception (vision and touch) "our body commands the visible for us," and thus, the body is world-forming (VI 136). Merleau-Ponty explains that, "Between the alleged colors and visibles, we would find anew the tissue that lines

them, sustains them, nourishes them, and which for its part is not a thing, but a possibility, a latency, and a flesh of things" (VI 133). He explains that the flesh is not matter, not mind, not a substance but an "element" of Being (VI 139). And we only know of the flesh of the world through our own flesh: "The thickness of the body, far from rivaling that of the world, is on the contrary the sole means I have to go unto the heart of the things, by making myself a world and by making them flesh" (VI 135). Body and world are intertwining *flesh*. This is to say that "it uses its own being as a means to participate in theirs, because each of the two beings is an archetype for the other, because the body belongs to the order of the things as the world is universal flesh" (VI 137). More aptly put, then, we can think of embodiment as overlapping bodies: the *world-body* (the tangible, in which our bodies are also tangible), the *lived-body* (phenomenal body which senses the palpable of both world and body), and the *I-body* (subjective body conscious of the self, body, and world).

In line with this, Merleau-Ponty states that inhabiting a body is to be "caught up in the tissue of things" (VI 135). We know of this tissue, this flesh, through touch and vision. When I touch my hand, I am both touching and being touched. I would not know what it 'feels like to be touched,' unless I have been touched. And, likewise, I would not know what 'touching' is, unless I am the one touching. And finally, when touching, I feel the tissue and all its distinct features. Therefore, the way in which the body has knowledge of what it is to be touched and to touch, is to perform the activity of touching. This indicates three distinct experiences, which, Merleau-Ponty explains, "subtend one another." The three dimensions overlap but are distinct:

> A touching of the sleek and of the rough, a touching of the things—a passive sentiment of the body and of its space—and finally a veritable touching of the

> touch, when my right touches my left hand while it is palpating the things, where the "touching subject" passes over to the rank of the touched, descends into the things, such that the touch is formed in the midst of the world and as it were in the things. (VI 134)

Yet, we do not experience touch in three distinct activities; rather, the phenomenon is holistically performed by the body, all at once. This means that in the activity of touching, the body does not interpret the layers of phenomena. Merleau-Ponty explains, "I do not translate the 'data of touch' into the language of seeing or vice versa—I do not bring together one by one the parts of my body; this translation and this unification are performed once and for all within me: they are my body, itself" (TPP 173). The way in which these dimensions overlap but are also distinct is ambiguous. They are not isolated in the body or the objects, but in the "midst of the world"—in universal flesh. This points to how one experiences the boundary of the body and world. As this action has to be performed afresh each time, the boundary vibrates, and is continuously being constituted.

This is also the case with vision. Merleau-Ponty describes vision as a 'palpation' with the look, and thus, it must also be inscribed in the order of being—"he who looks must not himself be foreign to the world that he looks at." He adds, "As soon as I see it, it is necessary that the vision (as is so well indicated by the double meaning of the word) be doubled with a complementary vision or with another vision: myself seen from without, such as another would see me, installed in the midst of the visible, occupied in considering it from a certain spot" (VI 134). With this in mind, he notes, the body is in the "heart of the visible" and yet far from it, in the sense that it has a thickness that can be seen and is that thickness which sees. In this case,

distance between things themselves and the seer "is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication" (VI 135). "It is thus," he explains, "and not as the bearer of a knowing subject, that our body commands the visible for us, but it does not explain it, does not clarify it, it only concentrates the mystery of its scattered visibility" (VI 136).

In his work "Cézanne's Doubt," Merleau-Ponty claims that the painter makes visible how the world touches us (CD 283). He asserts that art is a process of expressing the "true density" of the world, which "is for us the definition of the real" (CD 279). This is in line with what Cézanne thinks of art. Cézanne states that "Art is a personal apperception, which I embody in sensations and which I ask the understanding to organize into a painting" (CD 222). He strives to "paint from nature" (CD 275). That is, not to 'paint nature,' but instead, to make nature and art the same. The intention of the impressionists is to depict objects as they appear to instantaneous perception, without any scientific exactness or fixed contours (CD 275). Our instantaneous perception consists in seeing the world in a colorful mass, an indivisible whole, in which colors touch to suggest outlines of distinct objects (CD 279). Thus, along with the body "the spatial structure vibrates as it is formed" (CD 279).

The technique of the impressionist does not entail hard, precise outlines to demarcate distinct objects. Rather, as Merleau-Ponty explains, the distinct visible objects are captured through placing opposite colors next to each other. Two blotches of paint, one red and one green, create the perspective of a darker color, suggesting a boundary when they are placed next to the other—touching the other. Here Cézanne suggests that outlines and colors are no longer distinct: "to the extent that one paints, one outlines; the more the colors harmonize, the more the outline becomes precise…When the color is at its richest, the form has reached plentitude" (CD 279). Vision does not cut through this flesh of the world in order to form objects; rather, objects

materialize with the juxtaposition of various colors touching. There are no gaps between colors, but, suggestions of angles, outlines, and curves are inscribed like lines of force. This implies that there are no seen *gaps* between objects and the body. Instead, colored surfaces meet in which bodies and forms emerge from one universal mass.

According to Merleau-Ponty, Cézanne wants to portray matter as it takes on form. He notes that there is a distinction between spontaneous organization and human organization of matter. This, though, is counter to asserting a distinction between the sense and understanding (CD 227). That is to say, as Merleau-Ponty explains, "These distinctions between touch and sight are unknown in primordial perception. It is only as a result of a science of the human body that we finally learn to distinguish between our senses. The lived object is not rediscovered or constructed on the basis of the contributions of the sense; rather, it presents itself to us from the start the center from which these contributions radiate. We *see* the depth, the smoothness, the softness, the hardness of objects; Cézanne even claimed that we see their odor" (CD 279). Our bodies do not experience touch and sight as distinct *senses*, distinct both from each other and from the world.

Cézanne's intention was to forget what was learned through science, but then through a science, of sorts, to recapture the *being* of the image as an emerging organism. "The landscape thinks itself through me," he declares, "I am its consciousness" (CD 281). Cézanne brings the landscape into being, but as the landscape presents itself in being. Merleau-Ponty states that the painter, then, recaptures and converts the world into visible objects. For Cézanne, he explains, what motivates the painter is not geometry or laws, or any particular knowledge; instead, they are motivated by the "absolute fullness" (what Cézanne calls motif) of the world. Accordingly,

Merleau-Ponty adds, the painter embodies an "intuitive science" of the lived perspective that we actually perceive, not a geometric or photographic one (CD 278).

For instance, Merleau-Ponty explains that Cézanne does not negate the physiognomy—the physical, facial features which project some meaning—when painting people. Cézanne grants that there is always a manner of interpretation of the visual on the part of the painter; but the interpretation is not a distinction from the act of seeing. In regard to portraits, he explains that, "One's personality is seen and grasped in one's glance, which is, however, no more than a combination of colors" (CD 279). Cézanne tells us, "If I paint all the little blues and all the little maroons, I capture and convey [the individual's] glance." This suggests that even others' personalities, others' minds are communicated through vibrating colors. They are available to us "only as incarnate, as belonging to faces and gestures" (CD 280). Therefore, Merleau-Ponty states that "Cézanne's painting suspends these habits of thought and reveals the base of inhuman nature upon which man has installed himself" (CD 280).

The same relationship between world and body is modeled in the relationship of the painting and painter. Merleau-Ponty states that the only emotion possible for the painter, though, is of strangeness, the same way in which the body is in the heart of things, but also at a distance. The painter has to be a stranger to his/her work, in that they are removed from the painting, standing outside, perceiving at a distance. Additionally, painting interferes with the spontaneous movement of the world, in that it consists of "frozen distortions" (CD 278). It is up to the painter to arrest and project objects that "would remain walled up in the separate life of each consciousness: the vibration of appearances which is the cradle of things" (CD 281). The artist does not just create and express an idea, but must awaken the encounter with objects and world in others.

Yet, the painter can do no more than construct an image, and must wait for this image to come to life for other individuals. Through painting, then, there is a continual rebirth of existence which is close to instantaneous perception. Just as objects in the painting are *of* the paint, our bodies are *of* the world. The way the brush touches the canvas, the way the colors touch the canvas, the way the colors touch colors, is representing of the way the body touches and sees the world. As the painter paints the painting, through vision and touch, our bodies paint the world with its very flesh, all its fullness—belonging to it yet also a stranger to it.

3. *Body as a Work of Art*

To understand embodiment, Merleau-Ponty compares the body to a work of art:

> In a picture or a piece of music the idea is incommunicable by means other than the display of colors and sounds. Any analysis of Cézanne's work, if I have not seen his pictures, leaves me with a choice between several possible Cézannes, and it is the sight of the pictures which provides me with the only existing Cézanne, and therein the analyses find their full meaning. (TPP 174)

> A novel, poem, picture, or musical work are individuals, that is, beings in which the expression is indistinguishable from the thing expressed, their meaning, accessible only through direct contact, being radiated with no change of their temporal and spatial situation. The idea of the body is incommunicable by means other than the display. It is this sense that our body is comparable to a work of

> art. It is the nexus of living meanings, not the law for a certain number of covariant terms. (TPP 175)

Merleau-Ponty states that "The process of grasping a meaning is performed by the body" (TPP 177). The meaning of a painting cannot be communicated other than by way of the painting. One could give a description, but there is no equivalent in which the *visual* content can be known other than through a direct encounter with the painting. Any description of the painting, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, leaves open many possible interpretations; but, there is only the individual painting. The meaning of the painting is preserved in the paint on the canvas - without such material, all meaning is lost. Likewise, the meaning of the poem makes use of language, but requires a material aid as well: it is only preserved in the printed text, or in spoken word, which requires a body. Again, there are many possible interpretations of the poem, but there is only one way in which the words are organized to convey meaning. Here, we can see a distinction between the painting and the image of the painting, a distinction between the object and how it is interpreted.

We see this same distinction in regard to the body. We can have an image of our bodies but this is different than the body itself. To make this clear, this distinction can be condensed into two concepts of 'body image' and 'body schema.' Generally, body image is understood to consist of a system of perceptions, attitudes, emotions, and beliefs pertaining to one's own body. According to Merleau-Ponty, it is the way one is conscious of the world through the medium of the body. He writes: "Consciousness projects itself into a physical world and has a body, as it projects itself into a cultural world and has its habits…any form of lived experience tends towards a certain generality whether that of our habits or that of our 'bodily functions'" (TPP

158). That is, our body image is often a reflection of, or embodies, normative cultural standards and a conception of how our bodies function in that context, whether we may be conscious or unaware of how cultural norms inform our body image. Also, our body image is constituted by our intentional actions and our chance for success, which I explain in more detail later.

The body schema is a system of motor capacities which do not require direct cognitive awareness or monitoring in order to function. The body schema also includes abilities and habits that enable and constrain movement and intentional activity. Bodily space and external space form a practical system—it is in action that the spatiality of our body is brought into being (TPP 117). The body schema is not a structural copy of the body, not the sensation of the body, not global awareness, but the spatio-temporal field of our body. That is to say, it is a way of expressing how the body is *in-and-of-the-world* (115; 163-164). In this way, the body is tacitly understood in the figure-background structure—"every figure stands out against the double horizon of external and bodily space" (TPP 163). Knowledge of the body is not a matter of concentrating or directing attention to the lived-body; rather, embodied knowledge is instantaneous; it is peculiar to itself, and, moreover, it is complete in itself (TPP 100). The body does not need cognitive consciousness to *know*; it does not need language or representation to know. The body "has its world, or understands its world, without having to make use of any 'symbolic' or 'objectifying function'" (TPP 173).

4. *Canvas: Embodied Identity*

In *How the Body Shapes the Mind*, Shaun Gallagher outlines the roles body image and body schema play in our sense of self. When we act, we are aware of the bodily action as an

intentional action but not as a *bodily* action per se (BM 33). When we intend to move our body in a particular way to accomplish some task, for instance, picking up a cup of water, we exhibit control over our bodies, though there are prenoetic functions which underpin and affect our intentional experience. Gallagher defines a prenoetic performance as "one that helps to structure consciousness, but does not explicitly show itself in the contents of consciousness" (BM 32). These functions are subsumed into the intentional activities as "motor control takes its bearings from the intention of the agent, rather than from the level of muscle contractions or neuronal signals" (BM 33). Thus, we have a sense of ownership and agency, though not explicit, in the sense that 'I am the one picking up the glass with my body.' The sense of agency comes from the decision and then execution of picking up the cup—by making commitments and carrying out tasks.

In everyday experience, our knowledge of ownership is part of the structure of experience. As Gallagher explains, it is non-observational self-awareness of our own body enacting *our* actions. He states that, "the body image, as a reflexive intentional system, normally represents the body as *my own* body, as a personal body that belongs to me. This sense of ownership contributes to a sense of an overall personal self" (BM 28). Yet, the action is not mediated by a judgment that we have ownership of our body. In other words, we do not think 'I own my body' when accomplishing an intended task; instead, it is incorporated into our body image, we could say, pronoetically. That is, as Merleau-Ponty says, it is not a matter of "I think" but of "I can."

In the case of the body, ownership materializes as the individual grasps control: if I control the movement of my body, I own my body. Gallagher notes that our sense of agency is built into the structure of thinking itself, that is, the very structure of consciousness. To clarify,

he offers Edmund Husserl's description of phases of the conscious act, namely, focusing on the retentional and protentional functions. The function of retention is to retain previous consciousness and the intentional content of that consciousness. The protentional function is to anticipate what is about to happen in terms of experience. Protentional thought underlies a sense of agency in thinking, whereas, retention provides a sense of ownership of thought (BM 193).

If we are able to retain the thoughts we previously just had, then we get a sense that they are our thoughts. Being able to anticipate what comes next in terms of thinking gives us a sense that we are the ones who are thinking it. Thus, according to Gallagher, "the retentional-protentional structure of consciousness is constitutive of self-identity within the changing flow of consciousness; it generates the basic sense of *auto-affection* or *ipseity*…this being the feeling of identity, of being the perspectival origin of one's own experience, which is a basic component of the experienced differentiation of self from non-self" (BM 201). In other words, through this structure, we have a sense that 'I am the one experiencing…,' which provides a sense of ownership and agency since the thought coincides with my experience.

A sense of agency, however, is closely tied to body schematic processes that underlie movement and capacities. Problems with body schema can amount to a loss of motor control or other functional breakdowns, but they can also entail a sense of "depersonalization" (BM 36). This can lead to a disturbance in the auto-affective dimension of ipseity, or in our sense of self, which can have prevalent cognitive and emotional effects (BM 201). This is emphasized in cases such as the schizophrenic, in which the retentional-protentional structure of consciousness is disrupted. For the schizophrenic, thought insertion disrupts the retention-protentional structure because the individual does not have a sense of control over how and when these thoughts occur. Yet, the schizophrenic has a sense of ownership as the thoughts are happening within their minds

and are, therefore, part of their bodies. In this case, the self can become fragmented as the person has a sense of ownership, but not agency.

But, as Gallagher points out, sometimes something such as an illness, trauma, or other type of "personal-level" event may trigger the original disruption of auto-affective protentional functions, such as neurological underpinnings, and may be genetically or developmentally predisposed to disruption. This original disruption may be further reinforced by subsequent emotional reactions (BM 201). Schizophrenics who have an original rupture of retentional-protentional structure of consciousness can exhibit occasions of hyper-reflective behavior, fragmentation of meaning, transformations of intentionality, a lack of attunement with the world, abnormal feelings of saliency, flattened affect, etc. (BM 201). Also, in other 'mental illnesses,' the individual experiences a disruption of their body schema that gets transposed onto the body image. The self becomes more aware of their embodiment as it is an obstacle for everyday 'regular' functioning and performance.

Gallagher states that his main purpose here is to show how "the temporal, auto-affective structure that shapes cognitive experience also shapes embodied action" (BM 204). Changes to this structure play a role in the conscious registration of agency, ownership, and body image. "More than this," he adds, "motor action itself, in its prenoetic body-schematic performance, has the same tacit and auto-affective structure that involves retention of previous postures, and the anticipation of future action." That is to say, there is a common temporal structure of embodied movement, action, and cognition. This all suggests that ownership and agency, within a shared temporal framework, are components of the embodied feeling of being alive.

5. *Paint: Embodied Other*

As noted above, our body image is formed not only through our own beliefs and attitudes about our bodies but also through external social reflections on the ideal body, both in terms of how it functions and what it looks like. This implies that the 'other' is partially constitutive of our body image, which leads us to consider our relation to the other, and more fundamentally, how we come to see and recognize the existence of the other. This question markedly concerns the developmental source for both the body image and the body schema in relation to our own embodied self and our relation to others.

Gallagher discusses the infant's capacity for imitation as it is an important capacity directly related to questions about perception, social recognition, the ability to understand another person, and the origins of a sense of self (BM 68). In imitation, the child adjusts facial features to reproduce the image of the other person. The visual image of the other's features is translated into a 'motor language' (BM 79). In this sense, this means that the recognition of other, at this initial level of mimicking, is at the level of motor capacities.

Gallagher suggests that the imitating subject depends on a complex background of embodied processes such as a body-schematic system involving visual, proprioceptive and vestibular information (BM 76). Proprioceptive awareness is a self-referential, but normally pre-reflective awareness of one's own body and proprioceptive information is non-conscious, physiological information that operates on a sub-personal level, which contributes to the body-schematic control of posture and movement.

In relation to the imitating infant, he concludes that the proprioceptive information allows the infant to move parts of her body so that her proprioceptive awareness matches up to what she

sees. According to Gallagher, "This intermodal *intra*-corporeal communication […] is the basis for an *inter*-corporeal communication and has profound implications for the child's relations with others" (BM 76). In other words, the way in which the proprioceptive information and proprioceptive awareness interact within the body has an effect on how the child, as an embodied subject, relates to others as embodied subjects. Gallagher concludes that, "This proprioceptive awareness is a tacit, pre-reflective awareness that constitutes the very beginning of a primitive body image. It is in the intermodal and intersubjective interaction between proprioception and the vision of the other's face that one's body image originates" (BM 73). This indicates that the body-schematic system plays a role in our relation to others as well as our own identities. That is, at the level of the body, the "body schemas, working systematically with proprioceptive awareness, constitute a proprioceptive self that is *always already* 'coupled' with the other" (BM 81).

Beyond infancy, the understanding of the other person, according to Gallagher, is a form of embodied practice. We tend to have an understanding of another person and their intentions because such intentions are expressed in their embodied actions, which, as he puts it, mirror our own capabilities for action. Merleau-Ponty explains that an individual can interpret another's bodily action by the fact that the individual has a body as well. Another way to consider this is to suggest that one's desire and beliefs are expressed in their behavior. Understanding the other person's behaviors, beliefs, and intentions weighs in on our own body image. Our body image is not solely a personal relation, but can be influenced by external beliefs, context, etc. and even how we view the bodies of others.

We have a "perception-based" understanding of other individuals which is determined by 'body-reading.' Gallagher explains that, "In seeing the actions and expressive movements of the

other person, one already sees their meaning; no inference to a hidden set of mental states (beliefs, desires, etc.) is necessary" (BM 227). Merleau-Ponty provides an example of body-reading: "Faced with an angry or threatening gesture, I have no need, in order to understand it, to recall the feelings which I myself experienced when I used these gestures on my own account. And what is more, I do not see anger or a threatening attitude as a psychic fact hidden behind the gesture, I read anger in it. The gesture *does not make me think* of anger, it is anger itself" (TPP 214). No reasoning by analogy or other intellectual interpretation takes place, this is because, "Communication between consciousnesses is not based on the common meaning of their respective experiences, for it is equally the basis of that meaning" (TPP 216). Merleau-Ponty explains that, "The communication or comprehension of gestures comes about through the reciprocity of my intentions and the gestures of others, of my gestures and intentions discernible in the conduct of other people. It is as if the other person's intention inhabited my body and mine his" (TPP 215). In this sense, the body-to-other is the same proximity of the seer and thing seen, as noted above, "it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication" (VI 135).

6. *Palette: Embodied Context*

Furthermore, Gallagher states that cultural norms are also embodied and they greatly affect our body image and body schema. Cultural norms can be thought of as a matrix of body image and body schema. Social practices and institutions, societal sentiments, modalities of truth, and power relations establish an image of how the body is supposed to move, behave, and operate and whether one's body complies with this image. Likewise, bodily movement and behavior are

interpreted along the lines of such ideals in which one comes to identify with the available stigmas and traits; and thus, come to have an image of their body, shaped by innumerable cultural mentalities.

Often we are not aware of this aspect of our body image, although, it is the means of our sense of identity and role in the wider social context. But, this can get interrupted and our focus can shift to an awareness of cultural norms, particularly in the case of some disruption. For instance, individuals that stand outside or on the borders of accepted identities tend to be more aware of their bodies in the context of such norms. If what they do with their bodies does not fit within the domain of accepted subjects, individuals can internalize this into their body image. This aspect of their body schema in this wider social environment, then, can change one's beliefs about themselves and their image. It could be that one will believe that there is something 'wrong' with their body, they have a deficiency, or holistically, something is wrong with their very being. Those within the domain of normal bodies are primarily not confronted with having to account for their body—how it behaves, what it looks like, etc. However, marginalized identities are often marginalized by means of their bodies. That is to say, it is not one's set of beliefs, body image, or practices which positions them within the domain of intelligible, accepted identities; rather, it is these sets of beliefs, body image, and practices performed by the body. Simply put, we observe how bodies perform and either identify with them, accept them, or reject them.

The body image via body schema is constituted through such performances within social space. An example can be seen in the film *Examined Life*, in which Judith Butler and Sunaura Taylor discuss such marginalized identities formed by societal expectations of ability and gender. Their conversation is telling of the plasticity of body image and body schema and how it

shapes our identities within a particular social space. Taylor was born with arthrogryosis and uses a wheel chair to get around. Taylor is identified as "disabled" because of her limited motion and inability to perform and accomplish everyday tasks without help from either others or supplemental technology. Her body schema violates societal expectations of how bodies perform and accomplish tasks, and in return, inform her identity. Taylor, on the other hand, disrupts such normalizing expectations as she has a different set of beliefs and attitudes toward her body. She explains that she does not see herself as *dis*-abled, but able-bodied, which is becoming a more readily available discourse. But Taylor points out it is not just her distorted body which underlies such discourse, but how external bodies and technologies factor into her body schema. Taylor would not need to confront and adjust her set of beliefs and attitudes toward her body to societal standards and employ the language of 'able-bodied' if her body did not show up as different, alien, abnormal, or exceptional with the social context.

This shows how the social environment provides us with an accessible language to constitute our body image. We may be able to describe bodily behavior, but when it comes to identity we use a different discourse. In the scene, Butler and Taylor are "walking" in a neighborhood in San Francisco. Taylor contends that she is *walking* despite the visual fact that she is in a wheel chair and not physically walking in the traditional sense. In this way she suggests that she is as able-bodied as anyone else is, challenging the language and belief of disability. For example, Taylor states that she is just as capable as anyone else at purchasing a cup of coffee and drinking it. We witness a scene where she uses her mouth to pick up the coffee. Thus, she may have to use body parts not normally used to do perform that task, but the intentional action is still carried out.

Underlying the conversation is the issue of agency and ownership. Butler asks Taylor if she "feels free to move in ways you want to use." Taylor's response reveals the significance of her context influencing her feeling of freedom and her attitude toward her body. What provides her with a sense of free movement has to do with the social acceptability and the ease of physical access to buildings and public transportation. She states that "physical access leads to social access, moving in social space…" Yet, Taylor also stresses how it is more difficult for her to move because of "normalizing standards." She uses body parts in ways (or for purposes) that are not necessarily what they are intended for. Such normalizing standards affect her life in everyday situations, from experiencing the social repression of disabled people, being socially isolated, not being given the same opportunities, and the social construction of disability. Societal practices of repression and isolation fundamentally operate in how Taylor views her body. But she contends that "social repression" of disabled people and the "disabling effects of society" are what is disabling, not her body. In other words, the fact that she is "disabled" is because there is a social construction of disability which, weighs in on her body image. On the other hand, individuals do not necessarily have beliefs and attitudes about their bodies as being abled, unless they were to encounter someone we label as disabled, or undergo a physical change that would position them within the domain of disability. This is an underlying, non-conscious belief, perhaps, that only surfaces when our own body image is ruptured through the event.

Concerning gender, Butler and Taylor discuss societal norms which construct our identities through discourse of masculine and feminine. Such constructions then bear on issues of sexuality, in the case that there are particular norms for what a masculine body does verses a feminine body, and how they are to interact. Butler explains that all bodies are "sexed" and therefore are always positioned along the continuum of gender and sexuality. In the film, as

Butler and Taylor are walking, Butler describes a case in which a young man was killed for 'how his body performed' and 'what he did with his body.' His bodily performance of swishing his hips while walking was perceived as the way a homosexual male may walk. The swish of hips is seen as a feminine behavior and if a male is performing in a feminine way, then they are immediately identified as homosexual, through the identities available, whether the individual performs what society labels as homosexual acts or not. Bodily movements and acts constitute domains of subjectivity. Once again the theme of walking is introduced: someone is identified along a set of norms by how they walk.

This is not to suggest that only marginalized identities confront the ways cultural norms are constitutive of one's body image and body schema. All bodies are subject to the influence of societal interpretations and expectations in regard to our bodies.

7. *Easel: Body Image and Body Schema*

While we can distinguish between body schema and body image thematically, they are intimately intertwined, and serve as common specifications for physiological, neurological, psychological, somatic processes. Merleau-Ponty explains that "what allows us to link to each other the 'physiological' and the 'psychic,' is the fact that, when reintegrated into existence, they are no longer distinguishable respectively as the order of the in-itself, and that of the for-itself, and that they are both directed towards an intentional pole or towards a world" (TPP 101). When thought separately, the physiological is in-itself, meaning that it functions without intentional activity; it is a medium of activity. The for-itself, on the other hand, implies a forward moving, intentional activity, done on behalf of the one doing the action. Thus, it is the subject of action.

This is understood in how the physiological operates without any perceptual consciousness, and we are not made aware of it either than metaphorically to describe aspects of the body we do not see; conversely, we are made aware of seemingly 'psychic' processes by the outward effect observed.

Gallagher points out that despite their intertwining, body schema is not reducible to body image, and also, body image is not reducible to the 'mentalistic' side of consciousness (BM 245). Likewise, the body schema is not reducible to a purely neurophysiological explanation of motor control, since our pragmatic intentions guide the way the body moves (BM 245). In the same way my gestures are not reducible to body-schematic processes that are purely instrumental, "but are generated in the service of communicative or cognitive processes" (BM 246).

This means that the integration of the 'psychic' and 'physiological' is ambiguous. The ambiguity lies in the fact that "Man taken as a concrete being," Merleau-Ponty explains, "is not a psyche joined to an organism, but the movement to and fro of existence which at one time allows itself to take corporeal form and at others moves towards personal acts" (TPP 101). He adds:

> Psychological motives and bodily occasions may overlap because there is not a single impulse in a living body which is entirely fortuitous in relation to psychic intentions, not a single mental act which has found at least its germ or its general outline in physiological tendencies. It is never a question of the incomprehensible meeting of two causalities, nor of a collision between the order of causes and that of ends. But by an imperceptible twist an organic process issues into human behavior, an instinctive act changes directions and becomes a sentiment, or

> conversely a human act becomes torpid and is continued absent-mindedly in the form of a reflex. (TPP 101-102)

We take instinct to be a psychic process we assume is present by its outward effects. Take fear, for example: we can experience fear entirely as reflexive—a sudden movement on the boundary of our peripheral vision startles us; we then can become afraid of what we believe the moving object to be. The instinct develops into a disposition. Another example is riding a bicycle in the other case of the human act becoming more so of a reflex. At first an individual is astutely focused on the movements needed to balance and move the bicycle, but then over time the body becomes habitualized in terms of the schematic movements required, and thus, the action can be performed "absent-mindedly."

This also can be seen in cases in which we confront and take notice of our bodies through intentional actions or possible (non-intentional) disruptions in our lives. According to Merleau-Ponty, conscious life is "subtended by an 'intentional arc' which projects round about us our past, our future, or human setting, our physical, ideological and moral situation, or rather which results in being situation in all these respects." As he puts it, "consciousness put[s] up a host of intentions which run from the body as the center of potential action either towards the body itself or towards the object…" (TPP 157). Although body schema is not an operation of cognition, it can support intentional activity underlying cognition; the body schema conforms to an intention. In the case of intentional action, we may shift our image so as to respond to and affect our body schema. Our intentional experience can shape the pre-reflective, sub-personal movements controlled by a body schema. Merleau-Ponty says that, "It is this intentional arc which brings about the unity of the senses, of intelligence, of sensibility and motility" (TPP 157). Conscious

manipulation of the body can be used to monitor and affect posture and movements, for instance, and in these cases we do have some awareness of aspects of our body schema. Merleau-Ponty clarifies that, "In the case of the normal subject, the body is available not only in real situations into which it is drawn. It can turn aside from the world, apply its activity to stimuli which affect its sensory surfaces, lend itself to experimentation, and generally speaking take its place in the real of the potential" (TPP 125). Thus, although we typically do not have to attend to movements to accomplish intentional activity, the body can become the focus of attention and become an object of consciousness, in which it appears as an 'object' during certain circumstances, such as in the case of physical exertion, illness, stressful situations, danger, pleasure, or pathologies.

A simple example may help here: for instance, when I am running, I focus on tilting my hips, lowering my shoulders, and elongating my spine in order to create the most efficient stride. At this point, I am focused and aware of aspects of my body schema. Through the intention to create a more efficient pace (the potential), I draw my attention to my posture, focusing on particular parts of my body in which the body schema adjusts to match my intention. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, "the normal person *reckons* with the possible" (TPP 157). Over time, these adjustments become more proficient, they "take its place in the real of the potential," and I do them without conscious reflection. Yet, when there is a disruption of my body's performance, such as fatigue, my motor functions 'unconsciously' shift to conserve as much energy as possible. For instance, my shoulders collapse, I lean forward, and my pace slows. In either case of proficient pace or during fatigue, there is also a non-conscious, underlying schematic-system in operation that is maintaining balance, such as constricting my abdominals and other muscles to maintain an upright posture that accompanies this intentional action. Even more so, there are

the neuro-physiological processes taking place in order to send the right message to the parts of the body involved in movement, for example. I am not holistically aware of these motor functions in that I never have consciousness of the whole, or a 'global awareness' of the body, as Merleau-Ponty states.

Therefore, body image is partial—it can enter into our consciousness with certain parts emphasized or singled out, but the body functions more holistically. When our body is 'in tune' with the environment, it performs prenoetically. When the body performs prenoetically, there is a particular way that it is organized, or a style of performance, in its relations with its environment. The schematic-system can actively organize or give style to the body to integrate in and respond to the environment, but this is performed without our conscious monitoring the body. Gallagher explains that, "It is a dynamic, operative performance of the body, rather than a consciousness, image, or conceptual model of it" (BM 32). This means that it does not depend on a consciousness, active awareness, and cognitive representations to monitor the body's performance; rather, we could say, the body's schematic-system is responsible for monitoring the performance of the body.

Yet, we can become aware of how the body schema operates prenoetically if our attention is directed toward such beliefs and attitudes. The way that we move and navigate the world affects our body image as it incorporates it into the schemata, as we saw with the two examples of disability and running. I understand myself to be capable of certain movements and performances, which inform one aspect of my body image. I may also think of myself as healthy based on societal and medical standards of health. This belief is derived from the functioning of my body as well as my cultural environment, as explained above. That is to say, "every movement has a *background*," and additionally, "the movement and its background are

'moments of a unique totality'" (TPP 127). In movement, we exist as *being-in-the-world*, in that the totality of being and responses fill the whole field of action. In the case of what Merleau-Ponty distinguishes as *concrete* movement, there is no awareness of stimulus or reaction (TPP 122). On the other hand, in *abstract* movement, the body can become an impersonal being through manipulation. Thus, the body is manipulatable for me or in itself. Our body, then, comprises, as it were, two distinct layers: habit-body (manipulating movements) and body at motion (being manipulated) (TPP 95). When the body moves toward a world, it buries its perceptual and practical intentions into objects; the world is manipulatable for it.

Likewise, the body imposes a view of the world on us. Merleau-Ponty explains that, "Bodily experience forces us to acknowledge an imposition of meaning" (TPP 104; 170). It is for this reason that, "There is always some degree of depersonalization at the heart of consciousness" (TPP 158). There is an element of intervention from the outside (TPP 158). Though this is always in operation, intervening elements are highlighted in moments of danger, illness, pain, trauma, or accident. There is a sense of 'this is happening to' my body, and in these moments we become acutely aware of such intervention. At the same time, the body is not available in potential situations; rather, only *one* real world is possible, the world being imposed on the individual. In other words, the biological is sublimated into personal existence: "Impersonal time continues its course, but personal time is arrested" (TPP 96). If the body schematic performance fails, the body takes center stage in the perceptual field. In illness the "intentional arc which brings about the unity of the senses, of intelligence, of sensibility and motility" goes limp (TPP 157). With that, consciousness "may collapse into fragments" (TPP 158).

The disruption also occurs at the stage of prenoetic functions. That is, our body image changes without specific reflection on, or monitoring of, our comportment toward our body. Merleau-Ponty explains that, "When it has incorporated [an object] into its 'world,' and to move one's body is to aim at things through it; it is to allow oneself to respond to their call, which is made upon it independently of any representation" (TPP 160-161). For instance, when my capacity for running was disrupted by an injury requiring knee surgery, my body image changed in terms of what I found myself to be capable of and the potential movements available to me. This was of concern for me, but only became highlighted when I attempted an activity I no longer was capable of. The change in my body schema not only influenced how I moved, but also, what I required to move. In order to maintain mobility, I had to incorporate crutches into my body schema: the crutches became an element of my capacity for movement—they became my legs. My body had to learn and understand how to combine with the external aid, creating a new spacio-temporal field. In this case, embodied knowledge is a matter of praxis.

8. *Those Who Paint: Plasticity*

Gallagher presents the case of Ian Waterman, who lost proprioceptive awareness, to further illustrate how an illness can also disrupt a person's body schema and body image. Proprioceptive awareness is pre-reflexive, pragmatic awareness which gives the body ability to sense stimuli arising within the body. The proprioceptive awareness is a non-conscious process and part of the system that constitutes the body schema. It provides a perceived spatial structure which informs our body image.

With the loss of proprioception, Ian's body was impaired, but also, his body image was impaired. Similar to how a schizophrenic might feel, Ian experienced an alienating effect because he had lost the sense of his body *as his own* and the sense that it was under his control (BM 44). In order to gain control of his body schema, he had to develop an extremely high-functioning body image to 'substitute' for his loss (BM 42-43). Ian addressed his problem on a behavioral level, slowly rebuilding a partial and very minimal body schema through a body image which depended on a high degree of mental concentration to 'relearn' motor programs (BM 44). He could then control intentional movements through controlling his body image.

In everyday circumstances, we are able to accomplish intentional actions without such need for focused control. In the case of reaching for a cup, our focus is on the object and when we intend to move, movements tend to follow automatically in accordance with the intention. But, this is not the case for Ian, as when he moves, he has to focus not only on the intended object but also on his hand in order to grab it (BM 44). For Ian, consciousness of movement has to be present for there to be movement.

If we have normal proprioception when engaged in actions, we do not ordinarily consciously plan our movements nor consider that we have to take our movement into account (BM 64). In this sense, Gallagher explains, "Conscious experience is normally out ahead of movement, directed at the environment…[I]n normal behavior, movement underpins and supports intentional activity, but does not itself require reflexive conscious attention" (BM 64). Ian has to use visual attention to accomplish sensory-motor functions that would come 'automatically' to us. That is, he has to *see* his arm to move to pick up the cup and concentrate on the specific movements to accomplish such a task. It is as if Ian has a 'virtual body schema,' but functions only within the scope of the body image and has to be consciously and continually

maintained (BM 52). In order for Ian to complete an intentional movement, then, he has to have access to visual awareness of his body, but moreover, he has to be able to cognitively think about his body to create the framework of the body image that the virtual body schema relies on (BM 52). With this set of limitations, Ian has "reinvented movement" (BM 55).

Ian's case suggests that both the body schema and body image play an important role in a sense of embodied self, and also the plasticity of body schema and body image. As Ian felt alienated from his body because he did not have a sense of control, he felt a loss of embodiment. This supports the view that both control and body image are an important source for the sense of ownership and selfhood.

What is at issue for Ian is both the motor and perceptual habit, which is what, according to Merleau-Ponty, "enables us to understand the general synthesis of one's own body," as well as bodily spatiality (TPP 175). In a case like learning to navigate the world by means of a stick in blindness, this is an example of motor habit and equally perceptual habit. With use over time, "Once the stick has become a familiar instrument, the world of feelable things recedes and now begins, not at the outer skin of the hand, but at the end of the stick" (TPP 175-6). This suggests that perception is "…a reading off from the same sensory data, but constantly accelerated, and operating with ever more attenuated signals." But, Merleau-Ponty notes, "habit does not *consist* in interpreting the pressures of the stick on the hand as indications of certain positions of the stick, and these as signs of an external object, since it *relieves us of the necessity* of doing so" (TPP 176). The stick is no longer a perceived object, but rather is an instrument with which to perceive the world; "it is a bodily auxiliary, an extension of the bodily synthesis" (TPP 176). It is not a matter of interpretation, which is a cognitive intention; rather, the process of grasping a meaning performed by the body. He gives the example of a child learning to observe color: "In

the gaze we have at our disposal a natural instrument analogous to the blind man's stick. The gaze gets more or less from things according to the way in which it questions them, ranges over or dwells on them. To learn to see colors is to acquire a certain style of seeing, a new use of one's own body: it is to enrich and recast the body schema" (TPP 177).

The ability to continually enrich and recast the body schema is evidence of the plasticity of embodiment. In all examples, the body image and body schema are malleable in the attempt to recreate equilibrium. This may be temporal, like in the example of using crutches; extended over time, as in the case of the blind man; or essential, as in Ian Waterman's condition. In each situation, the body has to learn and understand its own embodiment. Cognitive concentration is certainly present but, in most cases, just temporarily; and moreover, it is not responsible for acquired embodied knowledge. As Merleau-Ponty explains:

> Whether a system of motor or perceptual powers, our body is not an object for an 'I think,' it is a grouping of lived-through meanings which moves towards its equilibrium. Sometimes a new cluster of meanings is formed; our former movements are integrated into a fresh motor entity, the first visual data into a fresh sensory entity, our natural powers suddenly come together in a richer meaning, which hitherto has been merely foreshadowed in our perceptual or practical field, and which has made itself felt in our experience by no more than a certain lack, and which by its coming suddenly reshuffles the elements of our equilibrium and fulfils our blind expectation. (TPP 177)

9. *Turpentine: Phantom Plasticity*

Merleau-Ponty presents a few cases in which this process of reforming equilibrium is complicated. In the case of phantom limb syndrome, the body never seems to 'get over' the loss of the limb. While cognitively one can recognize that they have lost a limb, the body does not reflect this 'knowledge.' The body fantasizes that the limb is still there, not as an image of the limb, but as a "representation of an actual presence." Likewise, the representation is of the same limb—not mutilated—which the subject still 'possesses' as *their* limb. Merleau-Ponty explains, "The phantom arm must be the same arm, lacerated by shell splinters, its visible substance burned or rotted somewhere, which appears to haunt the present body without being absorbed into it" (TPP 98-99).

The loss of the limb is not absorbed in the sense that the individual still 'utilizes it.' That is, individuals with phantom leg syndrome, for instance, will continue to try and walk or use it to get out of bed, seemingly not discouraged by the fall (TPP 93). With that, unlike the case of Ian Waterhouse, (an attempt at) mobility does not require such an acute image and awareness of the body—the body just acts. Additionally, Merleau-Ponty suggests that the awareness of the amputated limb is not a judgment or deliberate decision. The consciousness of the phantom leg is not a matter of 'I think that…' (TPP 94). Therefore, "If [the subject] treats it in practice as a real limb, this is because, like a normal subject, he has no need, when he wants to set off walking, of a *clear and articulate perception of his body*: it is enough for him to have it 'at his disposal' as an undivided power, and to sense the phantom limb is vaguely involved in it" (TPP 93, emphasis mine). This is why Merleau-Ponty proposes that the consciousness of the phantom limb is ambiguous. The subject has a preconscious awareness of the missing limb, in fantasizing

a limb; yet, the subject, in the attempt to use the limb, appears unaware of the limb being missing. Consequently, "To have a phantom arm is to remain open to all the actions of which the arm alone is capable; it is to retain the practical field which one enjoyed before mutilation" (TPP 94). Despite the destruction of the limb, the practical field is not destroyed.

Here we also see a distinction between 'intellectual memory' and, what Merleau-Ponty alludes to, something like 'emotional memory.' He explains, "The memories called up before the patient induce in him a phantom limb, not as an image in associationism summons up another image, but because any memory reopens time lost to us and invites us to recapture the situation evoked" (TPP 99). With memory, the subject attempts to recapture the moment of when the limb was not missing. The subject projects a past image into the present, recasting memory. The emotional memory is formed by the way the subject both acknowledges the missing limb by fantasizing one to be there, and, nonetheless, does not want to accept that the limb is missing. This dual insistence on what is real and what cannot be real defies the individual's 'intellectual memory'—in its place, memory is either repressed or fantasized. Merleau-Ponty explains:

> To feel emotion is to be involved in a situation which one is not managing to face and from which, nevertheless, one does not want to escape. Rather than admit failure or retrace one's steps, the subject, caught in this existential dilemma, breaks in pieces the objective world which stands in his way and seeks symbolical satisfaction in magic acts. The ruin of the objective world, abandonment of true action, flight into a self-contained realm are conditions favoring the illusion of those who have lost a limb in that it too presupposes the erasure of reality. (TPP 99)

This is why Merleau-Ponty suggests that memory, emotion, and the phantom limb are equivalents in the context of being in the world (TPP 99).

Merleau-Ponty also alludes to a distinction between memory and traumatic memory, though he does not name it as such. He explains that the fixation on the repressed memory (the fixation on the phantom limb), "…does not merge into memory; it even excludes memory insofar as the latter spreads out in front of us, like a picture, a former experience, whereas this past which remains our true present does not leave us but remains constantly hidden behind our gaze instead of being displayed before it" (TPP 95). The *memory* of losing the limb is not assimilated into an individual's body image, and strangely, also the body schema. Both the subject and the body deny that the leg is missing. Further, the memory is not preserved as a memory—it is happening in present time. According to Merleau-Ponty "Each present may claim to solidify our life, and indeed that is what distinguishes it as the present. Insofar as it presents itself as the totality of being and fills an instant of consciousness, we never extricate ourselves completely from it, time never completely closes over it and it remains like a wound through which our strength ebbs away. It can now be said that, *a fortiori*, the specific past, which our body is, can be recaptured and taken up by an individual life only because that life has never transcended it, but secretly nourishes it, devoting thereto part of its strength, because its present is still that past" (TPP 98). But, in the case of phantom limb syndrome, we find the opposite: its past is still present.

Thus, he reasons that the imaginary limb is "...like repressed experience, a former present which cannot decide to recede into the past" (TPP 99). An individual can *feel* the missing limb and has memory of the causal situation—that situation making itself known through the

phenomenological experience. Similar to the concept of repression in trauma, the memory is submerged, only to be hauled along. Although absent, the limb is present—it insists on its presence. It is for this reason that Merleau-Ponty not only likens phantom limb syndrome to repression, he asserts that "the phenomenon of the phantom limb is *absorbed* into repression" (TPP 95, emphasis mine). Merleau-Ponty describes repression as the body entering a course of action, but in that course, encountering a barrier which cannot be surmounted. In this sense, the body remains "imprisoned"—held captive to pursuing an impossibility. Specifically in traumatic experience as time passes, this impossible project does not get carried away; time does not "close up on traumatic experience" and "the subject remains open to the same impossible future, if not in his explicit thoughts, at any rate in his actual being" (TPP 95). With repression, *one* world or present situation "acquires exceptional value" among others; "it displaces the others and deprives them of their value as authentic presents" (TPP 96). The body insists that the world in which the limb is still intact is the only authentic present.

This is also the case with traumatic memory:

> The traumatic experience does not survive as a representation in the mode of objective consciousness and as a 'dated' moment; it is of its essence to survive only as a manner of being and with a certain degree of generality. I forgo my constant power of providing myself with 'worlds' in the interest of one of them, and for that very reason this privileged world loses its substance and eventually becomes no more than a certain dread. All repression is, then, the transition from first person existence to a sort of abstraction of that existence, which lives on a

> former experience, or rather on the memory of having had the memory, and so on, until finally only *the essential form remains*. (TPP 96, emphasis mine)

The traumatic memories, much like the nerves of the body, are experienced as physical reactions to the present (Kolk, BKS 204). The nerves in the body still register that there is a limb; it is still very much a part of the organism, even if only virtually. Analogously, dread—dreading the next interruption of the traumatic memory, dreading the inescapability, dreading that impossibility—"prevents it from being abolished, and cause(s) it to still count in the organism" (TPP 99). Both the phantom limb and the dreaded memory take on exceptional value and remain as such.

Thus, plasticity in regard to phantom limb syndrome and also, more broadly, in trauma, is not adaptive or developmental—the body does not admit to disrepair; it does not adapt to traumatic experience and memory; it does not develop a successful strategy of repair. Whereas, in the case of Ian Waterhouse, he is able to adapt and develop a virtual body schema via his body image to accomplish intentional actions. What we find with trauma, such abilities to recast body schemas, construct virtual body schemas, reorganize the organism, or absorb the traumatic memory into the individual's narrative in order to regain equilibrium are not available as the embodied feeling of being alive is compromised. This is because the features of trauma—flashbacks, nightmares, interruptive memories, depression—are unpredictable; the trauma is "not assimilated" in the body or narrative; linear time is collapsed.

The model of embodiment and plasticity covered in this chapter helps to establish what is essential for the "embodied feeling of being alive": a sense of ownership, agency, historical narrative, linear temporality, and control over one's body. But now we need to understand how these essential aspects of embodiment are compromised in trauma. Catharine Malabou asserts

that trauma does not work from repression, unlike cases of phantom limb syndrome. And moreover, the essential *form* does not remain. A whole new being emerges, not the same patient with a missing limb, but a whole new identity is formed. And thus, she offers another possible plasticity in regard to trauma: destructive plasticity.

CHAPTER THREE:

MAKING OF THE ONTOLOGICAL REFUGEE

Catharine Malabou describes plasticity as, "…an equilibrium between the receiving and giving of form. It is understood as a sort of natural sculpting that forms our identity, an identity modeled by experience and that makes us subjects of history, a singular, recognizable, identifiable history, with all its events, gaps, and future" (OA 3). Plasticity is the ability to maintain a capacity for change and balance, with the aptitude of remaining the same. It is a positive metamorphosis, one that is developmental, modulational, and reparative. It is a system that undergoes metamorphosis in order to maintain equilibrium. Malabou explains that "Plasticity also refers to the possibility of being transformed without being destroyed; it characterizes the entire strategy of modification that seeks to avoid the threat of destruction" (OA 44-45). For instance, Merleau-Ponty notes that in the case of danger, illness, or trauma, new emotions and perceptions develop and replace old ones. He adds that this process only affects the "content of our experience and not its structure" (TPP 96). This means that what structures our experience is not replaced—we still experience the world as embodied subjects with a sense of ownership, agency, linear temporality, historical narrative, and control over one's body. So while the content of such experience influences how body schema and body image are shaped, this capacity for equilibrium remains an essential component of our being, despite disruptions to the schematic system.

For instance, take my earlier example. When I underwent knee surgery, the material *content* of my body went through several metamorphoses—scar tissue, loss of a meniscus, frequent swelling and pain, etc. I also underwent a reorientation of what I could do, how to get around, and how to live with pain. These changes are incorporated into not only my body schema but also my body image. My daily experience is influenced by knowledge of my limitations, being in pain, and anticipation of the development of other complications, such as osteoarthritis. And yet, I have returned to being able to do almost as much as before. Equilibrium is established not just in the physical recovery, but also the way in which the event, surgery, pain, and future complications are all a part of my identifiable, historical narrative. At no point was this capacity for equilibrium, my sense of time, autonomy and ownership of my body, or identity compromised.

Take another example. In the case of drastic emotional changes, like in the case of grief, an individual's comportment to the world, others, and oneself undergo significant metamorphosis, in the sense of the sublimation of biological into personal existence. Yet, as Merleau-Ponty points out, these moments are no more than moments (TPP 97). He explains:

> While I am overcome by some grief and wholly given over to my distress, my eyes already stray in front of me, and are drawn, despite everything, to some shining object, and thereupon resume their autonomous existence. Following upon that minute into which we wanted to compress our whole life, time, or at least, personal time, begins once more to flow, carry away, if not our resolution, at least the heartfelt emotions which sustained it. Personal existence is intermittent and when this tide turns and recedes, decision can henceforth endow

> my life with only an artificially induced significance. The fusion of soul and body in the act, the sublimation of biological into personal existence, and of the natural into the cultural world is made both possible and precarious by the temporal structure of our experience. Every present grasps, by stages, through its horizon of immediate past and near future, the totality of possible time; thus does it overcome the dispersal of instants, and manage to endow our past itself with its definitive meaning, re-integrating into personal existence even that past of all pasts which the stereotyped patterns of our organic behavior seem to suggest as being at the origin of our volitional being. (TPP 97-98)

The body schema still is operating as it does, and while the grief may overwhelm the individual, it is still the same recognizable identity experiencing that grief. In fact, the very experience of grief hinges on a recognizable identity having a shared history with the lost loved one. That is to say, for one to experience grief, they carry the past memories into the present—*their* memories. Furthermore, what takes place in grief is the forecasting of the future without the loved one. Thus in the case of metamorphoses of emotions and perceptions, the temporal and relational structure of being remain intact.

Additionally, while there may be disruptive events to the body-image-schematic system, there is also a creative plasticity. Malabou notes that there is always a cycle of destruction and creation in regard to plasticity, and even though a being may drastically change, there is a unifying, cyclical metamorphosis that links the various changes. An individual can go through several metamorphoses, several new combinations of body schema and body image, or how Merleau-Ponty would put it, several worlds. But in any of these interpretations, the true nature

of being is not "carried off" and the identity returns to its prior form, not in terms of content, but in terms of identification with a prior self (OA 11).

Malabou, though, proposes that if the identity were to change substantively then there would be no return to prior forms (OA 9). Rather, the circle of metamorphosis would be broken and the capacity for equilibrium would be annihilated (OA 5). This is what Malabou labels as *destructive plasticity*—one that she claims has not been given any name, especially the name of 'plasticity.' This is because, by definition, plasticity at its core is the capacity for a balance between change and remaining the same. The being can experience changes to body schema and body image, yet it still remains the same ontological being. On the other hand with destructive plasticity, the result is the subject is transformed to the point that it is unrecognizable, not "because of a change in appearance," but, "on account of a change in nature…" (OA 9).

A metamorphosis does in fact take place, just like in the case of creative plasticity; however, destructive plasticity is an unprecedented metamorphosis: it is "a plasticity that does not repair, a plasticity without recompense or scar, one that cuts the thread of life in two or more segments that no longer meet" (OA 6). Here lies the distinction between destructive plasticity and traditional plasticity: the incapacity for reestablishing equilibrium. Yet, the language of 'plasticity' is still appropriate because it is an underlying aspect of our being: we are plastic beings, and as Malabou notes, anyone of us has this plastic power of destruction within us and can undergo such a metamorphosis (OA 2, 5).

1. *Explosive Plasticity: The Deserting of the Subject*

Destruction can be understood in a number of ways: something could be destroyed to the state of nonbeing, to the state that it disappears, or to the state that it becomes unrecognizable. On Malabou's account of destructive plasticity all three senses of destruction seem fitting and yet, do not quite fit. Specific to her concept of destructive plasticity, destruction is "annihilation of equilibrium," but also a whole new being is formed, not one that is modified, but "one form annihilates the other" (OA 5). "The formation of a new individual," Malabou contends, "is precisely this explosion of form that frees up a way out and allows the resurgence of an alterity that the pursuer cannot assimilate" (OA 12). Note that Malabou equates the formation of a new individual with the explosion; the formation is not a separate process; it is not the result of the explosion—it is not the exploding IED which destroys the soldier, but the individual exploding from the inside; "a molting of the inner sculpture" (OA 9). This means that both content and the structure of experience undergo metamorphoses.

Yet, in Malabou's account of destructive plasticity, the being is not destroyed to the state of nonbeing. Malabou explains, "Something *shows itself* when there is damage, a cut, something to which normal, creative plasticity gives neither access nor body: the deserting of subjectivity, the distancing of the individual who becomes a stranger to herself, who no longer recognizes anyone, who no longer recognizes herself, who no longer remembers her self. These types of being impose a new form on their old form, without mediation or transition or glue or accountability, today verses yesterday, in a state of emergency, without foundation, bareback, sockless" (OA 6). Malabou lists what *shows itself* as "types of being." That is to suggest, it is not a distinction between different worlds, or a number of worlds the individual inhabits or takes

up; it is not a matter of displacing worlds or giving one exceptional value; and it is not a modification of body image and body schema.

What shows itself is a gap, but not an absence of being. This is the Lacanian formulation of the Freudian unconscious: a gap in the symbolic order, the very order of subjects. The tuché is the Lacanian lack, the missing subject—a rupture in the symbolic order *and* body. Thus, what shows itself is the absence of subjectivity. The loss of subjectivity means a loss of the individual's sense of agency, autonomy, narrative history, and spatial-temporal world—the very ingredients of the embodied feeling of being alive. Consequently, the phenomenological experience includes a disassociation of the self and numbness towards the world. In order to better elucidate what it is that "shows itself," namely the deserting of subjectivity and estrangement of the individual, I will focus on each element Malabou points out.

2. *Flight Identity*

Specifically, the new form imposed on the old form is what Malabou identifies as the *form of flight*. When threatened by destruction, the individual wants nothing more than to flee, instantaneously, with every bit of strength and force. In that moment, *flight* appears as "the only possible solution"—flee or be destroyed (OA 10). Within traditional plasticity, as opposed to fleeing, the individual transforms to evade the danger, or to recover from destruction. But, she argues that "metamorphosis by destruction is not the same of flight; it is rather the form of the impossibility of fleeing" (OA 10).

Malabou references Freud's discussion of the drives to illustrate this impossibility of fleeing. The drives are a constant force that cannot find release outside the psyche. He writes,

"…no actions of flight avail against [the drives]" (cited in OA 10). The question then becomes how to "eliminate" or satisfy the constant force of the drive. As we know from Freud, such drives cannot be eliminated; yet, the subject desires release, and so makes the attempt. In the case of the accident, "What follows," Malabou writes, "is an *attempt* at flight." Malabou draws attention to the verb "what follows" to literally mean "what comes to be formed." This attempt constitutes itself; that is, Malabou explains, "The only possible way out from the impossibility appears to be the formation of a *form* of flight" (OA 11). Rather than being able to take flight, a simulated, virtual flight is formed. Malabou specifies this form of flight as "flight identity," which is, "…the formation of an identity that flees itself, that flees the impossibility of fleeing itself" (OA 11). Despite any desire, any attempt, we cannot transcend the present or the body of the past. As noted before in the case of trauma, Merleau-Ponty clarifies: "we never extricate ourselves completely from it, time never completely closes over it and it remains like a wound" (TPP 98). It is impossible to flee the overlapping worlds of world, body, and self: the whole of consciousness and experience.

But, this is not quite what Malabou has in mind when she speaks of an identity that flees itself. Instead, Malabou argues, it is an, "Identity abandoned, disassociated again, identity that does not reflect itself, does not live its own transformation, does not subjectivize its change" (OA 11). This is because what forms the subject—the sense of embodied subjectivity, how we can determine an individual self distinguishable between worlds—is absent. The individual attempts to flee from the very thing which constitutes being—the body. In that case, the individual wants to flee an impossible present.

The something that shows itself, though, is still a form of being, just not cognized as an identifiable one, because any means by which the individual can know, recognize, remember, or

identify the new being is destroyed with it. As noted above, the formation of a new individual *is* the explosion; the formation is not a separate process; it is not the result of the explosion. For these reasons, flight identity is qualitatively and structurally different. The body of the individual is incessantly destroying the self; the flashback of the IED exploding, explodes the felt embodied-self.

All of this suggests that explosive identity is not accessible, identifiable, and intelligible. This has already been suggested when Caruth notes that the trauma is that which happens too soon and cannot be made intelligible. Further, the lack of a subject includes a lack of ownership—something is happening *to* the individual, in which the individual grapples with making it intelligible. Malabou steers in a different direction by indicating that the sense of 'happening to' can only occur in a coherent, continuous, recognizable self. If something is happening to me, it is because I can recognize myself as a body and mind within a world, subjected to external force. But in the instance of the accident, no prior subject is there to cognize the 'happening-to.' Further, it is not an external force which is 'happening to' the individual. The body 'happens to' itself. Here is the seed of the disassociation of the self—there is no recognizable self and the dwelling of the missing self is experienced as foreign, external.

3. *Negative Possibility*

Respectively, this corresponds to what Malabou means by saying that the something that 'shows itself' does so without mediation, transition, glue, or accountability. For example, repression can be understood as a way for the individual to mediate between the painful memories and the bearer of such memories. Merleau-Ponty describes repression as displacing worlds and

privileging one world. On this account, the accident is just one of the individual's worlds, a particular way of being-in-the world. But in the case of flight identity, the individual is wrested out of the world, disassociated from the self, in which the metamorphoses are not modalities of recovery to maintain equilibrium for being-in-the-world. Malabou argues that "The accident—trauma, catastrophe, injury—is not repressed. It is not relegated, not occulted, not admitted" (OA 79). This is because there is a formation of a *new* being, not another *way* of being. Malabou explains that, "The affective coldness [disassociation] and indifference of victims are not strategies of escape" (OA 79). As discussed above, the affective coldness produced in the subject is the phenomenon of the other living within—an unrecognizable being, that of flight identity. With this, "Destructive plasticity prohibits envisaging precisely the *other possibility*, even if it were an *a posteriori* possibility. It has nothing to do with the tenacious, incurable desire to transform what has taken place, to reengage in the history of the phantasm of an other history it does not match any unconscious tactical strategy of opening, the refusal of what is, in the name of what could have been" (OA89). Flight identity is the impossibility of fleeing.

Malabou provides another reason why the accident does not work from repression. Often repression is understood as the body denying the traumatic memories. But, Malabou contends that "Denial always involves an act of faith, a faith that may be defined as faith in another possible beginning, a source other than the real historical source of what really happened. When I deny something, in other words, when I negate the evidence, I postulate without being able to affirm it, that everything could have been otherwise, that everything could have been happened differently" (OA 85). When imagining 'what if it hadn't happened,' the subject imagines the possibility of 'it was not,' placing faith into no-thing, having "the dumb good will to believe" (Nietzsche, BGE 5). Denial is faith in a transformation of 'it-was' to 'it-was-not.' This implies

the possibility of transitioning to maintain equilibrium, transforming instead of fleeing. Yet, 'it was' cannot be *transformed* into the other possibility.

For Freud, the attempt at flight and failure to flee is expressed as the repetition compulsion. The subject is compelled to bring back the scene of the trauma in the attempt to annihilate it, disown it, and strip it out of the body. With that, Malabou argues that it simultaneously brings back its *denegation*. Denegation is the subject imagining "what if it hadn't happened? What if something else had happened?" Yet, Malabou reasons, "The question of the other possibility, the wholly other version, is not simply witness to a compulsive, mechanical return; it also betrays an expectation, the expectation of the arrival of another way of being. A way of being excluded from reality" (OA 87). This means that by going back to the trauma, repeatedly, the subject cannot anticipate or even imagine any other possibility. This is the "implacable harshness of the negative" (OA 87). The individual digs in its heels, hauling itself back to the scene of the trauma, to un-imagine the un-imaginable. But, this is not possible because the new form of being has no history to transcend. The torn tissue that connects one's past to its present cannot be glued back together.

This is why Malabou argues that flight identity is not a form of redemption. Redemption is a way to answer to the past. To understand Malabou's point, a little Nietzschean redemption may be helpful here: "To redeem those who lived in the past and to recreate all 'it was' into 'thus I willed it'—that alone should I call redemption" (TSZ II, 251). Nietzschean redemption is to *will the past*, to *will backwards*. Redemption, on this account, would mean to affirm 'it was' as 'what must be' and deny any other possibility—*amor fati*. In a scene in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Zarathustra is confronted by hunchbacks, the blind, and cripples—the accident—who ask to be healed. Zarathustra resists and explains: "when my eyes flee from the now to the past, they

always find the same: fragments and limbs and dreadful accidents…" (TSZ II, 250). The same dreadful accidents exist in the past and present, indicating an inevitability. This is what creates great suffering: to will against the past. "'It was,' Zarathustra explains, "That is the name of the will's gnashing of teeth and most secret melancholy. Powerless against what has been done, he is an angry spectator of all that is past. The will cannot will backwards…" (TSZ II, 251). The will is always fettered to the past, to 'it was.' The desire to undo the past, to remake history, to will the other possibility, is to take revenge on life. 'Thus I will it,' is a creative gesture in which the creative will is a liberator and devises to "get rid of his melancholy and to mock his dungeon" (TSZ II, 251). But, Zarathustra suggests that it is not just a matter of reconciling with the past, coming to terms with the past, or coping with the past—that would suggest that the past is something which can be reconciled. Rather, 'Thus I will it' is even stronger than reconciling or coming to terms with it: to will the past is to take it in, to create one's identity out of it. This means to do more than accept it, but to absorb it into being, narrative history, and identity as a subject inhabiting a past in the present. In the case of the accident, this would mean to will both 'it must be' and 'it could be otherwise' at the same time—its denegation.

However, such creative elements and the creative will are not available to the subject who encounters the accident or trauma. This is seen in a distinction between negation in the sense of rejection (spitting out), and negation in sense of the *negative possibility* ("what must not come into presence"). Malabou asserts that it does not mean a negation of possibility that is still adopted by the subject, nor is it what is impossible. The negative possibility is understood as a possibility of "how to say no, a cut and dry no, an inconvertible, irredeemable no; how to think destruction without remission" (OA 75). Rejection has an affective origin in that being wants to 'spit out' what is bad or harmful; the ego seeks to expel it from being. This is not how negative

possibility is characterized, though. Malabou explains: "Negative possibility does not proceed either from rejecting or spitting out. Since the accident is in no way interiorized by the victim, it remains foreign to the fate of the psyche and is not integrated into the history of the individual. The individual does not reject the trauma outside of him- or herself and has no desire in relation to it, wants neither to eat nor to vomit it" (OA 81). This is because rejection requires judgment, but, with trauma, no judgment takes place. The accident or trauma is the moment of the breakdown, the abandonment of subjectivity, and with that, a rupture in the essential foundation of judgment and will—the agent. The 'rejection' happens on a much more primal, bodily level. This suggests that there is no will in the moment of accident or trauma, that is, as Zarathustra puts it, "Unless the will should at last redeem himself, and willing should become not willing" (TSZ II, 251).

Therefore, the subject cannot reclaim the negative possibility as a positive—'Thus I will it'—because willing is not possible; there is no 'it was' to will. Also, the subject cannot reject 'it was' as a bad thing—'it should not be.' The question asked, 'what if something else happened?' negates 'Thus I will it,' in the sense that the latter is the only reality; whereas the former is the impossibility, a negation of the possible other—the formation of that impossible being: flight-being. To put it simply, to flee is not to will, and thus, there is no recovery, no reconciliation, and no redemption—the trauma is inevitable. "The negative possibility," Malabou asserts, "which remains negative until it is exhausted, never becomes real, never becomes unreal either, but suspended in the post-traumatic form of the subject who misses nothing—who does not even lack lack, as Lacan might have written—remains to the end this subjective form that is constituted starting from the absence from the self" (OA 90). The concept of the Lacanian lack implies a subject which lacks its own subjectivity at the moment of the trauma. But, what

Malabou is adding to this notion of lack, is that the explosion of the self and formation of a new being is not a lack.

The negative possibility never becomes real in the sense that it does not come into presence, but also never becomes unreal as the negative possibility is always projected in the traumatic experience, the returning of the subject to the scene of the trauma—'what if it hadn't happened?' The accident, though, prohibits this question from even being formed—there is no other possible outcome. This is what torments the individual, this "harshness of the negative": the individual continues to ask this question, knowing that it is negated.

Negation, though, does not mean to reduce something into non-being, to what is "truly thrown out of being" (OA 81). It also does not mean to assimilate. In that case, 'thus I will it' would mean to enfold it into one's being, to interiorize and integrate it into the history of the individual as a coherent being, one with a shared, recognizable past and felt present. But in the case of destructive plasticity, what emerges is an *unimaginable*, unrecognizable being, one in which the present has no past. Malabou notes that "Without reducing it to affirmation, the negative possibility is not the expression of any lack or any deficit. It bears witness to a power or aptitude of the negative that is neither affirmed nor lacking, a power that *forms*" (OA 75).

This is what allows an appearance or formation of the *other*: "…the only other that exists in this circumstance is being other to the self" (OA 11). "The question," Malabou proposes, "is therefore how to think the void of subjectivity, the distancing of the individual who becomes an ontological refugee, intransitive (he or she is not the other *of* someone), without any correlation, genitive or origin. A new person, whose novelty is not, however, inscribed in any temporality" (OA 24). In the face of danger, a refugee flees their place of home and comes to live in a foreign land. The ontological refugee flees their being and comes to reside in another being.

4. *The Inevitable Accident*

With the formation of a new being, there is no "today verses yesterday." What is meant here is that a present day cannot be contrasted with a past day. First, trauma repeatedly manifests in sensory memory fragments, in which it is never a complete event with a definitive beginning and end. During a flashback, the individual does not experience it as a past event; rather, it is taking place in the present. All the sensations, images, meaning are present in the immediate experience and the past. The present and past are conflated such that both are experienced in the immediate now. In Merleau-Ponty's account, the past remains our "true present," meaning it is what structures our world, yet it remains "hidden behind our gaze" (TPP 96). But, for Malabou, in the case of a formation of a whole new being, the "present comes from no past" (OA 2).

Second, to make the distinction between today and yesterday implies a continuous, coherent history of the individual. Yet, that is not possible in trauma, as Malabou stresses that a whole new being is created. Malabou explains: "As a result of serious trauma…the path splits and a new, unprecedented persona comes to live with the former person, and eventually takes up all the room. An unrecognizable persona whose present comes from no past, whose future harbors nothing to come, an absolute existential improvisation" (OA 1-2). With that, the whole new being also has a whole new past. An example may help here: presently, any allusion to "a smashed up face," whether in memory, imagination, film, art, text, or speech, summons the same sensations as the traumatic memory for me. If I am to recall a scene from a movie I watched before the trauma, I cannot remember that scene without experiencing the same sensations if I see the film now. A past in which I was not affected by the image is not my past and does not coincide with my present experience. A world in which I am indifferent to such an image does

not exist for me. I cannot even possibly imagine such a past, as in imagining, what it would be like to not have "a smashed up face" incite traumatic sensory fragments, I conjure up those fragments. Such a past simply does not exist. Moreover, I do not need to remember images of *his* face to experience such sensations—they are there, hidden behind my 'gaze,' shaping my engagement with the world. Thus, there is not a singular history shared by the prior form and new being.

Additionally, one aspect of trauma is that the individual lives in a state of perpetual fear: the fear of the next flashback; the fear of a potential nightmare; the fear of an image, a smell, a sound; the fear of inescapability; the fear of the other living within; the fear of the inevitable. This is what makes the individual feel as if they are always in a state of emergency: everything is potentially destructive, even one's own body. The body interprets the world as dangerous in which at any moment, there is a call for immediate action. And the only action available is to flee; and yet, that is not possible, reinforcing the urgency. The inevitable chance is a constant threat.

5. *Bareback and Sockless*

The flight being is always in a state of emergency, an improvisation, an incessant attempt to flee, an impossibility of fleeing, a stranger to oneself, without subjectivity, and without foundation. To have the sense of a foundation means that there is an element of predictability based on a familiar narrative history, one that is recognizable to the individual. Identity is formed on the model of experience. The individual experiences both retention and protention and inhabits an assumptive world, able to carry out intentional actions and commitments. Additionally, the

individual's body schema and body image, while plastic, maintain a consistent relation. The individual's set of beliefs and dispositions toward the world are fairly stable in that questions of everyday existence and identity do not often arise. The world is familiar; the self is present; the body is available.

On the other hand, with trauma, identity is perpetually at issue, the world is potential destruction, the body is destruction. When one's world is incessantly interrupted by traumatic sensations, the individual lives in a state of ambiguity—in the world, flailing, with no script, no future, improvising, completely exposed to the world. Malabou captures this sensation when she describes what shows itself as bareback and sockless. What shows itself is not just the loss of subjectivity, disassociation, and a broken history; simultaneously, the body exposes the accident, though it may not be available to visual perception. The body perceives the accident; it knows the accident; it knows its destructive nature. Thus, the accident exposes how the individual is exposed to the world.

6. *Accidental Brushmarks*

In order to grasp how the accident shows itself in the body, I return to Merleau-Ponty's analogy of the body to a painting. If we recall, in order to "paint from nature" Cézanne sees himself as the medium through which nature shows itself: "The landscape thinks itself through me. I am its consciousness." Analogously, we can ask: how is the body the consciousness of the accident? How does the accident think itself through the painter? Painter Francis Bacon hints at an answer. Through a series of interviews, he draws a connection between his paintings and the accident.

He states, “I always think of myself not so much as a painter but as a medium for accident and chance” (FB 140).

Bacon discusses one of his paintings of a triptych (May-June 1973), in which there is a distorted figure hunched over a basin, apparently sick—in the very moment of being sick. On the shoulder of the figure, there is a “whip of white paint.” Bacon states, “I did it at the very last moment, and I just left it. I don’t know if it’s right, but for me it looked right” (FB 94). Bacon remarks on how he could have scrubbed out the white mark, painted over it, or incorporated it into the figure’s body; but, he allowed the accident—“it looked right.” What might look like a mistake is the accidental brush mark Bacon tries to capture. Throughout the series of interviews, Bacon often suggests that involuntary marks, which he describes as haphazard, non-rational, irrational, non-illustrational, and anti-illustrational, are much more deeply suggestive, unlocking areas of sensation other than a simple illustration of an image (FB 56). While there is always a manner of manipulation in painting, Bacon claims to work “by chance.” He explains: “I think that accident, which I would call luck, is one of the most important and fertile aspects of [my work], because if anything works for me, I feel it is nothing I have made myself, but something which chance has been able to give me. …I never know how much it is pure chance and how much it is manipulation of it” (FB 90).

Yet, Bacon tells the interviewer, that he does not know exactly what chance is. Comparatively, he says that it is like trying to explain the unconscious. For this reason, he states that, “It’s also always hopeless talking about painting – one never does anything but talk around it – because, if you could explain your painting, you would be explaining your instincts” (FB 100). In an attempt to get at what Bacon means, the interviewer offers a distinction between “conscious activity” and “accidental activity.” He wonders if painting by accident is like

entering into something like a trance-like state, similar to what Cézanne was talking about when he said that, "if he took thought when painting, everything was lost" (FB 96-97). Bacon replies that it is difficult to distinguish between the conscious and the unconscious (or instinctive) activity. He cannot explain "why an image will tend to look more inevitable the more it comes about by accident" (FB 99). He asks, "Does one know why very often, or nearly always, the accidental images are the most real? Perhaps they've not been tampered with by the conscious brain and therefore come across in a much more raw and real sense than something which has been tampered with by consciousness?" (FB 177-178). Bacon concludes that accident and chance in painting work to make the images "fresher, not interfered with," "more organic," "raw," and "immediate" (FB 57, 92, 120). For this reason, he wants "the paintings to come about so that they look as though the marks had a sort of inevitability about them" (FB 94). "What so-called *chance* gives you," he explains, "is quite different from what willed application of paint gives you. It has an *inevitability* very often which the willed putting-on of the paint doesn't give you" (FB 53; 99, emphasis mine). Chance hands over the inevitable.

If one is familiar with his paintings, it seems strange to say that the images he creates are more organic and not tampered with—his work is a collection of haunting distortions of the human body, animal forms, objects, and obscure landscapes. It takes some time to know what you are looking at. For instance, many of the portraits he paints do not have distinct eyes, noses, or mouths. Rather, there are, as he puts it, just sockets—hollowed out, dark forms. Yet, the colors, contours of paint, and forms are suggestive enough that we can make out a human face. Likewise, with the human figures, body parts are enlarged, distorted, placed where they do not go and objects are blurred, their shapes mere suggestions formed by the opposing colors. All of this is quite disorienting, and yet, orienting. What I mean by this, and what Bacon emphasizes, is

that the distorted images orient us in the sensational aspect of the image, as opposed to just an illustrational image. Bacon explains, "There is a kind of sensational image within the very, you could say, structure of your being, which is not to do with a mental image – when that image, through accident, begins to form" (FB 160). Out of the accident, images emerge which are as gestural as the human body; the image is as palpable as the skin.

This method of distortion, for Bacon, gets closer to what we could call the facticity being represented in the image. What he aims to do is to "trap" not just the appearance, but also the "energy within the appearance"—"I'm trying to make images as accurately off my nervous system" (FB 175; 82). And so, "I'm always trying through chance or accident to find a way by which appearance can be there but made out of other shapes" (FB 105). He notes that the forms he attempts to make are extremely "unrepresentational" (FB 104). In order to capture what cannot be represented, he starts with unrepresentational forms: "What I want to do is to distort the thing far beyond the appearance, but in the distortion to bring it back to a recording of the appearance" (FB 40). What this accomplishes, according to Bacon, is that distortion produces a mood as he explains, "you can't make an image without its creating a mood" (FB 26). Thus, Bacon's method of distortion is actually similar to Cézanne's "painting from nature." Cézanne desires that his paintings "attempt to display the density of the world, to capture immediate perception;" "this indivisible whole…presence, insurpassable plentitude" of the world, without scientific exactness (CD 275; 279). Bacon also attempts to capture the *real* of the world, the thickness of the world; he states, "I think the only thing is that my paint looks immediate" (FB 92).

Yet, he says that this is extremely difficult and even if he is able to do so, the way appearances are formed is still mysterious to him. This is because, Bacon says, with "some accidental brushmarks suddenly appearance comes in with a vividness that no accepted way of doing it would have brought about" (FB 105). Bacon explains that, "It's really a question in my case of being able to set a trap with which one would be able to catch the fact at its most living point" (FB 54). It is this "living quality" which is hard to "move over" to painting. To have one's portrait really trapped and given through the medium of paint, Bacon says, it must capture all the pulsations of a person. This is because, "The sitter is someone of flesh and blood and what has to be caught is their emanation" (FB 174). A portrait for Bacon is not just a record their face, "but with their face you have to try and trap the energy that emanates from them" (FB175). He tells the interviewer, "When I look at you across the table, I don't only see you but I see a whole emanation which has to do with personality and everything else. And to put that over in a painting, as I would like to be able to do in a portrait, means that it would appear violent in paint" (FB 82). He believes that, "it's the slight remove from fact, which returns me onto the fact more violently" (FB 30). Bacon has to destroy the individual to capture their most "living quality." Bacon notes, "What has never yet been analyzed is why this particular way of painting is more poignant than illustration. I suppose because it has a life completely of its own. It lives on its own, like the image one's trying to trap; it lives on its own, and therefore transfers the essence of the image more poignantly. So that the artist may be able to open up or rather, should I say, unlock the valves of feeling and therefore return the onlooker to life more violently" (FB 17).

Bacon notes that the "human body is in a sense a filter, apart from its other attributes" (FB 199). All experience is filtered through the body. The body is the medium of the accident, the material real of the accident, without which the accident does not exist. Additionally Bacon asserts that, "We merely always live through screens – a screened existence. And I sometimes think, when people say my work looks violent, that perhaps I have from time to time been able to clear away one or two of the veils or screens" (FB 82). Both painting and body are, as Merleau-Ponty intimates, "beings in which the expression is indistinguishable from the thing expressed, their meaning, accessible only through direct contact, being radiated with no change of their temporal and spatial situation. ...the nexus of living meanings" (TPP 174). The way in which the meaning of the painting is stored in the painting, only known by direct display, is the way in which the meaning of the trauma is stored in the body. The trauma forms a whole new, permanent filter—a whole new body.

The annihilation of form, then, both unveils the screens by which we engage with the world, and exposes the raw, immediate, materiality of our existence. The accident in painting damages to the point that it returns the materiality of life back—the thick, immediate flesh of the world. Likewise, trauma distorts, disfigures, and destroys the being far beyond recognition. Consequently, the self returns to the world more violently, and the world returns to the individual more violently— at its most living point. What happens, then, is that the accident is absorbed into the body, as the paint is absorbed into the painting, though the phenomenological experience is one of the impossibility of flight, not absorption.

The accident in the painting is the painter's secret. It is inside the display, visible to all, but known to one. It does not ruin the painting, but the accident in the painting destroys the meaning of the painting. That is, if we can only understand the painting because it is on display, if the material content changes, the display changes. And with that, the identity is new. However, unlike in art in which the extraordinary is made available by display, with trauma, the coercive, transformation of the body is not communicated through display. It is the sufferer's secret. This is where we see a distinction between those who know and those who do not. The display of trauma is not made available for all to know, yet, the individual who experiences trauma is in on the secret.

I had not noticed the whip of white paint before. I was always transfixed by the distorted figure and other features of the painting. It always makes me think about what it feels like to be hovering over a basin, miserable. It also always conjures disturbing memories—the distorted figure becomes *his* smashed up face. To have these experiences does not entail any reflection or interpretation; rather, immediately, and every time, the painting displays knowledge which I share: I know what it feels like to be in that miserable state. Similarly, to have a shared understanding of trauma, there is no reflection, interpretation, expression; there is no need to bring it into the conversation: I know what it feels like to *be* that miserable state.

7. *Pain: Tearing the Canvas*

The image of the figure hunched over the basin, sick, communicates a shared knowledge of the felt-experience of being sick. It is something like this form of embodied knowledge that is understood and shared by individuals who experience trauma. Illness and pain also affect one's

sense of autonomy, ownership, and temporality, although not to the extent that trauma does. The distinction can be made clear by looking to a model of physical pain and seeing how it is similar to and different than traumatic experience.

Elaine Scarry in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, provides a phenomenology of physical pain. In Scarry's account, one of the main points is that physical pain, for the one who experiences it, cannot be denied; there is a certainty in its reality. However, when the sufferer reports their pain, it cannot be confirmed, and thus, there is always some potential for doubt. This means that knowledge of physical pain is simultaneously certain and ambiguous. The uncertainty of knowledge lies in the fact that physical pain is an exceptional state, though we are all capable of experiencing it. That is to say, physical pain differs from any other bodily and psychic event, such as the capacity to hear, touch, desire, fear (BP 161). In the case of seeing, desiring, fear, hunger, etc., Scarry explains that there is a bonding of interior states with "companion objects in the outside world" (BP 162). For instance, "desire is desiring of *x*, fear is fear of *y*, hunger is hunger for *z*…" We do not have to invent a world that one is extended out into; "the object is an extension of, an expression of, the state…" (BP 162). On the other hand, pain does not have an object in the external world—it is not "of" or "for" anything (BP 161-162). This is what makes it resistant to language, as it is not referential (I discuss this further in the next chapter).

Scarry compares the state of physical pain to the imagination. In imagination, she says, there is "no activity, no "state," no experienceable condition of felt-occurrence separate from the objects: the only evidence that one is "imaging" is that imaginary objects appear in the mind" (BP 162). Likewise, there is no activity, no experienceable condition or felt-occurrence separate from the pain. The only evidence that one is in pain, is that pain 'appears' in the body. For this

reason, Scarry explains that, "pain "intends" nothing; it is wholly passive; it is "suffered" rather than willed or directed." She states that, "one can say that pain only becomes an intentional state once it is brought into relation with the objectifying power of the imagination: through that relation, pain will be transformed from wholly passive and helpless occurrence into a self-modifying and, when most successful, self-eliminating one" (BP 164). Thus, pain can be considered "an intentional state without an intentional object" (BP 164).

Yet, there is a shared knowledge in which one individual will *understand* what the sufferer is experiencing without the exact *embodied* knowledge of that pain. This is what makes something such as torture effective in the way that it is. In examining the structure of torture, Scarry lays out eight attributes of the felt-experience of pain. These elements belong 'equally' to the torturer and the tortured; both the torturer and the tortured have an equivalent, shared understanding of how pain *works*. The torturer knows that the tortured has a sheer aversion to pain, and this is what the torturer uses as the tool of torture. This sheer averseness is the most essential aspect of pain, underlying the eight other aspects Scarry describes.

The first aspect Scarry discusses is how in physical pain the sufferer feels as though they are being 'acted on.' The sufferer can have the experience that either the world is acting on the individual, or in the case of intense pain, the sufferer experiences their own body as the agent of their agony. This experience is seen in common idiomatic expressions, for instance, "My stomach is killing me!" The structure of pain, its very being, is a negation, in the sense that it is other to the individual and an unwanted intruder in the body. "Pain," Scarry states, "is a pure physical experience of negation, an immediate sensory rendering of "against," of something being against one, and of something one must be against. Even though it occurs within oneself, it is at once identified as "not oneself," "not me," as something so alien that it must right now be

gotten rid of" (BP 52). The individual instantaneously rejects the sensation, both bodily and subjectively.

In the case of feeling "not me," agency is displaced. Scarry explains that, "While pain is in part a profound sensory rendering of "against," it is also a rendering of the "something" that is against, a something at once internal and external" (BP 52). In the first case, the individual has a sense of internal agency, even when there is a weapon of some sort being used on their body. What the individual feels is not the knife, but the body the knife is entering into. This illustrates how pain is an exceptional state. For instance, in the case of touch, one feels the smoothness of the blade and the coolness of the metal. But as the blade enters the body, the sensations of smooth and cool are not registered; the individual does not feel the blade, but their body. In that case, it is one's own body which is hurting the individual. We could say the body is 'up and against itself.'

Whereas, Scarry contends, when there is no weapon present, "there often arises a vivid sense of external agency." This shows up in our everyday vocabulary for pain: "knifelike pains, stabbing, boring, searing pains" (BP 53). This is how one can make a distinction between internal and external agency: "*My stomach* is killing me!" as opposed to "*I* feel a stabbing pain in my stomach!" The first expression is an example of the felt sense of internal agency; and the latter, external agency, in which pain is an effect, not a cause or agent of the pain. The individual is 'up and against the pain.' This frayed agency makes it so that "one feels acted upon, annihilated, by inside and outside alike"—"suicide and murder converge" (BP 53).

In that case, physical pain not only dissolves the inside and outside boundary, it also collapses the distinction between the private and public. Scarry explains that pain "brings with it all the solitude of absolute privacy with none of its safety, all the self-exposure of the utterly

public with none of its possibility for camaraderie or shared experience" (BP 53). This conflation of the private and public is often artistically objectified. In particular, she describes the solitary figure in the typical canvas of Francis Bacon: "the solitary figure…is made emphatically alone by his position on a dais, by an arbitrary geometric box inserted over him, and by his naked presence against a uniform (and in its uniformity, almost absolute) orange-red background; yet while he is intensely separate from the viewer…he is simultaneously mercilessly exposed to us, not merely because he is undressed, unshielded by any material or clothing, but because his melting body is turned inside out, revealing the most inward and secret parts of him" (BP 53). The combination of isolation and exposure are not always visible to the outside, but, Scarry notes, it is "always present in the felt-experience of pain" (BP 53-54).

The fifth attribute is one that Scarry takes time to develop throughout the text: the relationship between physical pain and language. She maintains that pain has the ability to destroy language—"the power of verbal objectification, a major source of our self-extension, a vehicle through which the pain could be lifted out into the world and eliminated" (BP 54). First, physical pain monopolizes language and becomes the only subject. Any complaint, becomes the exclusive mode of speech. But also, pain intensifies and "deepens" such that "the coherence of complaint is displaced by the sounds anterior to learned language" (BP 54). Verbal expression is silenced by the human cry.[8] Complaints, such as, "my stomach is killing me," are taken over by grunts, moans, winces, and cries; or even hunching over, clutching the stomach. At this point, objective, coherent language is absent and not accessible to the individual, whose agency is displaced.

[8] Francis Bacon states that he wanted to make the best painting of the human cry. He obsessively repeated the image of the human cry in several distorted paintings of Velasquez's painting of Pope Innocent X.

In line with that, pain destroys the contents of consciousness. What this means, according to Scarry, is that, "Pain annihilates not only the objects of complex thought and emotion, but also the objects of the most elemental acts of perception" (BP 54). The sufferer is no longer thinking *about* or *of* the pain, or anything for that matter. Pain intervenes and owns the consciousness and body, in which it has no object and intends nothing. Any intentional activity taking place in consciousness is shut down with physical pain.

This ties in with the seventh attribute of pain, which is, that it is its totality. Scarry states that, "Pain begins by being "not oneself" and ends by having eliminated all that is "not itself" (BP 55). Pain takes over to the point that it annihilates anything other. She continues, "At first occurring only as an appalling but limited internal fact, it eventually occupies the entire body and spills out into the realm beyond the body, takes over all that is inside and outside, makes the two obscenely indistinguishable, and systematically destroys anything like language or world extension that is alien to itself and threatening to its claims. Terrifying for its narrowness, it nevertheless exhausts and displaces all else until it seems to become the single broad and omnipresent fact of existence" (BP 55). Pain is world destroying—the world (of others and objects), the world of the self, and the world of the body.

This leads to the eighth element, one that Scarry says is the "most frightening," which is pain's resistance to objectification. Scarry explains that, "Though indisputably real to the sufferer, it is, unless accompanied by visible body damage or disease label, unreal to other. This profound ontological split is a doubling of pain's annihilating power: the lack of acknowledgement and recognition (which if present could act as a form of self-extension) becomes a second form of negation and rejection, the social equivalent of the physical aversiveness" (BP 56). She continues, "The person's pain being subjectively real but

unobjectified and invisible to all others, it is now hugely objectified, everywhere visible, as incontestably present in the external as in the internal world, and yet it is simultaneously categorically denied" (BP 56).

Given that physical pain has no object in language, Scarry states that the existing vocabulary of pain amounts to limited use of adjectives. With that, she explains, "one passes through direct description very quickly and almost immediately encounters an 'as if' structure (BP 15). For example: it feels as if…; it is though…. What follows the ellipse are "two and only two metaphors," which are very problematic. This is because "The first specifies an external agent of the pain, a weapon that is pictured in producing the pain; and the second specifies bodily damage that is pictured as accompanying the pain" (BP 15). Scarry argues that pain is not the same as agency or damage; yet, because agency and damage are referential, we readily employ them in order to express the experience of physical pain itself (BP 15).

Take, for example, when someone communicates that they are in pain by stating something like, "It feels as if there is someone stabbing me in the stomach." The statement does convey the experience of the sufferer to someone else. In the case that there is an actual weapon or wound, the pain is immediately conveyed. For instance, if someone were actually being stabbed in the stomach, the *scene* would convey that the one stabbed in the stomach is in pain; the sufferer does not need to state that they are in pain, and how much, as the event already does so. On the other hand, if the sufferer has not been stabbed but is using the metaphor to communicate the intensity of the stomach pain, the person on the outside of the sufferer's body could still grasp the feeling of pain. This is accomplished through *imagining* the scene. The person on the outside of the sufferer's body does not need to have experienced being stabbed in the stomach either. An actual agent is present with the immediate proximity of the weapon to the

body; whereas in the case of "it feels as if…," there is an imagined agent, in which both can convey the felt-experience of the sufferer to someone outside the sufferer (BP 15). This, then, makes it so that the pain is 'externalized,' objectified, and made sharable even though it originated in an interior experience. The pain can be apprehended in the presence of the agent or image, but it cannot be apprehended without either.

Thus, to express pain, "one must *both* objectify its felt-characteristics *and* hold steadily visible the referent for those characteristics." That is, Scarry explains:

> The image of the weapon only enables us to see *the attributes* of pain if it is clear that the attributes we are seeing are the attributes *of pain* (and not of something else). The deeply problematic character of this language, its inherent instability, arises precisely because it permits a break in the identification of the referent and thus a misidentification of the thing to which the attributes belong. While the advantage of the sign is its proximity to the body, its disadvantage is the ease with which it can then be spatially separated from the body. (BP 17)

The process of imagining a visible referent to express the pain is also what produces the uncertainty of knowledge.

Despite this ambiguity, there is an attempt at objectification, for instance, the pain scale used by the medical field, and also, the act of simply pointing to the region of the body where the pain is felt. For example, the sufferer may be asked: "Where does it hurt?" "What does it feel like?" "On a scale of 1 to 10, how much does it hurt?" "Is it a sharp pain, dull pain, stabbing pain…?" The sufferer can point to the body and provide testimony: "It hurts here, in my

stomach below my sternum. It feels as if I am being repeatedly punched in the stomach. The pain is so intense it is radiating to my back and chest. It is a throttling, stabbing pain. I would say it is probably around an 8—not the worst pain I have ever felt, but pretty bad." And when the pain is so intense that it takes over the individual, it can be communicated by the human cry. Similar to Merleau-Ponty's example of anger, in observing the individual wincing and screaming, one does not need to recall feelings of pain, but can read pain in these gestures.

Consequently, we may observe the veteran wince during a flashback of the traumatic scene, and that gesture could be interpreted as physical pain. Van der Kolk says, "The emotions and physical sensations that were imprinted during the trauma are experienced not as memories but as disruptive physical reactions in the present" (BKS 204). Pain too is a disruptive physical reaction that takes place in the present. Thus, we could say trauma is experienced as if the body is in pain. But, the outsider does not read trauma when the veteran winces. This is because bodily gestures, such as wincing, are not associated with traumatic experience. Also, for the most part, trauma is not accompanied by visible bodily damage. Further, the individual may not display any affect whatsoever during the flashback or traumatic memory.

In regard to memory, there is a distinction between physical pain and trauma. If we are to recall moments that we have experienced some pain, those memories do not have the same disruptive physical effect. I can remember having knee surgery and that it was quite painful, but I do not *feel* the knee pain presently. Also, if I were to experience knee pain presently, I may be reminded of the surgery, but that memory is just that: a memory. The knee pain I experienced with surgery is in the past. There may be residual effects, such as the painful osteoarthritis I experience now, but this is a separate event. Likewise, my knee does not start hurting when I think of the snowboarding accident that caused it, or if I see snow, or a snowboard, or anything

that was particular to that event. With the lasting effects on the individual there may be subtle to dramatic changes in body schema and body image. But, pain, even chronic pain, is temporal—it has a beginning and an end, and when the pain fades, it becomes just a memory.

In both trauma and physical pain, agency is jeopardized. However, another distinction lies in the fact that agency in trauma is completely compromised, as opposed to fragmented in physical pain. The sensation of being 'acted on' or 'happening to' can only be experienced by a continuous, coherent self that can recognize oneself as a body and mind. This means that in the case of physical pain, subjectivity remains intact, though there is a displacing of agency. With trauma, there is an annihilation of the self, a subject who no longer recognizes herself. Beyond the wounded body, both the body and identity are wounded, and remain an open wound.

So while we can look to embodied knowledge of physical pain as an archetype for understanding the type of embodied knowledge of trauma and how we might say there is a shared knowledge, the difference lies in the embodied experience of agency and temporality. With that, such questions to gauge the felt-experience of trauma are incomprehensible. The individual cannot point to a place in the body; trauma is ungeometrical. There are no visible or imagined weapons, and further, the language used to express traumatic experience is even more remote to the body. For example, when asked "What does it feel like?" the individual may express the sensation of trauma in ways in which we cannot determine the sign and its proximity to the body, such that it enables us to see *the attributes* of trauma. The individual may say, "It feels as if my world is falling apart." The imagined reference to a crumbling world is so far removed from any object in relation to the body. Or, "It feels like a dark man is living inside me." Or, they may say, "*I do not feel like myself*." The imagined referent is absent, already

destroyed. Or, perhaps the response is, "I don't feel anything." Trauma is even more resistant to language.

8. *At the Most Living Moment*

On the classical model of embodiment, trauma compromises the embodied feeling of being alive. As Merleau-Ponty and Gallagher understand it, embodiment is to be tied to a certain world; to be intervolved in a definite environment; to identify oneself with certain projects; to be continuously committed to such projects; to have a continuous narrative history; and to have a sense of temporality, ownership, and agency. Trauma, with its destructive force, forms a sense of disassociation, temporal disorientation, and an uninhabitable body—the very site of identity and world. With trauma, one is wrested out of the world, and it is world-destroying. But, Malabou's account of destructive plasticity and the accident reveals how the experience of trauma simultaneously makes the very 'real' of the world known, in which the individual is buried in the world in the most violent, intimate way. The instance of trauma is encountering the intense, immediate, inevitable feeling of being alive "at its most living point." Thus, while we can say that it compromises the embodied feeling of being alive on account of subjectivity, it is not a matter of disembodiment. Rather, traumatic experience is the most violent embodied feeling of being alive, in abeyance of the inevitable chance.

There is a shared knowledge of this abject feeling of being alive, which makes it such that it can be communicated from person to person. Painting and other imagery is able to communicate this exceptional state by display. But, without a display, absent any image or referent, this abject state demands the invention of an image, created out of language, harbored in

writing. Thus, the relationship between language and the body—the symbolic and semiotic—must be established in order to know what is distinct of trauma-writing.

CHAPTER FOUR:

THE HORROR OF THE OTHER LIVING WITHIN

I read the words, "A smashed up face is still a…"—I squint, shudder, rattle my head, my heartbeat quickens, I desperately, impulsively look away from the page, engulfed in a flood of images, too quick to anticipate, engulfed in "a twisted braid of affects and thoughts;" a response which disrupts, disturbs, throws off being, creating a state of ambiguity, in-between, in abeyance.

What takes place such that the words "a smashed up face" cause such a visceral reaction, bodily rejection, and revolt of being? What takes place such that the words bring a whole new world of meaning and reveal a whole new being? The metamorphosis does not take place in the symbolic order; they are the same words I have encountered in the past and they carry a co-understanding of an image one might recall from memory of a scene in a film, for instance, or imaginatively create based on other visual memories. The meaning of the independent words remains the same by use and function. In my case, though, the words "a smashed up face" are no longer solely symbolic. The words do not make me think *of* a smashed up face; there is no decisive association of resemblance or reasoning by analogy. The words are not analogous to the traumatic memory, and yet they impart the same interruptive power as a flashback. The words are as violent as the sensory memory fragment. The locution "A smashed up face" is *his* smashed up face.

Language is jeopardized in traumatic experience because it is this experience which compromises the foundation of language: temporality, subjectivity, and identity. Yet, in this

moment, what is unassimilated, a missing encounter, resistant to being captured in language, *is* captured in language, not in the sense that it is able to communicate the traumatic experience through description, thus disseminating the embodied knowledge of trauma. The words are not just a signifying chain of signs. Rather, the locution captures the significance of the traumatic memory much like how Francis Bacon captures the immediate, accidental, most living quality of the flesh of the world within the painting. At this moment language acts back on itself and occupies the position of the real, the gap in the symbolic order. The cut becomes that which cuts.

1. *I Am Pain*

Given that the *tuché* is a break in the symbolic order, then establishing any kind of relationship with language, other than its absence, is problematic. Scarry makes this point in regard to physical pain, which shares similar features to the embodied knowledge of trauma. Scarry describes how physical pain resists language as it compromises temporality, agency, and ownership. But, she adds, language in turn "betrays" physical pain. She writes,

> [O]ne of two things is true of pain. Either it remains inarticulate or else the moment it first becomes articulate it silences all else: the moment language bodies forth the reality of pain, it makes all further statements and interpretations seem ludicrous and inappropriate, as hollow as the world content that disappears in the head of the person suffering. Beside the initial fact of pain, all further elaborations—that it violates this or that human principle, that it can be

> objectified in this or that way, that it is amplified here, that it is disguised there—all these seem trivializations, a missing of the point, a missing of the pain. But the result of this is that the moment it is lifted out of the ironclad privacy of the body into speech, it immediately falls back in. (BP 60)

When we speak of the pain of the tortured and how it is a violation of some moral principle, or attempt to objectify pain according to the pain scale, or use intensifiers and adjectives to create a more robust imagery, all of this is human measurement. Any further statement or interpretation does not have meaning in the sense of what the pain means to the individual, or rather, the significance that it has in the body. For this reason, all measures of pain seem trivial and inappropriate. There is no effectual translation over into actual embodied knowledge. To place any value or distinction on pain is to grant it a meaning other than itself, but also, to interpose a purpose, reason, or intention. Pain is extended out into the world through such measures[9] in that it is through supplementing it with purpose, reason, or intention we can make sense of its existence. Yet, it does not have any such external or empirical referent. And this is why it quickly falls back into the privacy of the body.

For instance, often when I experience the intense stomach pain from the stomach condition I have, the moment I attempt to make known my experience, I not only fail and betray the pain, but incite the conditions for modulated, seemingly contrived recognition. And what is worse, articulating my pain does nothing for it. Language offers no solace or relief. There are times when it is so intense that all my attention is drawn to it, and any such desire to express it drops out. In fact, all desire drops out, so to speak. There is no desire to express it or remain

[9] This excludes instrumental pain.

silent because all desire is condensed into relief. And when allowed enough reprieve to bring it into speech, I am compelled to articulate the inarticulate in order to explain my 'body language': clutching my chest at the sternum, rocking back and forth, breathing short, heavy breaths, and, blurting out strained groans. Yet, such bodily expressions remain ambiguous as this behavior can be mimicked—the truth as to whether I am in pain is not established in language or within a language of the body. This suggests that there is no necessary connection between my convulsing body and pain. Even more so, there is no necessary relationship between my convulsing body and language. One individual can be convulsing due to extreme stomach pain and another silent, though experiencing extreme pain due to reconstructive surgery. Pain is equally significant to each individual, yet pain's meaning to the individual is not given. With this in mind, there is no measurement of pain.

In any attempt to bring pain into speech, I interpret the experience according to a given encoded grammar. The interpretation is a process of a series of translations from embodied knowledge to "verbal images." According to Merleau-Ponty, these "verbal images" are "traces left in us by words spoken or heard," (TPP 202-203). I must conjure what image seems to best reflect the pain as there is no visible referent, no object to be experienced anywhere outside the body. In selecting the imagery to connote the experience, all via metaphor ("it feels as though…"), I impose a secondary judgement. First, I judge the severity or 'type' of pain, and then select the expression or verbal-image which best communicates this judgement from a set of trace words. And for there to be co-understanding, there must be a co-imagination. Communicating the pain effectively requires an ability to translate the experience into imagery such that another individual can 'imagine' what it is *like*. The reciprocity happens at the level of

the imagination. And this is why we have the affected response, "Oh, I can only imagine what it feels like…" or "I can't even imagine what it must feel like…"

As language is a sensible presentation of thought, it is a way in which the self is extended out into the world. According to Merleau-Ponty, "[Language] presents or rather it is the subject's taking up of a position in the world of his meanings. The term 'world' here is not a manner of speaking: it means that the 'mental' or cultural life borrows its structures from natural life and that the thinking subject must have its basis in the subject incarnate" (TPP 225). Language is a psychic link between the individual and the cultural world of meaning. It is through language that we draw the other into our world and enter into the world of the other. Merleau-Ponty explains that it is "a taking up of others' thought through speech, a reflection in others, an ability to think *according to others* which enriches our own thoughts" (TPP 208). Additionally, he explains that, "In order that I may understand the words of another person, it is clear that his vocabulary and syntax must be 'already known' to me. But that does not mean that words do their work by arousing in me 'representations' associated with them, and which in aggregate eventually reproduce in me the original 'representation' of the speaker" (TPP 213). Though while someone can claim to "imagine what it feels like," which implies a mutual understanding, it is not established through an articulation of the *same* image. Second, to claim that one "can't even imagine what it must feel like," suggests a necessary connection in the sense that there "must" be a way in which it is felt—a purpose, reason, or intention—which the other individual cannot comprehend. The vocabulary and syntax must already be known such that an individual can either identify or not identify with the other's imaginative description of their pain.

Beyond the denotative meaning, syntax, etc., language is incarnate and requires a body. That is to say, meaning is communicated through the body, specifically phonetic gestures. Merleau-Ponty explains that, "…a contraction of the throat, a sibilant emission of air between the tongue and teeth, a certain way of bringing the body into play suddenly allows itself to be invested with a *figurative significance* which is conveyed outside us" (TPP 225). Merleau-Ponty details:

> The phonetic 'gesture' brings about, both for the speaking subject and for his hearers, a certain structural co-ordination of experience, a certain modulation of existence, exactly as a pattern of my bodily behavior endows the objects around me with a certain significance both for me and for others. The meaning of the gesture is not contained in it like some physical or physiological phenomenon. The meaning of the word is not contained in the word as a sound. But the human body is defined in terms of its property of appropriating, in an indefinite series of discontinuous acts, significant cores which transcend and transfigure its natural powers. (TPP 225)

Symbolic meaning is not communicated in gesture or word alone—the body modulates the coming together of the two, in which the significance transcends the word and gesture into an imaginary world, but one that is then superimposed on the world and is meaning-giving. We communicate via reciprocity; just as we read bodily gestures, we 'read' gesticular language. Though while intense pain is at best expressed through metaphor, the metaphor stated within gesticular language allows for some reciprocity.

However, as noted above, as physical pain is brought forth into language, it equally retreats back into the body. This is because, Scarry explains, "Nothing sustains its image in the world; nothing alerts us to the place it has vacated. From the inarticulate it half emerges into speech and then quickly recedes once more. Invisible in part because of its resistance to language, it is also invisible because its own powerfulness ensures its isolation, ensures that it will not be seen in the context of other events, that it will fall back from its new arrival in language and remain devastating. Its absolute claim for acknowledgement contributes to its being ultimately unacknowledged" (BP 60-61). Acknowledgement requires that there be co-imagination on the part of the sufferer and the witness. And in communicating the image, all measurement of pain is speculative and figurative. Unable to communicate the pain, it is the individual's private embodied-knowledge, which the sufferer knows without the need for any image or metaphor—the body knows, the body keeps the score.

Scarry stresses that pain is not just resistant to language, it destroys language. What is meant by this is that pain consumes the individual's reality to the point that they are stripped of all world content and pain is the only possible reality. Language is silenced by the guttural noises and bodily compulsions. But, beyond this, language is destroyed in terms of its very structure of being. Pain forces language to betray itself; pain consumes the body and the signification of the words. The statement, "my stomach hurts" cannot possibly communicate such intense pain. What would serve as the possessive adjective of "my," implying a subject, object, and Other, collapses into meaninglessness. "My," as the possessive adjective, refers to the individual possessing an object. To have a sense that it is one's possession, there must be a distinction between the object and the self, as well as the self and another—*my* stomach, not yours, or hers. This utterance implies a subject, object (body), the Other, and pain serving as

both object and Other. Yet, as in the case of severely intense pain, the 'world' closes in and the whole totality of existence and reality is *pain*. There is no *I* separate from the pain; there is no *I* separate from the stomach; there is no stomach separate from the pain. So, if the individual can even muster the words, a more effective expression would be "I *am* pain." But "pain," here, is empty in the sense that there is not even an imaginable referent to tie it to the external world. Tying it to the "I"—the subject—is even more obscure as there is no image for "I" other than the self as body. But this occurs within the imaginary realm, not yet symbolic. That is, "I" as the Ideal Ego is the barred subject, the child desiring the unification with the image in the mirror, the *object petite a*.

As discussed in the first chapter, the sign is given as the signifier over the signified. So in this case, it would be the signifier "I" over the concept—the Ideal Ego, a singular, coherent identity. This is represented as the barred subject in the Lacanian algorithm. Keeping with this, the algorithm for "I am pain" would be symbolized as

$$\frac{"I"}{\$} \rightarrow \frac{"pain"}{a}$$

in the sense that in the sign "pain," the signifier is over what cannot be signified. As discussed before, the acoustic image "pain" is solely acoustic, lacking any proximal image. In signification, a sign is dependent on its context, but with pain, that context is buried deep within the body. Pain is not at the level of the symbolic, but rather the semiotic—where there are no laws which govern the signs. Pain returns the individual to the pre-linguistic stage and this is how it "destroys" language. Scarry explains that, "Intense pain is also language-destroying: as the content of one's world disintegrates, so the content of one's language disintegrates; as the self disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source and its subject" (BP 35). This implies that physical pain not only lacks an object in the external world,

but also a subject—it is not *of* or *for*; it is not *from* or *to*. Physical pain lies outside the symbolic order where speaking subjects are constituted in a realm of shared cultural meaning. Thus, it is not so much "*I* am pain" but rather, *pain exists*. As the totalizing, engulfing reality of existence, pain is both flesh and world.

2. *The Primordial "No!"*

> There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns, aside; sickened, it rejects. A certainty protects it from the shameful—a certainty of which it is proud holds on to it. But simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned. Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself. (PH 1)

The figure hunched over the basin, at the moment of being sick—vomit, repugnance, gagging, filth, defilement, tears, bile, sobs, sickly acrid smell of sweat, decay, shit, terror, a hatred that smiles, a pile of dolls at Auschwitz, black blood, a smashed up face—that physical revolt of being, that primordial "no"—the abject. The body's first *signifiance*: divide, reject, repeat; a significance that not only lacks symbolic signification, but resists it. This is what Francis Bacon

desires to capture within his paintings by chance: malformed bodies, hollowed out sockets, the accident. That which disturbs and fascinates, repulses and compels, calls out and silences—this is the marshland of trauma.

Trauma goes beyond a resistance to language—it destroys the very mimicry within the constitution of the symbolic. In the case of physical pain, the resistance to language does not intensify the felt-experience of the actual pain; that is, the physical pain does not increase or decrease when brought into speech or expressed in bodily gestures. For example, when I experience the intense stomach pain I frequently have, whether I alert someone else to it or remain silent, the pain persists at the same intensity. At the point in which pain obliterates language in the sufferer, as Scarry describes, it is not the obliteration of language which *hurts*. In this sense, we could say, pain hurts language, but language does not hurt the sufferer. On the other hand, with trauma, the ineffability of the felt-experience is part of, contributes to, and intensifies the 'pain.' This feature of trauma places it within the realm of the abject, in which this impossibility of communication is symptomatic of the impossible subject.

Kristeva writes, "If it be true that the abject simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject, one can understand that it is experienced at the peak of its strength when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it *is* none other than abject" (PH 5). As in the case of intense physical pain in which the self "disintegrates" into nothing other than pain, in trauma, the self is "pulverized" into nothing other than the abject—its very identity *is* abject. Without a foundation. Bareback. Sockless.

Malabou's description of flight identity is suggestive of the abjection of self: it is not just a transference in agency, but rather, with identity and ontology. The new being wants to ab-ject

flight-identity, cast it off, flee, leap, take flight. But, the impossibility of fleeing, this *revolt of being*, is its very *being*. The abject beseeches the individual, calls on the individual to respond and confront the abjection of self. Kristeva writes, "The abjection of self would be the culminating form of that experience of the subject to which it is revealed that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural *loss* that laid the foundations of its own being. There is nothing like the abjection of self to show that all abjection is in fact recognition of the *want* on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded" (PH 5). Something *shows itself* when there is damage, a cut, and that something is the inaugural loss that lays the foundation of being—the loss of the mother's body, that which provides the possibility of knowledge and meaning.

This loss is magnified with the interjection of language, the Law of the Father. This is not just because the individual fails to identify with any 'outside,' but also any 'inside.' The abject, Kristeva explains, is "essentially different from "uncanniness," more violent, too, abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory" (PH 5). Kristeva conceptualizes this by imagining "a child who has swallowed up his parents too soon, who frightens himself on that account, "all by himself," and, to save himself, rejects and throws up everything that is given to him" (PH 5). Initially, the mother and child are one body. Then at birth, there is a separation, a tearing away from the mother; yet, the two bodies are still connected through touch, nutrition, and protection. It is the mother's body which gives life to the child, the mother's body sustains the child's body.

In Kristeva's metaphor, she explains that "what [the child] has swallowed up instead of maternal love is an emptiness, or rather a maternal hatred without a word for the words of the father; that is what he tries to cleanse himself of, tirelessly" (PH 6). With the introduction of the father, the child recognizes an Other which is not the mother-child. This primordial "not" is the

soil for any desire—there must be an absence or lack for there to be a desire-for. This otherness, then, subverts the child such that the child recognizes that the other body is not its own body; it is not the body sustaining the child's life. Thus, the father's presence introduces the very possibility for the symbolic: separation.

Before the Law of the Father, the child's known world is that of touch. The child's world is and is known through the overlapping, but distinct, dimensions of touch:

> A touching of the sleek and of the rough, a touching of the things—a passive sentiment of the body and of its space—and finally a veritable touching of the touch, …where the "touching subject" passes over to the rank of the touched, descends into the things, such that the touch is formed in the midst of the world and as it were in the things. (VI 134)

The bodily knowing of touch is the mother's and child's canvas. Before an image is formed on the canvas, the paint touches the canvas; the blue touches the red. All knowing and meaning are given and received in the touch, absent of any symbol.

The separation—the initial absence of touch—is revealed with the introduction of the symbolic. And this is what gives the abject its horrifying power. Kristeva explains, "The symbolic light that a third party, eventually the father, can contribute helps the future subject … in pursuing a reluctant struggle against what, having been the mother, will turn into an abject" (PH 13). The mother's receptivity, though, drives back the separation, rejects the separation of the mother and child, this separation being the formation of the new being. In the giving and receiving of the mother's body, a new being is formed and nourished. This new being rejects

itself as separated from the mother's body—its own, separate body. The separation is the miserable condition of helplessness, hopelessness, having been thrown out, cast off the mother's body. This is how we can understand Kristeva's metaphoric child who swallows up emptiness and maternal hatred.

Kristeva notes, "In this struggle, which fashions the human being, the *mimesis*, by means of which he becomes homologous to another in order to become himself, is in short logically and chronologically secondary. Even before being *like*, "I" am not but do *separate*, *reject*, *ab-ject*" (PH 13). The mimesis of the child's body to the mother's is secondary to the abject. Before the "I" is formed, either in "I am not" (the father's body) or "I am like" (the mother's body), there is already a motility of separation and rejection. This is what precedes the misrecognition in the mirror stage: the child already rejects its body as separate from the mother, which is required for the child to have any desire to be the coherent object in the mirror. The abject is logically prior to any formation of subject and object. "The abject," Kristeva writes, "is not an ob-ject facing me, which I name or imagine" (PH 1). Kristeva states that "abjection, and even more so abjection of self, is its only signified" (PH 5). There is no kin, no mimicry, no representation, no sign, not even a signifier other than the abject. The embodied knowledge of the abject, thus, is constituted in the pre-linguistic realm—a barren frontier devoid of signification. This pre-linguistic realm is that of the semiotic.

The semiotic (*le sémiotique*) is the non-expressive totality of the meaning of drive, instinct, emotion, and, sensation. It is the rhythmic motility of the world, the pulsating flesh of the world—the musical, poetic, prosodic, and rhythmic topographies—a range of signification devoid of structure and sign, which is not encoded into grammar. It is the gesticular expression Merleau-Ponty speaks of, without which, the symbolic order of language would communicate

nothing other than symbol. That is to say, as Merleau-Ponty explains "language is equally uncommunicative of anything other than itself, that its meaning is inseparable from it. We need, then, to seek the first attempts at language in the emotional gesticulation whereby man superimposes on the given world the world according to man" (TPP 219). Thus, the semiotic underpins all significance, both body and sign.

3. *The Primordial Space*

According to Kristeva, energies move through the body which are always already involved in the semiotic process, that is, they move through the body *as* rhythms, phonatory rhythms, gestural, acoustic, tactile, motor, visual devices. This is the signifying system of the semiotic. Drives in the body displace and condense energies, and are 'articulated' through the semiotic, rhythm, kinetic, phonemic stage—marks of the stases of the drives. The *chora*, is "a modality of signifiance[10] in which the linguistic sign is not yet articulated as the absence of an object and as the distinction between the real and symbolic" (RPL 36). The *chora* lacks an object, but is the medium of the connection between the body, objects, and subject, all of which are not yet constituted as such. Kristeva derives this language of the *chora* from Plato's *Timaeus*, in which Plato associates the *chora* with the mother's body in the sense that he sees it as material and maternal. The mother's body mediates the symbolic law which structures social relations, the other, and the subject as it is the primary "space" of the *chora*. But, it is "unnamable, improbable, hybrid, anterior to naming, to the One, to the father, and consequently, maternally

[10] Signifiance or meaning: Kristeva uses this term to refer to operations that are both fluid and archaic. "It refers to the work performed in language (through the heterogeneous articulation of semiotic and symbolic dispositions) that enables a text to signify what representative and communicative speech does not say" (DL, translator's note, 18).

connoted to such an extent that it merits "not even the rank of syllable"" (DL 133, citing the *Timeus*).

Kristeva advises, though, that we must be careful to make a distinction between the provisional, uncertain articulation of the *chora* and the descriptive phenomenological, spatial, and temporal intuition. Namely, there is a distinction between the theoretical or 'symbolic' representation of a *chora*, which we would see as 'evidence' of the *chora*, and the *semiotic chora* which precedes any 'evidence.' As Kristeva notes, "the *chora* precedes and underlies figuration and thus specularization, and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm" (RPL 36). The *chora* "shows up" for us through the constraints on the body by the family and social structures, and thus, is ordered through such socio-historical and natural constraints (RPL 36). These social constraints are always already symbolic, however, as Kristeva notes, not according to law but through an objective *ordering* (RPL 36).

The theoretical is a mode of this constraint which involves symbolic structures of verisimilitude, spatiality, and temporality. That is, we make a connection to the semiotic marked out by nonverbal rhythms, etc. and yet speak of it through linguistic forms of temporality and spatiality, for instance. To put it abruptly, we 'see' the marks of kinetic, chromatic, phonic energies at the semiotic stage, which are ordered through a social, temporal space. This is what, for us, provides 'evidence' of the *chora*. Kristeva writes, "Though deprived of unity, identity, or deity, the *chora* is nevertheless subject to a regulating process, which is different from that of symbolic law but nevertheless effectuates discontinuities by temporarily articulating them and then starting over, again and again" (RPL 26). However, to reiterate, this 'evidence' is in the organization of structures of temporality and spatiality, in which case, the totality of the drives as motility, rhythms, etc., precede this 'evidence.' The totality of drives and their stases *as* motility

are a mode of signifiance, in the sense that the semiotic *chora* '*articulates*;' yet, the semiotic is not reducible to such structures, and moreover, it is not organized according to law (the symbolic). The distinction here is that signifiance, and further still language, is always structured in that it is a function of its context and grounded in a given set of elements. However, what is not presupposed are given laws which govern the semiotic. That is, the semiotic is able to articulate and communicate without the grammatical ordering of the Law of the Father.

Even so, the semiotic *chora* is necessary for the acquisition of language. As a knowing subject, the semiotic process is constitutive of the subject insofar as it functions within the signifying process (RPL 38). That is to say, the semiotic processes are always already in operation within the socialized body of the subject. The symbolic signifiance is created under explicit socio-historical relations simultaneously with the signifying process of the semiotic, which constitutes the subject. The subject, not being reducible to the *chora* or symbolic alone, is constituted both within the semiotic and symbolic realms. The drives connect and orient the body to the mother. "The mother's body," Kristeva explains, "is therefore what mediates the symbolic law organizing social relations and becomes the ordering principle of the semiotic *chora*, which is on the path of destruction, aggressively, and death" (RPL 37). Kristeva is referring to the death drive, which for Freud is the most instinctual drive. She explains that the drives "are always already ambiguous, simultaneously assimilating and destructive" (RPL 37). There are what we could call dueling "positive" and "negative" motilities which ultimately lead to a "destructive wave." She writes, "In this way, the term "drive" denotes waves of attack against stases, which are themselves constituted by the repetition of these charges; together, charges and stases lead to no identity (not even that of the "body proper") that could be seen as a

result of their functioning" (RPL 37). The *chora*, then, is where the subject is both created and annihilated: "the semiotic *chora* is no more than the place where the subject is both generated and negated, the place where his unity succumbs before the process of charges and stases that produce him. We shall call this process of charges and stases a *negativity* to distinguish it from negation, which is the act of a judging subject" (RPL 37). (This echoes the distinction between negation and negativity that Malabou makes in regard to the accident; see Chapter 3, pg. #).

The drives and their stases as motility are *ruptures* in the body in the sense that the body is never static, but moves as semiotic rhythms, phonatory rhythms, gestural, acoustic, tactile, motor, visual devices, etc. (BH 53; BS 62). If we think of how sound disrupts silence, so long as sound persists, the silence is continuously ruptured. Kristeva notes that the semiotized body *is constant rupture*, not a lack, but a continuum "that connect[s] zones of the fragmented body to each other and also to "external" "objects" and "subjects," which are not yet constituted as such" (RPL 38). We think of the unconscious as a *gap* in the symbolic order; we can also think of the *chora* as a "permanent scission" (RPL 37).

The unconscious emerges as there is a gap in the symbolic, that is, an absence points to a presence. But, with the *chora*, it is not the absence which points to 'something,' it is a presence: *something shows itself in the cut*—"a nonassimilable alien, a monster, a tumor, a cancer that the listening devices of the unconscious do not hear" (PH 11). With that, Kristeva notes, "We are no longer within the sphere of the unconscious but at the limit of primal repression that, nevertheless, has discovered an intrinsically and already signifying brand, symptom, and sign: repugnance, disgust, abjection. There is an effervescence of object and sign—not of desire but of intolerable significance; they tumble over into non-sense or the impossible real, but they appear even so in spite of "myself" (which is not) as abject" (PH 11). Object and sign do not

emerge because there is a desire for an object, an Other; rather, before the subject can unconsciously thrust the desire for an object deep into the void of the unconscious, there is the ability "to divide, reject, repeat" (PH 12). Primal repression, though, is not like repression in the sense of rejection, as noted by Malabou: "the only possibility of being that such and such an object has when it is judged harmful or bad by the ego is that of being expelled from being. Not reduced to non-being, but well and truly thrown out of being. Excluded from the register of beings. In this sense the repressed or denied is ontological spit. A rejection from presence" (OA 81). There is a presence which the body wants to expel, spit out, an aspect of being itself, as it is there within its presence—it is part of the being. In the case of repression, for there to be something to reject and spit out, there must be a formed ego. However, the stage of primary repression is before any formation of the ego, of the being which will decisively, though unconsciously, reject and spit. It is not the ego which is repulsed and negates some aspect of its being; it is the body, which in rejecting itself, is a negativity.

4. *The Revolt of Being*

The repulsion "appears" to the body in primordial repression as somatic symptom. The symptom is the language of the body, a structure within the body which is "outside the paths of desire" (PH 12). As discussed in Chapter One, Lacan states that the "symptom *is* a metaphor…just as desire *is* metonymy" (E 439). The symptom is "a metaphor in which flesh or function is taken as a signifying chain" (E 431). In metaphor there is an immediate association of the signifier (acoustic image) as signified (concept). This signification is "inaccessible to the conscious subject;" that is to say, the symptom signifies without any mental operation required.

It is a substitution through relations of similarity. Metonym, Lacan points out, is an exchange of name, a relation of material to object, or container to contents. It is when the symptom correlates to a geometrical part of the body that allows one to assign it a cause, and thus, establish a signifier (acoustic image) to signified (concept) relation. A mental operation is required to establish the relation and meaning of the metonym. This is how we can understand that the abject emerges as symptom (metaphor) and not as desire (metonym). With the abject, though, there is no distinction between the container and contents or the material to object; the material is that of the flesh, the content and container are flesh. In the case of the abject, the symptom does not correspond to any geometrical part of the body. Kristeva explains, "In the symptom, the abject permeates me. I become abject" (PH 11).

This is not to say that the abject permeates the body in the sense that the body absorbs or interiorizes the abject. Rather, as Malabou notes of the accident, it "is in no way interiorized by the victim, it remains foreign to the fate of the psyche and is not integrated into the history of the individual. The individual does not reject the trauma outside his- of herself and has not desire in relation to it, wants neither to eat nor to vomit it" (OA 81). The body is "always already haunted by the Other,"—the symptom—a foreigner in the body alerting us to an alien presence. It is the revolt of being that alerts us of its presence.

This might seem to be at tension when we speak of how the body keeps the score in the case of trauma. On the one hand, the body keeps the score and the abject permeates the body to the point that the being becomes the abject. On the other hand, the accident is in no way "interiorized" in the body, as Malabou puts it, as the body revolts against the abject. To clarify, first, we can say that what Kristeva means when she says it permeates the body is that there is no distinct 'location' of the abject; there is no topology or geography. The abject permeates being

to the point that the subject becomes the *revolt of being*—the body is repulsed by its own existence, gagging, hurling, straining to vomit out its own repugnance, its own ability to "divide, reject, *repeat*," left dry-heaving, incessantly. And second, the body records the presence of an alien Other. To revolt there must be a suppressor, an aggressor. Outside of any desire, the body records the presence of the aggressor. There is no Stockholm syndrome in the case of the abject and its relation to the body, assimilating the captor's desire so that it is the same as the hostage's. There is no break in the abuse which is then identified as the captor's kindness. The traumatic bonding of the aggressor and the hostage never takes place in the sense that there is no reward, only punishment. The body is both aggressor and hostage at the same time; there is no liberator to allow the individual to flee trauma.

In addition to somatic symptom, the abject is manifested in the body through sublimation. According to Kristeva, sublimation "is nothing else than the possibility of naming the pre-nominal, the pre-objectal, which are in fact only trans-nominal, a trans-objectal" (PH 11). The sublime is trans-objectal in the sense that it transcends objectification and naming. It is not pre-objectal in the sense of coming to be before the subject forms the distinction between self and object at the stage of primal repression. Rather, the sublime can be thought of as pre-objectal as it is an immediate experience of the flesh. Within the sublime moment, Kristeva describes, "there is a cluster of meaning, of colors, of words, of caresses, there are light touches, scents, sighs, cadences that arise, shroud me, carry me away, and sweep me beyond the things that I see, or think" (PH 12). All of these touches of the world bring the subject back to where all that is known is communicated through touch—the pre-objectal, pre-subjectal, pre-nominal body of the mother. Kristeva writes, "The "sublime" object dissolves in the raptures of a bottomless memory. It is such a memory, which, from stopping point to stopping point, remembrance to

remembrance, love to love, transfers that object to the refulgent point of dazzlement in which I stray in order to be. As soon as I perceive it, as soon as I name it, the sublime triggers—it has always already triggered—a spree of perceptions and words that expands memory boundlessly. I then forget the point of departure and find myself removed to a secondary universe, set off from the one where "I" am—delight and loss." (PH 12). In this sense we consider the sublime experience as transcendent of the self and world, but in the sense that the self is immersed in the world such that the distinction is dissolved and there is a loss of self.

Physical pain edges on the sublime in a similar way: the subject's world is consumed by the pain, all sense of the agential self and other are obliterated, the world and objects dissolve, language is annihilated, and the self is removed to another 'universe.' Both cases are exceptional states. With pain, the individual is carried off, though not in delight. And yet, with pain there is always a supplemental, most subtle, momentary, exhilarating, sublime delight—at the moment of its release. The self returns, the world is present again, and the body sighs a breath in relief, no longer in pain, no longer other-worldly.

Abjection is far more malicious, though. "Abjection," Kristeva writes, "is immoral, sinister scheming and shady: a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you. …" (PH 4). There is delight in being swept up in the sublime, delight in being released of pain, but, the abject is beyond the pleasure principle. The sublime and release of pain are what we could call negative pleasures; that is, pleasure is obtained with loss or absence. This loss or absence can be imagined and then sought after due to the temporal structure of the events. One is aware of the experience pre-, during, and post- encounter with the sublime. Likewise, an individual knows of the relief of pain as they are aware of what it feels like to not be in pain; pain manifests

because there is such a feeling of relief. The temporal structure, then, allows for the loss of absence to show up as an object of desire, despite it being a lack.

With the abject, though, the body does not revolt in seeking pleasure—the abject has no object. With trauma, the revolt of being has no purpose or use similar to what we can say of physical pain, but, unlike with pain, there is no release. It is not as though the body sighs in relief with the secession of the immediate traumatic memory fragments. The body perpetually desires the exhilarating, sublime delight of relief—the *object a*. For this reason, Kristeva states:

> Jouissance alone causes the abject to exist as such. One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it. Violently and painfully. A passion, as in jouissance where the object of desire, known as *object a*, bursts with the shattered mirror where the ego gives up its image in order to contemplate itself in the Other, there is nothing either objective or objectal to the abject. It is simply a frontier, a repulsive gift that the Other, having become *alter ego*, drops so that "I" does not disappear in it but finds, in that sublime alienation, a forfeited existence. Hence a jouissance in which the subject is swallowed up but in which the Other, in return, keeps the subject from foundering by making it repugnant. One thus understands why so many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims—if not its submissive and willing ones. (PH 9)

Rather than release, there is jouissance: the incessant attempt to transgress what is barring the delightful release. This malicious jouissance is what makes trauma traumatic in the sense that the individual experiences the desire, but it is a desire for a non-object, for an impossible

'object,' one that cannot even be imagined—there is no "it could be otherwise." And, given the compulsive repetition of trauma, any sense of reprieve, by withdrawal of memory fragments or forgetting, is always, incessantly interrupted. That is, specific to the traumatic experience is that of repetition. Traumatic memory is traumatic because it repeats all the sensations that the being revolts against—it brings that "No!" back to "Yes!" and "Once more!"

This is echoed by Zarathustra when, settling back into his cave, returning from teaching the eternal return, he asks, "*What* does joy not want? It is thirstier, more cordial, hungrier, more terrible, more secret than all woe; it wants *itself*, it bites into *itself*, the ring's[11] will strives in it; it wants love, it wants hatred, it is overrich, gives, throws away, begs that one might take it, thanks the taker, it would like to be hated; so rich is joy that it thirsts for woe, for hell, for hatred, for disgrace, for the cripple, for *world*—this world, oh, you know it!" (TSZ 435). This is how we are to understand Kristeva's claim that jouissance is what causes the abject to exist as abject: joy desires itself so much that it desires what causes it to be joy: woe, hell, hatred, disgrace, the cripple (accident), the abject.

Thus, the abject has this element of repetition as Kristeva explains that, "the abject from which he does not cease separating is for him, in short, a *land of oblivion* that is constantly remembered. Once upon blotted-out time, the abject must have been a magnetized pole of covetousness. But the ashes of oblivion now serve as a screen and reflect aversion, repugnance. The clean and proper (in the sense of incorporated and incorporable) becomes filthy, the sought-after turns into the banished, fascination into shame. Then, forgotten time crops up and condenses into a flash of lightning an operation that, if it were thought out, would involve bringing together two opposite terms but, on account of that flash, is discharged like thunder.

[11] The eternal ring of the eternal return.

The time of abjection is double: a time of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment when revelation bursts forth" (PH 8-9). Memory becomes filthy, banished in the conscious, condensed into bodily memory fragments that can strike by chance. It is both a matter of forgetfulness but also there is always a storm brewing, just below the surface of the skin, an ominous thunder sounding—it is always present—a heavy, dark promise of memory.

5. *Living-Death*

"What death unmasks was never more than a mask; to discover the grin of the skeleton, one need only lift off something that was neither beauty nor truth, but only a plaster and tinsel face." – Foucault, *The History of Madness*

It is chance which heightens the abject: that we should stumble upon it by chance, by accident. Kristeva describes the significance of chance in regard to the abject with the image of the corpse, the upmost of abjection:

> The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall), that which has irremediably come a cropper, a cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance. A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death—a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this

> defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. (PH 3)

The corpse *shows* death not through a cognitive process of recognition, rather, it is an immediate, semiotic, 'felt' knowing. There is nothing like the smell of decay, even before we see the image of the corpse, we recognize death is present and when present, the altogether lack of rhythmic movements of breath and heartbeat signify death. If we anticipate the corpse, we go through a process of meaning-giving—they died because of some scientifically explained phenomenon or through a god's will—which puts the immediate experience at somewhat of a distance. A filter is placed over the image, though the smell pushes through. That immediate encounter with the corpse is beyond uncanny. Kristeva writes, "In that compelling, raw, insolent thing in the morgue's full sunlight, in that thing that no longer matches and therefore no longer signifies anything, I behold the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders: fainting away. The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the upmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object" (PH 4). Next to the corpse, in the raw sunlit room, one experiences that embodied feeling of being alive at the most living point: not this, not me.

Kristeva writes, "The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to *I*. If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which, as a matter of fact, makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, what is *abject*, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses" (PH 2). Desire for the meaning of the object is co-existentially a desire to know what is in opposition to, or other than, the object: the *I*. The abject,

though, is contrary because the revolt of being draws one into a world of obscurity and nonmeaning. Kristeva states that, "abjection is above all ambiguity" (PH 9). This ambiguity is registered in the body. "On the one hand," Kristeva explains, "objects and signifiers, denied to the extent that they are identified with life, assume the value of nonmeaning: language and life have no meaning" (BS 51-52). Objects and signifiers are what represent life, existence, but, in the abjection of self, being revolts against its own being. Language has no meaning in the sense that it cannot possibly capture the abject. Moreover, the abject is the world of disorientation and ambiguity. The significance of objects and language moves to a zero point—nothing in the abject experience reflects language and life—it is a living death.

In trauma the subject is like a corpse: death-in-life. What has provided meaning and a sense of self decays like the organs in the body, still within the confines of the outer structure, encased by skin and skeleton. Though there are no apparent cuts or lesions, the flesh is wounded in the sense that it now bears that unbearable cut, "the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" of the abject (PH 4). "I live a living death," Kristeva states, "my flesh is wounded, bleeding, cadaverized, my rhythm slowed down or interrupted, time has been erased or bloated, absorbed into sorrow… Absent from other people's meaning, alien, accidental…" (BS 4).

6. *The Coatlicue State*

"How can I be without border?" (BS 4)

Just as the corpse disturbs the living, Kristeva states that the abject is "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (PH 4). This world of revolt, of

dissolving borders, is the *Coatlicue state*. Coatlicue is both the creator and destroyer of life within Aztec mythology. She is a flesh eating goddess, the devouring mother feeding on corpses. Gloria Anzaldúa, in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza,* describes the *Coatlicue State* as the distinct experience of living on the borderlands—that of the *mestiza*, the mixed identity. Anzaldúa specifically speaks of her own mixed Chicana identity, which she names the *mestiza,* and describes how living between the various cultures is disorienting. She uses the imagery of Coatlicue, the serpent goddess, to illustrate this particular lived-experience. The composite of animals and body parts are brought together such that, "The image of the goddess Coatlicue represents the "life-in-death" and the "death-in-life." Anzaldúa states that Coatlicue represents "duality in life, a synthesis of duality, and a third perspective—something more than mere duality or a synthesis of duality" (BF 68-69). Twin rattlesnakes face off in place of Coatlicue's severed head. She wears a necklace of human hands, hearts, and a skull. Her chest is deflated from giving birth. Her feet are eagle talons, able to dig graves. The hearts on her necklace perhaps represent the taking of lives through the practice of sacrifice. The skulls of the necklace and on the belt suggest life and death as one process.

Anzaldúa associates the *Coatlicue state* with images of a gap and cracks in the earth, cracks called *Nepantla*, which is the Nahuatl word for "the space between two bodies of water, the space between two worlds" (BF 237). Anzaldúa explains that in a constant state of mental nepantilism, an Aztec word meaning "torn between ways," this experience of being manifests as paralysis: "Petrified, she can't respond, her fate caught between *los intersticios*, the spaces between the different worlds she inhabits" (BF 43). From her personal experience as a *mestiza*, Anzaldúa explains, "My resistance, my refusal to know some truth about myself brings on that paralysis, depression—brings on the *Coatlicue state*. At first I feel exposed and opened to the

depth of my dissatisfaction. Then I feel myself closing, hiding, holding myself together rather than allowing myself to fall apart" (BF 70). The refusal to know some truth about the self, a revolt to being, brings on paralysis in the sense that the individual embodies a sense in which all is construct: world, meaning, objects, the self. If everything is a construct, then that means nothing is absolute, except death. Any sense of identity or orientation in the familiar is an illusion—all truth is illusion. This is the realm of the abject: the chasm between the body of the mother and the child, the permanent scission of semiotic and symbolic. The image of the primordial earth goddess symbolizes the world of ambiguity. The separation from the mother's body creates an embodied ambiguity as the child is thrown into a world of disorientation. Before, all was known through touch, but now the child is "torn between ways," within the "space between two worlds."

Likewise, the depressed are torn between ways. Kristeva notes that the depressed individual is aware of how her mood and depression are constitutive of the 'self', yet the 'self' is resistant to *speaking* about their experience (BS 46). This does not suggest that the abject has no signifying process, just that, in the case of the depressed for instance, meaning appears to be arbitrary, alien, secondary, and a "will to mastery" (BS 43). That is to say, "The depressed speak of nothing, they have nothing to speak of…they are without objects" (BS 51). Depression is not a depression *for* or depression *of*. It is objectless just like physical pain and abjection. There is no reason, no purpose. Being depressed does not resolve anything. Further, it cannot be measured. Any elaborations "seem trivializations, a missing of the point, a missing of the pain."

Despite this, though, we are still driven to make meaning of it. But, with abjection, the affect and primary semiotic processes come into conflict with the linguistic order and symbolic constructs. Kristeva notes that for depressed persons, they do not forget how to use signs in

speaking; even though signs do have signification, they are experienced as empty (BS 52). And "without a sign," Kristeva states, the abject "beseeches a discharge, a conclusion, a crying out (PH 2). Kristeva writes, "…lacking the filter of language, I cannot inscribe my violence in "no," nor any other sign. I can expel it only by means of gestures, spasms, or shouts" (BS 15).

We speak not for the sake of ourselves, not for the sake of truth, meaning, or a will for mastery—none of this is present in the abject. If we do speak, we speak for the sake of the Other. Desire for knowledge is on the part of the Other, not the individual who experiences abject trauma. Kristeva explains, "It is not the white expanse or slack boredom of repression, not the translations and transformations of desire that wrench bodies, nights, and discourse; rather it is a brutish suffering that "I" puts up with, sublime and devastated, for "I" deposits it to the father's account: I endure it, for I imagine that such is the desire of the other. A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in a opaque and forgotten life now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A "something" that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of nonexistence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me" (PH 2). The fashioning of the "I" is meaningless, trivial, alien. This accounts for the phenomenological experience of a disassociation of the self and numbness towards the world, as described by Malabou.

Why speak when anything I utter does not communicate the experience, and in fact, betrays its immediate, raw, most living moment? Why speak when in speaking I beckon the abject, held in abeyance, suspended in every word? Why speak when objects and signifiers, meant to identify with life, do not identify with what I know?—that unbearable knowledge. Why add the violence of language to the violence of the abject? The "I" annihilates the

individual in the sense that their identity is subsumed under the sign. Yet, the sign of "I" stands in for impossibility: a living-corpse, an impossible being, flight identity, being revolting against being. And then to put content to that "I," such as "it feels as though I am…," disturbs identity, creates more ambiguity. Anzaldúa states that when facing what is behind Coatlicue's eyes, "getting too close to the mouth of the abyss. She is teetering on the edge, trying to balance while she makes up her mind whether to jump in or to find a sager way down. That's why she makes herself sick—to postpone having to jump blindfolded into the abyss of her own being and there in the depths confront her face, the face underneath the mask" (BF 96). Yet, Anzaldúa writes, "When I reach bottom, something forces me to push up, walk toward the mirror, and confront the face in the mirror. But I dig in my heels and resist. I don't want to see what's behind Coatlicue's eyes, her hollow sockets" (BF 70).

Kristeva explains that, "on account of splitting, an intense, extravagant value is attributed…to the unsignifiable" (BS 51-52). Anzaldúa recognizes this as well:

> Fear develops the proximity sense aspect of *la facultad*.[12] But there is a deeper sensing that is another aspect of this faculty. It is anything that breaks into one's everyday mode of perception, that causes a break in one's defenses and resistance, anything that takes one from one's habitual grounding, causes the depths to open up, causes a shift in perception. This shift in perception deepens the way we see concrete objects and people' the senses become so acute and piercing that we can see through things, view events in depth, a piercing that reaches the underworld

[12] Though "la facultad" translates as "the faculty" in Spanish, it is apparent from the way that Anzaldúa describes and utilizes the term, that she intends a different, specific meaning. Part of this significance is captured in how she uses the definite article "the," rather than the indefinite "a."

> (the realm of the soul). As we plunge vertically, the break, with its accompanying new seeing, makes us pay attention to the soul and we are thus carried into awareness—an experiencing of soul (Self). (BF 61)

Attention to the phenomenon of fragmented selves, ambiguity, and fear allow us to "have access to other worlds through the cracks" (BF 237). It is not a cognitive recognition of the ambiguity of meaning and identity. Any cognitive recognition of a world of nonmeaning is executed through linguistic structure and the symbolic which is negated in the very process.

The *Coatlique state,* on the other hand, is an embodied knowledge of ambiguity and nonmeaning. Nonmeaning, in this sense, does not suggest that there is *no* meaning or nothing, a complete absence of signifiance. With this embodied knowledge, meaning can be experienced as insignificant, superficial, arbitrary, and empty. But, the *Coatlique state* also affords the 'self' recognition that meaning is multitudinous, abundant, boundless, and crosses borders. Anzaldúa explains that, "Every increment of consciousness, every step forward is a *travesía*, a crossing. I am an alien in new territory. And again, and again. But if I escape conscious awareness, escape "knowing," I won't be moving. Knowledge makes me more aware, it makes me more conscious" (BF 70).

This bodily awareness of ambiguity is a distinct embodied knowledge specific to trauma. Anzaldúa explains that, "There is a prejudice and a fear of the dark, chthonic (underworld), material such as depression, illness, death and the violations that can bring on this break. Confronting anything that tears the fabric of our everyday mode of consciousness and that thrusts us into a less literal and more psychic sense of reality increases awareness and *la facultad*" (BF 61). Anzaldúa describes *la facultad* as "the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of

deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant "sensing," a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning. It is an acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feelings, that is, behind which feelings reside/hide. The one possessing this sensitivity is excruciatingly alive to the world" (BF 60).

That abject feeling of being alive: one never feels as alive as when they feel living-death. It is the "unbearable weight of being;"[13] the weightiness of meaninglessness feels as though the individual is dragging a corpse around, making it go through the movements of life, trying to animate the corpse, the paralyzed body. As noted before, the abject reaches its peak strength when it is confronted by language (interfaced with language, violated by language). There is a drive for meaning formation but at the same time a resistance to this because in order to create meaning, one has to confront what is behind Coatlicue's hollow sockets. Anzaldúa notes that ""Knowing" is painful because after "it" happens I can't stay in the same place and be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before" (BF 70). It is the unbearable knowledge of trauma and the abject.

To attempt meaning formation, we do so with the language of the father—the symbolic—at the expense of the language of the mother—the semiotic. The experience is pressed to be put into comprehensible language in which "The sign represses the *chora* and its eternal return" (PH 14). This is problematic in that the individual is "situated at the precise point at which meaning is produced in nonmeaning" (E 423). To produce meaning outside of the body, in language, one does so as a betrayal to this embodied knowledge of ambiguity.

[13] To modify Milan Kundera's expression.

CHAPTER FIVE:

THE MOVING BODY OF METAPHOR

The intertwining of the symbolic order and semiotic processes is reflected in Nietzsche's description of the dueling drives of the *will to truth* and *will to illusion*. According to Nietzsche, a pervasive multitude of drives, desires, and instincts *wills* 'things' into existence. Nietzsche contends that this will reaches its highest echelon in humans (TL 54). He grounds the will in suffering. The will *to* manifests because, as Nietzsche explains, "something was *lacking*, that man surrounded by a fearful *void* … He did not know how to justify, to account for, to affirm himself; he *suffered* from the problem of his meaning. He also suffered otherwise, he was in the main a sickly animal: but his problem was *not* suffering itself, but that there was no answer to the crying question, "*why* do I suffer?" (GM 598). The question of suffering and its apparent answer of meaninglessness drives us to make meaning out of our condition. In turn, Nietzsche states, "man was *saved* thereby, he possessed a meaning, he was henceforth no longer like a leaf in the wind, a plaything of nonsense—the "sense-less"—he could not *will* something; no matter at first to what end, why, with what he willed: *the will itself was saved*" (GM 598). This is not to say that the will to truth and the will to illusion are cognitive, agential processes, though. Rather, the will permeates consciousness and the unconscious, and we are continuously compelled by it.

This will is an attempt to master over life—the uncertain, strange, frightful, and ambiguous—in which there are distinct styles. The will to truth is the vertical driving force behind scientific knowledge as it is a will to have "inextinguishable, ever-present, unforgettable,

"fixed,"" concepts as a way to order the world (GM 497). It is the condition for "foresight, prudence, regularity," with concepts and abstractions which satisfy a longing for certainty (TL 60). Such 'truth' allows for one to predict, explain, and control the world. As opposed to preserving codified constructs for understanding the world, the will to illusion is an artistic drive which creates and destroys, throws things into confusion, and disregards the vertical drive for certainty. It is the drive for the creation of art, poetry, fiction, music, and dance.

Although Nietzsche makes a distinction here, the two drives are not so easily isolated. This is because the material of Truth[14] is what is illusory—this illusion being that there is such a stopping point, in which one reaches and knows the Truth. The will to truth is not truth itself, but rather, "*that* which shall count as 'truth'" (TL 54). It is a continuous drive, and being that it is a kinetic process, there is no stopping point. Also, the truth drive does not create or invent 'truths' so much as it establishes that there is truth, a truth which coincides with a given reality. Yet, what is already assumed is that there is such a thing as a unified, identifiable, intelligible Truth. It is this will which invents such a distinction as opposed to the Truth being out there, to be discovered, grasped, tested, and documented. Nietzsche notes that the will to truth is not the creator of religions, metaphysics, and convictions, all of which assert a 'truth of the world,' but that which preserves such truths (GS 181). The 'creator' of such systems is the artistic drive, a fundamental human drive of metaphor formation, which erects and forms religions, metaphysics, convictions, etc., all of which are illusory and fictitious, according to Nietzsche.

Truth is a product of the dueling drives; produced by one, preserved by the other. If we are going to assert a truth, then there is also an implication that there can be a falsity, a lie. "The

[14] I capitalize "truth" to represent scientific knowledge, a singular, uncontestable system of knowledge-law, for instance, laws of nature. This is to distinguish it from the element of truth that appears within embodied knowledge: a certain but ambiguous truth of the body, something like physical pain, in which there can be multiple 'truths.'

liar is a person who uses the valid designations, the words, in order to make something which is unreal appear to be real" (TL 54). (This is why the will to illusion is sometimes referred to as the will to deception). Truth and lie, then, are nothing other than language. Nietzsche describes 'truth' as "A moveable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions; they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer as coins" (TL 56). The will to truth and language are intimately connected. To establish what will count as truth, "a uniformly valid and binding designation is invented for things, and this legislation of language likewise establishes the first laws of truth" (TL 54). What comes to be known as truth is nothing other than metaphors and metonyms, hardened and fixed as concepts, preserved for generations, thus seeming absolute and necessary.

1. *Mapping Metaphor*

Metaphor formation is a process of moving from one metaphorical sphere to another. This process produces a stratification between truth and knowledge. Nietzsche makes such a distinction as he describes the process: "The 'thing in itself' (which is precisely what the pure truth, apart from any of its consequences, would be) is likewise something quite incomprehensible to the creator of language and something not in the least worth striving for. This creator only designates the relations of things to men, and for expressing these relations he

lays hold of the boldest metaphors. To begin with, a nerve stimulus is transferred into an image: first metaphor. The image, in turn, is imitated in a sound: second metaphor. And each time there is a complete overleaping of one sphere, right into the middle of an entirely new and different one" (TL 55). Note that this is not an overlapping, but an overleaping.

We can understand this process by referring back to the Lacanian 'real.' Nietzsche grants that the 'thing in itself' is incomprehensible within language which is suggestive of how the *tuché* is a disruption in the symbolic order, a gap. In the immediate, raw encounter with the 'real,' there is no process of reflection by which one can determine the consequences. Such consequences are only observed retroactively. Any recognition of the *tuché* is metaphorical as the very notion and language of "tuché" stands in for what is no longer available as an immediate experience. Thus, the sphere of the *tuché* and the symbolic order never overlap.

This is also indicative of how Lacan asserts that the symptom is metaphor and desire is metonymy (E 439). As noted in Chapter 1, Lacan states, "Metaphor's two-stage mechanism is the very mechanism by which symptoms, in the analytic sense, are determined. Between the enigmatic signifier of sexual trauma and the term it comes to replace in a current signifying chain, a spark flies that fixes a symptom—a metaphor in which flesh or function is taken as a signifying element—the signification, that is inaccessible to the conscious subject, by which the symptom may be dissolved" (E 431). In metaphor formation, "an effect of signification is produced that is creative or poetic, in other words, which is the advent of the signification in question" (E 431). The first metaphor is generated through transference of an immediate nerve stimulus, the symptom—spark of flesh—to an image, which is perceived in place of the nerve stimulus. A second metaphor is created when the image is then imitated in sound, such as

through phonatory rhythms, gestural, and acoustic semiotic processes, music and speech. The word is thus an image coinciding with sound, or as Merleau-Ponty puts it, an 'acoustic-image.'

It is here that we see Lacan's signification of the sign, in which he emphasizes primacy of the signifier over the signified. In language, we encounter the word as acoustic metaphor, then associate sound with image, and then image with object, though not in such a linear, cognitive, calculative process. Accordingly, Nietzsche states, "Every word instantly becomes a concept precisely insofar as it is not supposed to serve as a reminder of the unique and entirely individual original experience to which it owes its origin; but rather, a word becomes a concept insofar as it simultaneously has to fit countless more or less similar cases – which means, purely and simply, cases which are never equal and thus altogether unequal" (TL 55). Nietzsche uses the example of a leaf to make this point:

> Just as it is certain that one leaf is never totally the same as another, so it is certain that the concept 'leaf' is formed by arbitrarily discarding these individual differences and by forgetting the distinguishing aspects. This awakens the idea that, in addition to the leaves, there exists in nature the 'leaf'; the original model according to which all the leaves were perhaps woven, sketched, measured, colored, curled, and painted – but by incompetent hands, so that no specimen has turned out to be a correct, trustworthy, and faithful likeness of the original model. (TL 55-56)

Yet, what is lost in metaphorical formation is the original nerve stimulus; that is why it is unavailable to the conscious subject and escapes our grasp.

In the genesis of a concept, there is a transition from one sphere to another, each able to serve as a metaphor for the other. The image and the word are not equivalent; rather, "each time there is a complete overleaping of one sphere, right into the middle of an entirely new and different one" (TL 55). To say that any 'thing' exists in terms of "it is X," is to privilege one metaphorical sphere, to make a "dogmatic assertion," and to arbitrarily ascribe a sign. Nietzsche notes that, "the further inference from the nerve stimulus to a cause outside of us is already the result of a false and unjustifiable application of the principle of sufficient reason. If truth alone had been the deciding factor in the genesis of language, and if the standpoint of certainty had been decisive for designations, then how could we still dare to stay 'the stone is hard,' as if 'hard' were something otherwise familiar to us, and not merely a totally subjective stimulation!" (TL 55).

What we take to be truth, in any discourse, is a scaffolding of condensed concepts generated through a genealogy of metaphorical activity. Nietzsche states that, "The concept – which is as bony, foursquare, and transposable as a die – is nevertheless merely the *residue of metaphor*, and that the illusion which is involved in the artistic transference of a nerve stimulus into images is, if not the mother, then the grandmother of every single concept" (TL 57). When describing concepts, Nietzsche uses imagery of cooler, lifeless structures, whereby their meaning is only significant if tied to a given context. For example, if we take the notion of a transposable die in the quotation above, it is a cube with numerated sides, in which the significance and value depends on how it is played in the game (always with an element of chance). The concept is transposable in this way, which suggests, as Merleau-Ponty claims, "language is equally uncommunicative of anything other than itself [;] … its meaning is inseparable from it. We need, then, to seek the first attempts at language in the emotional gesticulation whereby man

superimposes on the given world the world according to man" (TPP 219). Yet, Nietzsche says, "We believe that we know something about the things themselves when we speak of trees, colors, snow, and flowers; and yet we possess nothing but metaphors for things – metaphors which correspond in no way to the original entities" (TL 55). This is why, despite how it may seem from the quotation above, Nietzsche asserts that there is no 'thing in itself,'—any such 'thing' is merely metaphor, constructed through language, in which an individual "forgets that the original perceptual metaphors are metaphors and takes them to be the things themselves" (TL 57). "Thus," Nietzsche contends, "the genesis of language does not proceed logically in any case, and all the material within and with which the man of truth, the scientist, and the philosopher later work and build, if not derived from never-never land, is at least not derived from the essence of things" (TL 55). We can question: "Is language the adequate expression of all realities?" (TL 54).

2. *Sober Realists and Smock-less Artists*

With this in mind, the presentation of 'truth' as a metaphorical process in which language is arbitrary undermines any attempt of asserting binding, scientific knowledge. Some metaphors are better fit to express experience. Accordingly, Nietzsche introduces two figures whose strength is judged by how they relate to the conditions of life: the rational man and the man of intuition. Both desire to rule over life. The rational man does so by regularity, fixation, and preservation of concepts and Truth; whereas the man of intuition does so through the creative activity of myth and art.

In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche denotes these two figures as "realists" and "creators." He calls out to the realists:

> Ye sober beings, who feel yourselves armed against passion and fantasy and would gladly make a pride and an ornament out of your emptiness, ye call yourselves realists, and give to understand that the world is actually constituted as it appears to you; before you along reality stands unveiled, and ye yourselves would perhaps be the best part of it—oh, ye dear images of Sais! But are not ye also in your unveiled condition still extremely passionate and dusky beings compared with the fish, and still all too like an enamored artist? And what is "reality" to an enamored artist? Ye still carry about with you the valuations of things which had their origin in the passions and infatuations of earlier centuries! There is still a secret and ineffaceable drunkenness embodied in your sobriety! (GS 57).

The realists are ascetic, serious beings; they pride themselves on being devoid of passion and fantasy (GS 57). Yet, despite their sobriety, realists still are "passionate…dusky" and are still "like an enamored artist." The language of passion and drunkenness, with the allusion to artistry, is to suggest that the realists embody both the will to truth, in their pursuits of knowing the world as it is actually constituted, and the artistic drive.

The man of intuition is also invested in this game of signifying reality, but, as Nietzsche suggests, remains closer to the 'site' of metaphorical formation. Nietzsche uses examples of painting and music to illustrate this point: "A painter without hands who wished to express in

song the picture before his mind would, by means of this substitution of spheres, still reveal more about the essence of things than does the empirical world" (TL 58). The illusion created through sound sparks a nerve stimulus—it returns the individual back to the first and second metaphors. Yet, there is always still an uncertain, manifold diversity and abundance which is indecipherable and cannot be contained in any metaphorical sphere. Nietzsche uses the example of Chladni's sound figures to suggest this, in which sound vibrations are represented in nodal patterns in sand. The metaphor shows that while the figure would seem to show the formal structure of sound, it cannot express what sound *is*—it is not the same as encountering sound. For one, it is perceived with a different part of the body. Chlandni's sound figures are viewed with the eyes rather than heard with the ears. The visual metaphor of the sound figures cannot possibly express the direct, immediate experience of sound.

However, the meaning of the music or the painting cannot be separated from the medium. We are reminded of how the significance of the painting is only experienced in the direct, immediate encounter—one must be present before it, and any interpretation is a multiplication of the artist. Merleau-Ponty echoes that, "The musical meaning of a sonata is inseparable from the sounds which are its vehicle: before we have heard it no analysis enables us to anticipate it; once the performance is over, we shall, in our intellectual analyses of the music, be unable to do anything but carry ourselves back to the moment of experiencing it." With music, "…the notes are not only the 'signs' of the sonata, but it is there through them, it enters into them. …The meaning swallows up the signs…" (TPP 212). For music to make any sense, to have any signification, to be supplemental to just noise, the relation of the notes, the signs, must be maintained.

However, Nietzsche notes that neither sphere causes the other or is necessary for the other's existence. He explains: "For between two absolutely different spheres, as between subject and object, there is no causality, no correctness, and no expression; there is, at most, an *aesthetic* relation: I mean, a suggestive transference, stammering translation into a complete foreign tongue – for which there is required, in any case, a freely inventive intermediate sphere and mediating force" (TL 58). Likewise, Lacan states that the, "metaphor's creative spark does not spring forth from the juxtaposition of two images, that is, of two equally actualized signifiers. It flashes between two signifiers, one of which has replaced the other by taking the other's place in the signifying chain, the occulted signifier remaining present by virtue of its (metonymic) connection to the rest of the chain" (E 422). The musical meaning of the sonata, though inseparable from the notes (signs), is an aesthetic relation—an anthropomorphism. The sounds created through the condensation of breath, material, and rhythm are 'articulated' through the semiotic, rhythmic, kinetic, phonemic stage.

Aesthetic expression, whether in music, painting, or writing, expresses existence, "a remainder of the unique and entirely individual original experience to which it owes its origin" (TL 55). Merleau-Ponty explains that, "Aesthetic expression confers on what it expresses an existence in itself, installs it in nature as a thing perceived and accessible to all, or conversely plucks the signs themselves—the person of the actor, or the colors and canvas of the painter—from their empirical existence and bears them off into another world" (TPP 212). An example is Francis Bacon's hollowed out sockets—the shapes and colors suggest the presence of a human body. But to flash between the image in the painting and that of the human form, is an aesthetic translation, in which we confer that meaning onto the canvas. But also, Bacon contends that the painting, "has a life completely of its own. It lives on its own and therefore transfers the essence

of the image more poignantly. So that the artist may be able to open up or rather, should I say, unlock the valves of feeling and therefore return the onlooker to life more violently;" return the onlooker to the original experience (FB 17).

We can also understand this point in reference to Malabou's description of the accident and Kristeva's description of the abject. In both cases, the subject and object binary is produced through language—a separate, distant process, removed from the immediate event. At the moment of the accident, the subject is not present in the sense that the accident obliterates a sense of ownership, agency, linear temporality, and historical narrative. The subject is transformed to the point that it is unrecognizable, by going through a metamorphosis of nature. With that, there is "the deserting of subjectivity, the distancing of the individual who becomes a stranger to herself, who no longer recognizes anyone, who no longer recognizes herself, who no longer remembers her self. These types of being impose a new form on their old form, without mediation or transition or glue or accountability, today verses yesterday, in a state of emergency, without foundation, bareback, sockless" (OA 6). Malabou argues, it is an, "Identity abandoned, disassociated again, identity that does not reflect itself, does not live its own transformation, does not subjectivize its change" (OA 11). Any mediation, transition, or glue is a secondary aesthetic relation.

Metaphorical expressions such as 'flight identity' and 'ontological refugee' are translations of this deserting of subjectivity, a way to paint the experience. Malabou creatively invents such expressions in order to capture, as best as possible, the experience of the accident—life at its most living moment, that "mysterious X" of the nerve stimulus. The imagery of a bareback, sockless individual is a metaphorical "stammering translation" of the symptom. At the moment of the accident, the individual is exposed, bare, lacking any cloak or covering protecting

one from the elements, from the immediate environment, devoid of any human, linguistic constructs that provide a foundation of meaning. The concept of 'flight identity' is metonymic condensation of the repetition compulsion, the desire for flight, and the impossibility of flight. To make sense of the metonym, then, a mental operation is always required in which the connection between the signifier (S) and the second signifier (S^1) is re-established. During this process, there is a lot of chance for reinterpretation, the same as with communicating the meaning of the painting.

3. *Necessity: An Aesthetic Relation*

We may think that this transference, the relation of nerve stimulus to image, is necessary, but we are accustomed to think this only because we think our concepts are necessary. Nietzsche remarks,

> We are not acquainted with it in itself, but only with its effects, which means in its relation to other laws of nature – which, in turn, are known to us only as sums of relations. … All that we actually know about these laws of nature is what we ourselves bring to them – time and space, and therefore relationships of succession and number. But everything marvelous about the laws of nature, everything that quite astonishes us therein and seems to demand our explanation, everything that might lead us to trust idealism: all this is complete and solely contained within the mathematical strictness and inviolability of our representations of time and space. (TL 58-59)

To have the result of the concept, there is a necessary transference from one metaphoric sphere to the next. Because *this* process is necessary for the production of the concept, the result, it appears as necessarily true. It is this mathematical formulation of cause and effect, or rather effect and cause in this case, which produces for *us* a necessary connection. Nietzsche states though that, "If we are forced to comprehend all things only under these forms, then it ceases to be amazing that in all things we actually comprehend nothing but these forms. For they must all bear within themselves the laws of number, and it is precisely number which is the most astonishing in things. All that conformity to law, which impresses us so much in the movement of the stars and in chemical processes, coincides at bottom with those properties which we bring to things. Thus it is we who impress ourselves in its way" (TL 59).

Further, "In conjunction with this it of course follows that the artistic process of metaphor formation with which every sensation begins in us already presupposes these forms and thus occurs within them. The only way in which the possibility of subsequently constructing a new conceptual edifice from metaphors themselves can be explained is by the firm persistence of these original forms. That is to say, this conceptual edifice is an imitation of temporal, spatial, and numerical relationships in the domain of metaphor" (TL 59). What appears as absolutely given in 'nature' is nothing other than our aesthetic relation to 'nature,' as it is also a human construct.

What is familiar passes for necessary and is transposed everywhere through these generalizations. Therefore, what counts as knowledge is what we are familiar with (GS 91). Yet, "the hardening and congealing of a metaphor guarantees absolutely nothing concerning its necessity and exclusive justification" (TL 58). Nietzsche claims that, "There is *only* a

perspective seeing, *only* a perspective "knowing"; and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our "concept" of this thing, our "objectivity," be" (GM 555). This suggests that a concept is never complete as there are always more eyes coming into existence. Our concepts change with the shifting eye. Nietzsche, likewise, tells us to be on guard against the "dangerous old conceptual fiction… [because] these always demand that we should think of an eye that is completely unthinkable, an eye turned in no particular direction, in which the active and interpreting forces, through which along seeing becomes seeing *something*, are supposed to be lacking; these always demand of the eye an absurdity and a nonsense" (GM 555). To privilege a particular concept, is to privilege the ascetic ideal. "In a certain sense," Nietzsche says, "the whole of asceticism belongs here: a few ideas are to be rendered inextinguishable, ever-present, unforgettable, "fixed," with the aim of hypnotizing the entire nervous and intellectual system with these "fixed ideas"—and ascetic procedures and modes of life are means of freeing these ideas from the competition of all other ideas, so as to make them "unforgettable"" (GM 497).

4. *Reality: Inherent Forgetting*

Metaphorical activity at the level of the concept is the most dangerous because it arranges the world without realizing the ongoing metaphorical activity. With hardened, condensed concepts readily at our grasp, we no longer tolerate 'sudden impressions.' "Our eye," Nietzsche explains, "finds it more comfortable to respond to a given stimulus by reproducing once more an image that it has produced many times before, instead of registering what is different and new in an impression" (BGE 295). We forget this aspect of life: that it is full, abundant, and diversified; it

cannot be captured in any one particular metaphorical sphere, and certainly not in a concept. It is only by forgetting that we can possess any 'truth' in which only the result is preserved and the process is hidden. Nietzsche explains that, "Only by forgetting this primitive world of metaphor can one live with any repose, security, and consistency: only by means of the petrification and coagulation of a mass of images which originally streamed from the primal faculty of human imagination like a fiery liquid, only in the invincible faith that *this* sun, *this* window, *this* table is a truth in itself, in short, only by forgetting that he himself is an *artistically creating* subject, does man live with any repose, security and consistency (TL 57). We forget the creative power of the fundamental human drive for metaphoric formation, the anthropocentric center of any 'truths,' 'reality', measurements, and evaluations—we forget that we are artists.

Metaphorical activity, in that it is a constantly flowing drive which breeds the conditions for concept formation, is always already forgotten in the word, the concept, the drive for truth. That is, the drive for truth maintains a forgetfulness of the process and genesis of the metaphor. "Forgetting," then, "is no mere *vis inertiae* as the superficial imagine; it is rather an active and in the strictest sense positive faculty of repression, that is responsible for the fact that what we experience and absorb enters our consciousness as little while we are digesting it…" (GM 493). Nietzsche adds,

> But purposes and utilities are only *signs* that a will to power has become master of something less powerful and imposed upon it the character of a function; and the entire history of a "thing," an organ, a custom can in this way be a continuous sign-chain of ever new interpretations and adaptations whose causes do not even have to be related to one another but, on the contrary, in some cases succeed and

> alternate with one another in a purely chance fashion. The "evolution" of a thing, a custom, an organ is thus by no means its independent *progressus* toward a goal, even less a logical *progressus* by the shortest route and with the smallest expenditure of force—but a succession of more or less profound, more or less mutually processes of subduing, plus the resistances they encounter, the attempts at transformation for the purpose of defense and reaction, and the results of successful contractions. The form is fluid, but the "meaning" is even more so." (GM 514)

Specifically in the case of the concept 'reality,' a concept which preserves a certain type of the ascetic ideal, maintains a forgetfulness of the process and genesis of the metaphor. 'Reality' is a metaphysical fiction and thus it is a supplement which is *added* to life. Nietzsche explains that, "The 'apparent' world is the only one: the 'real' world has only been *lyingly added*" (TI 46). But, what is ironical here is that reality prohibits fiction: to assert a *real* world is to deny any fictitious, creative process, in which it is merely produced. Nietzsche asks though, "Why couldn't the world *that concerns us*—be a fiction? (BGE 235). When Nietzsche asks the realists, "And what is "reality" to an enamored artist?" the answer is that we forget: "Remove the phantasm and the whole human *element* therefrom, ye sober ones! Yes, if ye could do *that*! If ye could forget your origin, your past, your preparatory schooling—the whole history as man and beast!" (GS 57).

In this case, the active force of forgetting is a stripping away, mummification, preservation, and abstraction. Forgetting is a process of formation and deformation—transition of the affirmation of life in its diversified plurality, to the will to nothingness and the ascetic

ideal. Nietzsche states that, "this longing to get away from all appearance, change, becoming, death, wishing, from longing itself—all this means—let us dare to grasp it—*a will to nothingness*, an aversion to life, a rebellion against the most fundamental presuppositions of life; but it is and remains a *will*! . . . And, to repeat in conclusion what I said at the beginning: man would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will" (GM 598-599). The drive for meaning continues, even if what we make of life, the meaning we provide, is ultimately an offense to life—life-negating. The will to truth, then, can be understood as something like the death drive, "the task of which is to lead organic life back into the inanimate state" (Freud, MP 380).

Along with this, we also negate the abundance of life and the fact that we cannot get at the mysterious x. It is un-measurable and un-weighable, and yet we arbitrarily set up evaluations and measurements because we value valuations. Likewise, we see ourselves as creatures that measure, a "valuating animal as such," "Setting prices, determining values, contriving equivalences, exchanging" (GM 506). As Nietzsche points out,

> The reputation, the name and appearance, the importance, the usual measure and weight of things—each being in origin most frequently an error and arbitrariness thrown over things like a garment, and quite alien to the essence and even to their exteriors—have gradually, by the belief therein and its continuous growth from generation to generation, grown as it were on-and-into things and become their very body; the appearance at the very beginning becomes almost always the essence in the end, and *operates* as the essence! (GS 58)

He explains further, “In every feeling, in every sense-impression, there is a portion of this old love: and similarly also some kind of fantasy, prejudice, irrationality, ignorance, fear, and what else has become mingled and woven into it. There is that mountain! There is that cloud! What is “real” in them?” (GS 57). The human element of metaphor formation, the will to truth and illusion: “It is we, who think and feel, that actually and unceasingly *make* something which did not before exist: the whole eternally increasing world of valuations, colors, weights, perspectives, gradations, affirmations and negations. This composition of ours is continually learnt, practices, and translated into flesh and actuality, and even into the commonplace, by the so-called practical men (our actors, as we have said)” (GS 57).

Thus, “An *illusion*, however, is his constant accompaniment all along: he thinks he is placed as a *spectator* and *auditor* before the great pantomime and concert of life; he calls his nature a *contemplative nature*, and thereby overlooks the fact that he himself is also a real creator, and continuous poet of life” (GS 148). “But,” as Nietzsche points out, “it is precisely this knowledge that we lack, and when we get hold of it for a moment we have forgotten it the next…” (GS 301; 148). Here he suggests that forgetting is just as immediate as metaphorical activity.

5. *Free-Spirit: Self-Forgetting*

In a schemata, which is the dissolution of images into concepts, a pyramidal order is constructed, a creation of a new world of laws, knowledge, veracity, etc. This new world replaces the vivid first impressions. It becomes more solid, universal, more known, and ‘more human,’ thus, it

becomes regulative and imperative. For humans it is language that we identify as human activity, not belonging to any other creature. Or better put, we are familiar with language, it is what we do and use, and so if something has a language, it has human understanding. On the other hand, the non-human, alien—the original, raw, disconcerting, uncertain ambiguity—does not have language. Thus, with a lack of language, the artistic force is what drives us to create such metaphors.

A construction though, according to Nietzsche, is the subordination of the multiplicity of drives to the strongest drive which then serves as the provisional center of perspective. In this sense, not everyone participates in the construction of worlds; rather the 'herd' preserves the world of hardened concepts because they are familiar, as the concept of the metaphor is always in operation. They do so through naming and "more depends on what they are called than what they are" (GS 58). The concept is not possible without language—language preserves what is similar, what results from identification of what is non-identical, and what designates impressions which are common. The problem with language is that explaining means naming, including within a category, reducing difference, which is to strip life of life—it is life-negating.

Yet, each language introduces new categories and divisions. To name is to be the master. As Nietzsche puts it, "…whatever exists, having somehow come into being, is again and again reinterpreted to new ends, taken over, transformed, and redirected by some power superior to it; all events in the organic world are a subduing, a *becoming master*, and all subduing and becoming master involves a fresh interpretation, an adoption through which any previous "meaning" and "purpose" are necessarily obscured or even obliterated" (GM 513). Accordingly, Nietzsche states that, "…the self-renewing impulse to play calls new worlds into being" (PTG

111). This involves a process of creation through annihilation as the drives consistently condense and displace energies in the body. With that, Nietzsche remarks,

> This drive is not truly vanquished and scarcely subdued by the fact that a regular and rigid new world is constructed as its prison from its own ephemeral products, the concepts. It seeks a new realm and another channel for activity, and it finds this in *myth* and in *art* generally. This drive continually confuses conceptual categories and cells by bringing forward new transferences, metaphors, and metonymies. It continually manifests an ardent desire to refashion the world which presents itself to waking man, so that it will be as colorful, irregular, lacking in results, coherence, charming, and eternally new as the world of dreams. Indeed, it is only by means of the rigid and regular web of concepts that the waking man clearly sees that he is awake; and it is precisely because of this that he sometimes thinks that he must be dreaming when this web of concepts is torn by art. (TL 59)

Given the destructive power of the artistic drive, "the scientific investigator builds his hut right next to the tower of science" because "he requires shelter, for there are frightful powers which continuously break in upon him, powers which oppose scientific 'truth' with completely different kinds of 'truths' which bear on their shields the most varied sorts of emblems" (TL 59). The instability of the tower of science is always threatened to be exposed by the will to illusion. This is because, as Nietzsche points out, "Art, as the *goodwill* to illusion," displays a multitude of 'truths,' directly confronting the *one* truth of scientific knowledge (GS 91).

The creator, who confuses the concepts, does so by being a destroyer—smashing in frameworks. A stabilized framework is just a toy for the creator and, similar to how children discard their toys, the creator shows they have no need of these concepts and can as easily discard them. Nietzsche explains: "That immense framework and planking of concepts to which the needy man clings his whole life along in order to preserve himself is nothing but a scaffolding and toy for the most audacious feats of the liberated intellect. And when it smashes this framework to pieces, throws it into confusion, and puts it back together in an ironic fashion, paring the most alien things and separating the closest, it is demonstrating that it has no need of these makeshifts of indigence and that it will now be guided by intuitions rather than by concepts" (TL 60).

Nietzsche here introduces a different kind of knowledge contrary to that of scientific knowledge—intuition. But unlike scientific knowledge which is constructed by language and concepts, intuition does not have a name, so to say, or a language. That is because it is an immediate sense impression, felt and known by the body. Nietzsche states that "There exists no word for these intuitions; when man sees them he grows dumb, or else he speaks only in forbidden metaphors and in unheard-of combinations of concepts. He does this so that by shattering and mocking the old conceptual barriers he may at least correspond creatively to the impression of the powerful present intuition" (TL 60). The individual who shatters and mocks conceptual barriers and prohibitions is the *ideal spirit*. It is not a "spirit" in the sense of the mythical or other-worldly—that would be life-negating—but *spirited* in the sense of being full of sensation, full of breath, full of life-force. That is, as Nietzsche puts it:

> The ideal of a spirit who plays naively (that is to say involuntarily and from overflowing abundance and power) with everything that has hitherto been called holy, good, inviolable, divine; to whom the loftiest conception which the people have reasonably made their measure of value, would already imply danger, ruin, abasement, or at least relaxation, blindness, or temporary self-forgetfulness. (GS 225)

The ideal spirit rolls "in the dice game of Heraclitus' "great child," be he called Zeus or chance" (GM 21).[15] Like a child on the beach, the creator builds sand castles—"he piles them up and tramples them down" (PTG 111). The creator again destroys these structures because, "it is only as creators that we can annihilate!" (GS 58). But this is not a closed event, but a continuous creating through annihilation. The ideal spirit starts the game anew calling new worlds into existence. And as mentioned above, it continues to play, as the artistic drive is never vanquished. For this reason, the creative impulse also leads to the construction of worlds and concepts which can become hardened over time. Thus, "when it does build, it combines and joins and forms its structures regularly, conforming to inner laws" (PTG 111). And in doing so, Nietzsche remarks, "he gives rise to an interest, a tension, a hope, almost a certainty, as if with him something were announcing and preparing itself, as if man were not a goal but only a way, an episode, a bridge, a great promise" (GM 521).

Nietzsche's use of the child as a metaphor for the creator suggests that creating and destroying worlds is without morality and measure; it is innocent child's-play, before the world of measurement and identification. Nietzsche states, "In this world only play, play as artists and

[15] Heraclites, fragment 52: Lifetime is a child playing, moving pieces in a backgammon game; kingly power is in the hands of a child.

children engage in it, exhibits coming-to-be and passing away, structuring and destroying, without any moral additive, in forever equal innocence" (PTG 111). Art allows us to play games with concepts and language, and distance ourselves from our own evaluations. On the other hand, for the rational man, this play is seen as "danger, ruin, abasement," and thus, the will to truth drives him to construct morally binding, unconditional commands in the form of a *formal conscience*. The rational man then, "According to its strength, impatience, and tension…seizes upon things as a rude appetite, rather indiscriminately, and accepts whatever is shouted into its ears by someone who issues commands—parents, teachers, laws, class prejudices, public opinions" (BGE 300). In other words, the rational man in his need for foresight, prudence, and regularity: "Without that art we should be nothing but foreground, and would live absolutely under the spell of the perspective which makes the closest and the commonest seem immensely large and like reality in itself" (GS 67).

However, for Nietzsche, a system is not evaluated for its 'truth' or morality, but for its beauty, force, and strength. What makes a system superabundant and life-affirming is to will illusion, to express itself as the mask of mask, to allow for ambiguity, and behold the beauty of the overflowing, excess of life. Nietzsche calls this the "art of commanding" (BGE 300). Conversely, a weak comportment towards the world is neediness, forgetfulness, and life-denying through preserving concepts and clinging to ascetic scientific knowledge. This is what Nietzsche calls the 'herd instinct,' developed through obedience in one direction for a long time, which teaches the *narrowing of our perspective*" (BGE 292). The will to truth is a will to obedience, whereas the will to illusion is a will to will:

> When a man arrives at the fundamental conviction that he *requires* to be commanded, he becomes "a believer." Reversely, one could imagine a delight and a power of self-determining, and a *freedom* of will, whereby a spirit could bid farewell to every belief, to every wish for certainty, accustomed as it would be to support itself on slender cords and possibilities, and to dance even on the verge of abysses. Such a spirit would be the *free spirit par excellence*. (GS 182)

To say goodbye to every belief, value, and certainty—Truth, that tower we take shelter in—demands *laisser aller*. This is a familiar Nietzschean notion of "letting-go." The will to truth, though, teaches the "hatred of the *laisser aller*," the "all-too-great freedom" (BGE 291).

6: *Rigidity Means Death*

"Learn to think with pain" –Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*

Letting-go requires strong will, great strength, and independence. It is not just accepting a 'principle' of ambiguity, it is living it. If we embrace the overflowing, excess of life, then we embrace all its ambiguities, uncertainties, possibilities—the *Coatlique state*. This is not easy as it can be gut-wrenching, and also, we already have a resisting force built within—the will to truth. Yet, Nietzsche sees this potential for the self-determination and the will to illusion as liberating. Anzaldúa does as well in the sense that the mestiza embodies aspects of the ideal spirit. Anzaldúa explains that for the mestiza,

> In perceiving conflicting information and points of view, she is subjected to a swamping of her psychological borders. She has discovered that she can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries. The borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out are entrenched habits and patterns of behavior; these habits and patterns are the enemy within. Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically. La mestiza constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes. (BF 101)

The will to truth, as is hinted at by Anzaldúa, is never completely stifled; it continues to drive the mestiza to habits and thinking that resist ambiguities, the dissolving of borders, contradictions in life. There is a continuous drive toward a singular (Western scientific) truth established through rigid concepts and scaffolding. While this singular Truth offers an answer to why we suffer and can quiet alarm to meaninglessness, which the mestiza embodies, Anzaldúa states that, "The new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity" (BF 101).

It is not just that the mestiza allows for these contradictions and ambiguity—she wills the excruciating feeling of being alive. Anzaldúa explains: "Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. She can be jarred out of ambivalence by an intense, and often painful, emotional event which inverts or resolves the ambivalence" (BF 101). Anzaldúa expresses uncertainty as to how the ambivalence is resolved,

but remarks that, “The work takes place underground—subconsciously” (BF 101). And although this ambivalence, “is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm” (BF 101-102).

This is indicated in how she explains her process of creating:

> The way that I originate my ideas is the following: First there has to be something that is bothering me, something emotional so that I will be upset, angry or conflicted. Then I start meditating on it, sometimes I do that while I am walking. Usually I come up with something visual of what I am feeling. So then I have a visual that sometimes is like a bridge, sometimes like a person with fifty legs, one in each world; sometimes *la mana izquierda*, the left-handed world; the *rebollino*, et cetera and I try to put that into words. So behind this feeling there is this image, this visual, and I have to figure out what the articulation of this image is. (BF 236).

“For example,” she illustrates, “the feeling of not belonging to any culture at all, of being an exile in all the different cultures. You feel like there are all these gaps, these cracks in the world. In that case I would draw a crack in the world” (BF 236). She moves from nerve-stimulus to image.

Anzaldúa notes that “An image is a bridge between evoked emotion and conscious knowledge; words are the cables that hold up the bridge. Images are more direct, more immediate than words, and closer to the unconscious. *Picture language* precedes thinking in words; the metaphorical mind precedes analytical consciousness” (BF 91; emphasis mine).

Picture language comes before the symbolic—language as nominative, syntax, and sign. With picture language, the way Anzaldúa describes it, the spheres of the nerve stimulus and image collapse: she feels the images. However, adding the third element of language still is in question: how can the nerve-stimulus-images be captured in language? Without Anzaldúa's picture in front of us—our eyes touching the canvas—without its presence, missing that encounter, how can we, the Other, *feel*—embody, 'know'—these gaps and cracks in the world?

7. *Poetic language: Between Body and Sign*

It is possible to connote the sensation of trauma-knowledge, the abject, the *Coatlique state*, but not in scientific language. It requires a language of its own: one of imagery, semiotic rhythm, discordance, life, flesh—*poetic language*.

According to Kristeva, poetic language is spatial in that it "does not involve lines and surfaces but space and infinity;" it stretches horizontally *and* vertically (DL 88). This spatial dimension is created as poetic language is a double: "the minimal unit of poetic language is at least *double*, not in the sense of the signifier/signified dyad, but rather, in terms of *one and other*." (DL 69). The sign (signifier/signified) is a 0 – 1 sequence. This is a product of scientific abstraction: "(identity-substance-cause-goal as structure of the Indo-European sentence), designating a vertically and hierarchically linear division" (DL 69). On the other hand, Kristeva explains, "Saussure's poetic *paragram* ("Anagrams") extends from *zero* to *two*: the unit "one" (definition, "truth") does not exist in this field. Consequently, the notions of definition, determination, the sign " = " and the very concept of sign, which presuppose a vertical (hierarchical) division between signifier and signified, cannot be applied to poetic language—by

definition an infinity of pairings and combinations" (DL 69). According to Kristeva, this suggests that "poetic language functions as a *tabular model,* where each "unit" (this word can no longer be used without quotation marks, since every unit is double) acts as a multi-determined *peak*" (DL 69).

"*Poetic logic*" connotes "the concept of the *power of the continuum* [which] would embody the 0-2 interval, a continuity where 0 denotes and 1 is implicitly transgressed" (DL 70). Kristeva states that "Within this "power of continuum" from 0 to a specifically poetic double, the linguistic, psychic, and social "prohibition" is 1 (God, Law, Definition). The only linguistic practice to "escape" this prohibition is poetic discourse" (DL 70). God, Law, and Definition prohibit anything other than the 1. This is what poetic language transgresses—this limit, stopping point.

An example of what Kristeva means can be understood in the child's utterance referred to in Chapter 1. When the child utters, "There is a dark man living inside of me, telling me to kill people," from what we know, the child actually *believes* or *knows* what he is saying or intends to communicate. Yet, scientific language bars the utterance from having any truth or 'real' significance. That is, in scientific language of the 0-1 interval, the signifier "dark man" signifies a human being and the color of his skin. Yet, poetic language can transgress this prohibition. The "dark man" can be referring to the child's father, any other man, a character from a movie or book, etc., and "dark" can be used to indicate color, character, mentality, sinister, evil, maliciousness…there are many possible subjects permitted, an infinite number of pairings of "dark man." This is how we can think of it as a multi-determined peak. The interval of 0-2 of poetic language means that poetic language always carries with it prohibition and transgression: "it cannot be" and "it can be otherwise."

Poetic language is also spatial in that it permeates the body. Another distinction between scientific discourse and poetic language is the function of the semiotic. In scientific discourse, the semiotic component is reduced as much as possible. "On the contrary," Kristeva states, "the signifying economy of poetic language is specific in that the semiotic is not only a constraint as is the symbolic, but it tends to gain the upper hand at the expense of the thetic and predicative constraints of the ego's judging consciousness" (DL 134). The semiotic constrains in the sense that it expresses meaning and significance, which is always a limiting feature—it has a specific meaning. "Thus," Kristeva intimates, "in any poetic language, not only do the rhythmic constraints, for example perform an organizing function that could go so far as to violate certain grammatical rules of a national language and often neglect the importance of an ideatory message, but in recent texts, these semiotic constraints (rhythm, phonic, vocalic timbres in Symbolist work, but also graphic disposition on the page) are accompanied by nonrecoverable syntactic elisions; it is impossible to reconstitute the particular elided syntactic category (object or verb), which makes the meaning of the utterance undecidable." She continues:

> However elided, attacked, or corrupted the symbolic function might be in poetic language, due to the impact of semiotic processes, the symbolic function nonetheless maintains its presence, it is for this reason that it is a language. First, it persists as an internal limit of this bipolar economy, since a multiple and sometimes even uncomprehensible signified is nevertheless communicated; second, it persists also because the semiotic processes themselves, far from being set adrift (as they would be in insane discourse), set up a new formal construct: a

> so-called new formal or ideological "writer's universe," the never-finished, undefined production of a new space of significance. (DL 134-135).

Citing Bakhtin, Kristeva states that language has a double character: 1) syntagmatic, manifested through extension, presence, and metonymy; and 2) systemic, manifested through association, absence, and metaphor. What is present and lost within the symbolic order of metonymy and metaphor can be recovered in the semiotic. Kristeva notes that the semiotic "posits its own process as an undecidable process between sense and nonsense, between *language* and *rhythm* … between the symbolic and semiotic"—"situated at the precise point at which meaning is produced in nonmeaning" (DL 135; Lacan, E 423).

Poetic language also is disconcerting in that it "awakens our attention to this undecidable character of any so-called natural language, a feature that univocal, rational, scientific discourse tends to hide—and this implies considerable consequences for it subject" (DL 135). Poetic language has the ability to reactivate what the individual wants to forget, but cannot. It may reactivate all of the overwhelming feelings of chance, accident, meaninglessness, and ambiguity. Kristeva states that, "the unsettled and questionable subject of poetic language (for whom the word is never uniquely sign) maintains itself at the cost of reactivating this repressed instinctual, maternal element" (DL 136). It can return the subject to the *chora* and that primary splitting: the abject.

Poetic language, in this sense, has a feeling of eternality. This is contrary to scientific language. The 0-1 interval is temporal in the sense that it stops at 1; it is a closed event; the simple past, the simple present, the simple future. But, in poetic language, the doubling does not stop. The subject is always in question as there is always a *one and other* and an ongoing

interaction between the two. The subject can always be called into question. When the child utters, "a dark man lives inside me," the dark man is multiplied in that it could be naming an other outside the child's body, the otherness of self, or the other of horror living within, for instance. For this reason, we are to understand the subject of poetic language as nontemporal, continuous, abundant, overflowing: a "questionable *subject-in-process*." Kristeva explains that "the subject of poetic language continually but never definitively assumes the thetic function of naming, establishing meaning and signification, which the paternal function represents within reproductive relation" (DL 138). Rather, (describing Céline's literary style) Kristeva explains that it is "a dissonance" with this paternal function in language—it is "neither imaginary discourse of the self, nor discourse of transcendental knowledge, but a permanent go-between from one to the other, a pulsation of sign and rhythm, of consciousness and instinctual drive" (DL 139).

Similar to how Anzaldúa describes her own experience of living on the borderlands, between two worlds, in Nepantla. She remarks that it is "very awkward, uncomfortable and frustrating to be in that Nepantla because you are in the midst of transformation," like a person with fifty legs, standing on multiple peaks (BF 237). From this perspective, "You see the cracks and realize that there are other realities" (BF 237). Kristeva too notes that poetic language shows up at times of symbolic and social unrest. It is a means of overriding the constraints of transcendental rationality—scientific discourse. This is because it has a "disruptive form (unreadable for meaning, dangerous for the subject)" (DL 140). That is to say, "So-called "artistic" practices have always exerted fascination because they elude this boundary, owing to which signification—always already in the form of a sentence—comes into being, and they revive the uneasiness that goes with regressing to a time before the mirror stage" (DL 168).

Within poetic language there is free-play in the sentence structure and meaning formation: techniques of displacing verbs; using obscenities, lacking objective referents. The semiotics of poetic language "connect it to gesturality, kinesthesia, the drives' body, the movement of rejection and appropriation of the other;" creating hesitation and rhythm through breaks and ellipses, etc. These movements allow for "multiple connotations that no longer depend on the framework of the sentence, but on a free context" (DL 141). Referring again to Céline's literature, Kristeva notes that "The elided object in the sentence relates to a hesitation (if not erasure) of the *real object* for the speaking subject. That literature is witness to this kind of deception involving the object … that the existence of the object is more than fleeting and indeed impossible" (DL 141-142). Such style "obliges the reader not so much to combine significations as to shatter his own judging consciousness in order to grant passage through it to this rhythmic drive constituted by repression and, once filtered by language and its meaning, experience as jouissance" (DL 142).

Anzaldúa states that, "The art of composition, whether you are composing a work of fiction or your life, or whether you are composing reality, always means pulling off fragmented pieces and putting them together into a whole that makes sense" (BF 238). When the audience engages with poetic language, we make sense of it by entering it back into the order of the symbolic; we can "restore" the sentence. Kristeva explains that language "has a specificity that no other system based on differences possesses: it *divides* (signifier/signified) and *joins* (modifier/modified = sentence) (DL 168). But, Kristeva notes, by "restoring" the sentence, "we lose semantic and logico-syntactic ambiguities, but we mainly lose a music" (DL 167). "By *music*," she explains," I mean intonation and rhythm, which play only a subordinate role in everyday communication but here constitute the essential element of enunciation and lead us

directly to the otherwise silent place of its subject" (DL 167). Thus, the creators of poetic language must be like composers, creating symphonies, which return us to the original, colorful, vivid experience.

Poetic language is a form of creation through annihilation; it is a tearing apart of the logic of the sentence, and rebuilding meaning; creating meaning out of nonmeaning. Kristeva explains this process:

> "Musicating" this dividing-joining movement involves exploding rhythm *into division*, of course, but also, *into juncture*: into the metaphoric-metonymic slippage that corrugates lexemic items and lifts even the signifier/signified censorship; *but especially, into the juncture of logic and sentence* where socio-symbolic order is rebuilt and ignores anything having to do with the previous, underlying (semic, morphemic, phonic, instinctual) explosion. (DL 168)

Destructive, accidental, creative, poetic language intervenes in the symbolic order; it is the cut which cuts, and in that cut, *something* shows itself. Kristeva explains, "Intervening at the level where syntactic order renders opaque the outlay underlying the signifying practice; intervening at the point where sociality constitutes itself by killing, by throttling the outlay that keeps it alive—that means intervening precisely when the sentence pulls itself together and stops. The problem is to raise and transform this very moment, to allow it to sing." (DL 168).

But poetic language is more than song—it is song and paint; a singing of the image, "A composition with texture: more-than-a-sentence, more-than-meaning, more-than-significance" (DL 168). It is not a lack, or absence, but an overflowing. "If there is a loss," Kristeva states, "if

an outlay is made, they never result in less, but always *more*: more-than-syntactic" (DL 168). Thus poetic language involves an excess, abundance, overflowing of meaning, whether the syntactic unit of a sentence is disrupted, missing, exploded, or overdetermined. Poetic language is illusory—it gives the illusion of music, song, dance, and paint. It is an expression of the instinctual drives and the drive to illusion, perpetually confronting and resisting the drive to truth. This is not to say that poetic language does not express truth, rather it is a bridge between the body and the other, an outpouring of embodied knowledge.

CHAPTER SIX:

THE FRAGMENTARY IMPERATIVE

It's not enough
deciding to open.

You must plunge your fingers
into your navel, with your two hands
split open,
spill out the lizards and horned toads
the orchids and the sunflowers,
turn the maze inside out.
Shake it.

Yet, you don't quite empty.
Maybe a green phlegm
hides in your cough.
You may not even know
that it's there until a knot
grows in your throat
and turns into a frog.

It tickles a secret smile
on your palate
full of tiny orgasms.

But sooner or later
it reveals itself.
The green frog indiscreetly croaks.
Everyone looks up.

It's not enough
opening once.
Again you must plunge your fingers
into your navel, with your two hands
rip open,
drop out dead rats and cockroaches
spring rain, young ears of corn.

Shake it.

This time you must let go.
Meet the dragon's open face
and let the terror swallow you
—You dissolve in its saliva
—no one recognizes you as a puddle
—no one misses you
—you aren't even remembered
and the maze isn't even of your own making.

You've crossed over.
And all around you space.
Alone. With nothingness.

Nobody's going to save you.
No one's going to cut you down,
cut the thorns thick around you.
No one's going to storm
the castle walls nor
kiss awake your birth
climb down your hair
nor mount you
on a white steed.

There is no one who
will feed the yearning.
Face it. You will have
to do, do it yourself.
And all around you a vast terrain.
Alone. With night.
Darkness you must befriend if
you want to sleep nights.

It's not enough
letting go twice, three times,
a hundred. Soon everything is
dull, unsatisfactory.
Night's open face
interests you no longer.
And soon, again, you return
to your element and
like a fish to the air
you come to the open
only between breathings.
But already gills

grow on your breasts.

……

Why write more when Anzalúa's poem ""Letting Go," captures the experience of writing-trauma so well? The poem presents the various fragments of trauma I have described thus far. First, the reference to opening the navel with one's own two hands hints at the embodiment of trauma-knowledge. The body knows the traumatic feeling of being alive without cognitive memory or recognition. The individual forgets and "may not even know it is there" until the flashback, nightmare, or traumatic memory fragment demands recognition and insists on its own reality; until "the frog indiscreetly croaks."

Second, the poem reflects the element of explosive plasticity in regard to the accident. At the moment of the accident, the individual undergoes a metamorphosis such that there is a "molting of the inner sculpture." Metaphorically, the individual "dissolves in its saliva." Simultaneously, something reveals itself, as Malabou puts it, "the deserting of subjectivity, the distancing of the individual who becomes a stranger to herself, who no longer recognizes anyone, who no longer recognizes herself, who no longer remembers her self" (OA 6). The new being, flight identity, takes over such that the individual is unrecognizable and there is no 'self' to save or redeem—"nobody's going to save you."

Third, images of dead rats, roaches, horned toads, and green phlegm invoke the abject. To plunge into one's navel is suggestive of returning to the *chora*, the site of the abject. Here is where the individual meets the dragon's open face, and resides in the *Coatilique state* of uncertainty and ambiguity.

Fourth, to let go in the Nietzschean sense of *laissez-aller*, means to be able to tolerate ambiguities, to not only resist, but annihilate absolutes, such that one can create their own

meaning. The way letting-go is expressed in the poem means to plunge into the deepest, darkest, defiled aspects of being, willfully. And this is why it is not enough to decide just to open—you must let the terror swallow you. This is not a matter of the will to truth, but an incessant crying out of embodied knowledge. Also, the language by which one "opens" is not handed over in scientific concepts, but must be poetically, independently invented—you will have to do it yourself.

Finally, if one does decide to open and write, it is not enough to let go once, twice, or a hundred times, given the repetition compulsion in trauma. Anzaldúa's poem highlights the aspect of the eternal return of trauma and its disastrous effects, and also, what must take place such that an individual can open and let-go. Words themselves are dangerous because they embody images, fragments, and pulsations which can haul the individual back to the scene of the trauma. The reference to returning to one's element can represent both returning to the traumatic scene, but also 'returning' *from* that scene. Returning to and from the scene is a matter of self-overcoming, not strictly in the Nietzschean sense, but beyond, in multiple aspects.

With all of this in mind, the question of why write more, for the trauma-being, is effaced by the question of why write at all? Why write when writing means dissolving of the self, confronting the dragon's open face, becoming the unrecognizable being, swallowed up by terror, recognizing nothingness, befriending darkness? And the futile attempt to empty oneself only to return again to choke on pain—why write?

1. *let the terror swallow you*

"It is not you who will speak; let the disaster speak in you, even if it be by your forgetfulness or silence." (WD 4)

In *The Writing of the Disaster*, Maurice Blanchot affirms that writing the disaster is disaster. He observes, "a disaster ruins everything, all the while leaving everything intact" (WD 1). What remains intact—or appears to remain intact—are those who are spared. Still those who are spared are transformed, and it is questionable how intact they remain in light of this transformation. In the disaster, Blanchot notes, death comes too late. The individual must endure their survival, for it is this survival which marks the disaster and trauma—trauma is in having survived.

It is for this reason that the disaster comes to pass under a "here in excess of all presence," (WD 1). This is due to the immediacy of the disaster. When the disaster comes upon us, it does not come, as its ruinous effects have not fully come. It watches over us and we live "under the surveillance of the disaster" (WD 4). We are always under its threat—the threat of the disaster yet to come, the disaster we experience in the immediate present, and the disaster that came upon us. Blanchot explains that "Before it is there, no one awaits it; when it is there, no one recognizes it: for it is not there—the disaster. It has already diverted the word "be," realizing itself to such a degree that it has not begun" (WD 36). The disaster continues to unfold, and in the immediate 'here' we do not know it as disaster as its effects have not yet come to pass—it is not here. Further, we are not able to situate it in the future because, Blanchot explains, "it cannot

be prescribed and formulated, how we will encounter it, and how it will effect us, is in the future: the disaster is yet to come"—it is not there (WD 1).

Temporality is further complicated through our relationship with the past. Blanchot asks, "How can one enter a relation with the passive past, a relation which would itself be incapable of presenting itself in the light of a consciousness…?" (WD 29). That is to say, "We can no more think of the immediate than we can think of an absolutely passive past" (WD 24-25). The disaster, which has come upon us, continues to affect us in the immediate present. This 'past' lives in us, and as it lives, it is active. Further still, when we think of the disaster, if at all possible, we reawaken this past, and thus, the disaster is the return of the return; "the disaster comes back; it would always be the disaster after the disaster" (WD 6). Therefore, we can ask with Blanchot, "Can the disaster be interrogated? Where might one find the language in which answer, question, affirmation, negation may well intervene, but without any effect?" (WD 24-25). In questioning the disaster, we intervene, and, to highlight the double play of Blanchot's use of language, we are "the incessant that interrupts."

Not only is it paradoxical to interrogate the disaster, as it cannot be reached, but also because in interrogating it, we are passive to the disastrous knowledge of the disaster. "Knowledge which goes so far as to accept horror in order to know it," Blanchot notes, "reveals the horror of knowledge, its squalor, the discrete complicity which maintains it in a relation with the most insupportable aspects of power" (WD 82). It is, perhaps, just the kind of suffering for knowledge that Nietzsche describes:

> Have you suffered for knowledge's sake?" This is asked of us by Nietzsche, on the condition that we not misunderstand the word "suffering": it means, not so

> much what we undergo, as that which goes under. It denotes the *pas* ["not"] of the utterly passive, which drawn from all sight, from all knowing. Unless it be the case that knowledge—because it is not knowledge of the disaster, but knowledge as disaster and knowledge disastrously—carries us, carries us off, deports us (whom it smites and nonetheless leaves untouched), straight to ignorance, and puts us face to face with ignorance of the unknown so that we forget, endlessly. (WD 3)

The type of knowledge being described here is like trauma-knowledge. It is the horror of knowing horror and yet, not knowing it. What I mean by this is that it is privileged knowledge of having survived, for instance, the knowledge of what the Holocaust survivor knows, "saved at the last minute, … forced to live that last instant again and each time to live it once more" (WD 82). The Holocaust survivor survives his own death, and in doing so, undergoes the death of all the others. He lives such that others die. When asked how he can bear it, Blanchot shares that his response is just to observe what he knows. But this is an impossible question, to ask how one can bear it. The only response, Blanchot notes, is that "he could find no other alibi than the search for knowledge, the so-called dignity of knowledge: that ultimate propriety which we believe will be accorded us by knowledge. And how, in fact, can one accept not to know?" This is why, "The wish of all, in the camps, the last wish: know what has happened, do not forget, and at the same time never will you know" (WD 82). Blanchot explains that this forgetfulness is not a negative, but also not a negation of an affirmative, because it is immemorial; it cannot be a memory. The memory fragments are not memories but disaster.

This burden of having to answer the impossible question of unbearable knowledge discloses Blanchot's understanding of passivity in the disaster. The way Blanchot describes the notion of passivity is not to be understood in a simple 'non-action.' Rather, *passivité*, coming from *passif*, is referring to suffering or undergoing hardship. The notion of 'non-action' is implied in the idea of undergoing suffering *without resistance*. With trauma we undergo suffering whether we resist it or not—we are passive in regard to it, especially given the chance repetition of the traumatic memory fragment or flashback. This is reflected in the passivity in regard to the disaster, as Blanchot describes it, "the absolute passiveness of total abjection" (WD 15). As Kristeva remarks, the abjection of self, for the individual, it is a "forfeited existence," in that the abject permeates the subject such that they become abject (PH 11).

Blanchot coins a new expression to capture this idea: "*le subissement*." The term "is [partnered on *subir*, "to undergo," but is also] simply a variation of *subitement* ["suddenly"], or the same word crushed; we might invent that term, *le subissement*, in an attempt to name the inert immobility of certain states said to be psychotic, … dispossession, that is, the self wrested from itself, the detachment whereby one is detached from detachment, or again the fall (neither chosen nor accepted) outside the self" (WD 15). In one sense we are passive to resist the disaster, but beyond that, we are passive in the sense that it always returns, and this is what makes it disastrous. It is always too late—the disaster returns, incessantly—trauma happens too soon, too fast, too suddenly for us to resist it, and so we are *le subissement*.

Yet, we are challenged to move on, obliged to survive, beckoned to respond: we are responsible for it, not necessarily for its 'cause,' but in terms of how we are called to respond—write, speak, blurt obscenities, scream, sob, go numb. We are called on to respond to what we have passively encountered, outside the realm of choice and agency, where subjects are deserted;

we are called to respond to suffering, without resistance. The disaster is in excess of all presence and so there is not any chart or plan, no way to resolve it, to solve it, to absolve it. The notion of 'coming-to-terms-with' the disaster, the accident, trauma, and grief, is the illusion of transcendence.

This means that in regard to writing, the disaster returns whether we write or not. Blanchot notes, refusing to write, is in itself, a form of writing. The refusal to write is a form of writing itself and how in writing the event that resists or cannot be captured in words in a stable way, we are led to find this state of affairs unbearable, "as though he were being obliged to survive" (WD 10). Trauma is in having survived, and in writing-trauma, we undergo our own survival at Blanchot explains, "with respect to the disaster, one dies too late. But this does not dissuade us from dying; it invites us—escaping the time where it is always too late—to endure inopportune death, with no relation to anything save the disaster as return" (WD 4). In responding, we undergo, we suffer, which is the upmost of passivity, of abjection: there is no action, no will, no suffering *for* a purpose, or suffering *to* some end—*the maze isn't even of your own making*. Yet passivity allows us to respond to the unending demand of responsibility, which is an impossible demand, for the damaged, deserted, speechless subject. The decision to write or not is a moment in which ones relation to the content of the embodied knowledge is both passively and actively known—accessed by "opening up" the navel into the body.

This moment is unbearable, as reflected within the imagery of Anzaldúa's poem. The loss of meaning and state of ambiguity, makes the narrative of this disaster unbearable. Kristeva notes that "the narrative is unbearable in the case of the abject" because "its linearity is shattered, it proceeds by flashes, enigmas, short cuts, incompletion, tangles and cuts" (PH 141). For someone who experiences trauma, a linear narrative is disrupted and thus a single story of the

'self' appears as meaningless, arbitrary, superficial, supplementary, impossible. Consequently, it is also that in telling the narrative, the individual has to reconstruct trauma from the residue, which, according to Anzaldúa, makes her physically sick. She explains, "writing invokes images from my unconscious, and because some of the images are residues of trauma which I then have to reconstruct, I sometimes get sick when I *do* write. I can't stomach it, become nauseous, or burn with fever, worsen" (BF 92). Kristeva adds that,

> At a later stage, the unbearable identity of the narrator and of the surroundings that are supposed to sustain him can no longer be *narrated* but *cries out* or *descried* with maximal stylistic intensity (language of violence, of obscenity, or of a rhetoric that relates the text to poetry). The narrative yields to a *crying-out theme* that, when it tends to coincide with the incandescent states of a boundary-subjectivity that I have called abjection, is the crying-out theme of suffering-horror. (PH 141)

On the other hand, as Merleau-Ponty explains, the poem, though "indistinguishable from the cry," makes use of body and language "in such a way that the existential modulation, instead of being dissipated at the very instant of its expression, finds in poetic art a means of making itself eternal" (TPP 174). The narrative, Kristeva explains, occupies the place that it does—it decks itself out "in the sacred power of horror." In writing the individual succumbs to the trauma, and elaborates it; it involves an unveiling, "an elaboration, a discharge, and a hollowing out of abjection…" (PH 208). And this is why for Blanchot, the disaster is the limit of writing. He reiterates, "this must be repeated: the disaster de-scribes. Which does not mean that the disaster,

as the force of writing, is excluded from it, is beyond the pale of writing or extratextual" (WD 7). The disaster is a force of writing and for this reason it is not beyond writing or outside the text—it is *in* writing, but at its very limit. For Kristeva and Blanchot, writing is passive inasmuch as it does not and cannot be the site of ultimate resistance.

In conjuring trauma fragments through writing, it is not as though the individual has any more control over the destructive power the disaster. Although Anzaldúa suggests some potential for a creative, agential relation between the words and images in the process of writing— "I feed [my inner demons] no words"—this does not protect the individual against the accident. Whether in writing or not, a sudden flashback can swallow the individual, paralyze them, destroy them. This is the risk the individual undergoes in writing. Thus, writing is not a form of resistance, as some would have it, not a presentation of the meaning of the individual's thoughts, but a crying out, a discharge of the disaster, an over-spilling of the embodied knowledge of horror—the source of such poetic language.

2. *Shake it.*

> "Write in order not simply to destroy, in order not simply to conserve, in order not to transit; write in the thrall of the impossible real, that share of disaster wherein every reality, safe and sound, sinks" (WD 38).

With other modes of writing, scientific, narrative, epic, to name a few, writing is an expression of the will to truth and with that it drives toward coherency. But writing-trauma is a force of writing, a risk, not toward some coherent truth, but crying out of the body in pain. The style of

writing which captures the sensory memory fragments of trauma in language is what Blanchot describes as *fragmentary writing*. Fragmentary writing is jarring, disruptive, unnerving, arrhythmic, unpredictable, a chance encounter. Blanchot himself employs the fragmentary writing style. Sometimes he will write a small paragraph expressing an idea, such as *le subissement*, and sometimes just a sentence, or even less, just a fragment of a sentence. What will come next, in terms of form, style, and content, cannot be anticipated as he moves and shifts directions within the discussion—if you can even call it that—annihilating any coherent, logical, predictable (scientific) whole. The fragmentary writing is opposite the writing that is the will-to-truth in that "…fragmentation is the pulling to pieces (the tearing) of that which never has preexisted (really or ideally) as a whole, nor can it ever be resembled in any future presence whatever. Fragmentation is the spacing, the separation effaced by a temporalization which can only be understood—fallaciously—as the absence of time" (WD 60).

Helen Cixous expresses the desire to be able to write in such a way as to capture fragments. She states, "I would like to write like a painter. I would like to write like painting" (PG 583). What Cixous means by writing like painting is being able to capture that instantaneous experience one has when in front of the painting. When the eyes touch the canvas, there is a transference of meaning in multiple directions. Face to face with the painting, the individual is brought into its world, the momentary "frozen distortions," to put it into Cézanne's language, which "would remain walled up in the separate life of each consciousness" were it not for the painting (CD 278). Likewise, Cixous describes the painter as "A bird-catcher of instants" (PG 583). This type of writing-painting is "closer to the painter's gesture." She states, "My words can't tell you the simultaneously infinite and yet finite" (PG 584). This is because language, even poetic language, is not instantaneous. The colors of the paint produce certain

sensations, similar to how Merleau-Ponty explains words: **"**the spoken or written words carry a top coating of meaning which sticks to them and which presents the thought as a style, an affective value, a piece of existential mimicry, rather than as a conceptual statement. We find here, beneath the conceptual meaning of the words, an existential meaning which is not only rendered by them, but which inhabits them, and is inseparable from them" (TPP 212). But, it is in placing particular words next to each other that one forms the fragment. This is similar to how Cézanne describes painting, that is, "to the extent that one paints, one outlines; the more the colors harmonize, the more the outline becomes precise…When the color is at its richest, the form has reached plentitude" (CD 279).

Thus, unlike in the immediate impression of the painting, there is always a mental process of translation from sign to signifier in the circumference of the semiotic; but also, there is a process of aligning the words such that the fragment of language carries meaning. It is one thing to stand before one of Francis Bacon's canvases and another to describe it. And in describing the frozen distortions, it is impossible to communicate how the paint touching paint forms the human form through such grotesque distortion. Yet, Bacon's paintings are able to capture that moment through distortion. And so is the same with fragmentary writing—it is a form of distortion. A painting provides the image, but leaves the interpretation open. Unlike with the painting, in which the observer's response is unpredictable, writing creates an unpredictable *image* which is then open to unpredictable interpretations. The multiple image-interpretation—the double of poetic language—fragments language even more so. With that, "Fragmentary writing is a risk, it would seem: risk itself. It is not based on any theory, nor does it introduce a practice one could define as *interruption*. Interrupted, it goes on. Interrogating itself, it does not co-opt the question but suspends it" (WD 59). Fragmentary writing is a risk in

that the fragments could be senseless, nonsense, an orphan with no theory to house it, nor practice to connect it to other writing nor other writing to interrogate (WD 59). The sensory-memory-image fragments of fragmentary language are unpredictable, with meaning always suspended, in abeyance, and multiplied. Fragmentary writing, then, can act back on itself, tearing itself to pieces—what was never whole to begin with.

Fragmentary writing, through fragmentation and distortion, captures and paints the trauma fragments by chance. Trauma is an incessant interruption and is best captured in language which interrupts itself—language which transforms the cut into that which cuts. This "interruption of the incessant," is "the distinguishing characteristic of fragmentary writing: interruption's having somehow the same meaning as that which does not cease" (WD 21). The fragment takes on the same meaning as the eternal return. This is similar to how, in his paintings, Bacon destroys the individual to capture their most "living quality," fragmentary writing destroys language and the self in order to capture the most living quality of disaster, trauma, accident, grief, and abjection. In this way, we could say of fragmentary writing, as Bacon did of painting: "…it has a life completely of its own. It lives on its own, like the image one's trying to trap; it lives on its own, and therefore transfers the essence of the image more poignantly. So that the artist may be able to open up or rather, should I say, unlock the valves of feeling and therefore return the onlooker to life more violently" (FB 17).

3. *And all around you space.*

> "In a world where God is dead once and for all, and where we know, despite the promises from all sides, from the Right and from the Left, that we won't find happiness, language is our only

resource, our only source. It reveals to us in the very hollow of our memories and beneath each of our words, beneath each of those words that gallop through our head, it reveals the majestic freedom of being mad" (LMD 27).

Language may be all we have, for those of us who cannot paint, and whether we write or not write, we are passive before it. It too has a life of its own and cannot be stopped, cannot be slowed down, for above all, language is repetition. Foucault, in "What is the Language of Literature?" reiterates that, "Language may be the only being in the world that is absolutely repeatable" (LMD 72). There are of course other beings, things, which are repeatable, but they are never one and the same. There may be more than one leaf, but that leaf is not materially, precisely identical to the next. Foucault remarks that "in the natural order, repetition is, in reality, only a partial identity and, moreover, one that can be easily analyzed discursively. There are no repetitions in the strict sense outside the order of language" (WD 72). He notes that if we are going to say that there is an ontology of language, it is repetition: "This phenomenon of repetition in language is, of course, a constitutive property of language, but this property is not neutral and inert with respect to the act of writing. Writing does not mean sidestepping the necessary repetition of language; I believe that writing, in the literary sense, involves placing repetition at the very heart of the work" (LMD 72-73). The function of writing is to repeat for the sake of repeating.

When we think of repetition, normally we think of repetition *in time*, as repetition is a sequence of an initial unit, followed by a copy, and so on. But, it is not time which preserves language; language preserves time. The simple unit of the verb points to the function of time *in language*. But, at heart, language is *space*, which functions to express time. Words take up

space—space on a page, space in breath, space in sound—and so this space is contended for by other words, words which will stand in the space of the other: the metaphor. This *movement* is what highlights the function of time in language.

Foucault makes a distinction between language, literary work, and literature. Language is the accumulated words through history, a "murmur of everything that is pronounced," and at the same time a "transparent system that results in the fact that when we speak, we are understood" (LMD 46). It is the promise of meaning that makes it language—it is not just the words but the systemic order of the words that makes up a language. The literary work, is "inside" of language, a "configuration of language that dwells on itself, that remains motionless, that constitutes a space of its own, and which holds in that space the flow of the murmur, which thickens the transparency of signs and words, and which thus establishes a certain opaque volume…" (LMD 46). The third term literature is *a language*, "a text made of words, of words like any others, but words that are so appropriately and carefully chosen and arranged that something ineffable passes through them," but, which, Foucault modifying the description, states is "non-ineffable" in that it is made from a fable (LMD 46).

Foucault holds that literature as a language is really born in the nineteenth century. That is, within the seventeenth century, it would be considered something like a familiarity, usage, and frequency of literary works (LMD 46-47). It is a passive relationship between language and the work, that of knowledge and memory. Literature in the nineteenth century, on the other hand, is active. It is active in the sense that it doubles itself to determine what literature is—its object is itself (LMD 47). The question "what is literature?" is an essential blankness. Literature is not required for a language to transform into "a work." It describes an empty space, dismembered, fractured from language and the work. It is external to the literary work, which is inside

language as an immobile, opaque flow of language. The work is thick because it flows over and over such that the language is fixed, opaque—the words are not transparent in that they… unlike with literature, which oscillates, or vibrates, but not as if between two poles, language and literature.

As soon as a word is written on the blank page, in space, it becomes literature, but no longer is literature at the same time. That is because it transgresses the pure, empty sacred essence of literature. This might be understood in the relationship between sound and silence. The eruption of words, as soon as they are spoken, are not a fulfillment of silence, but its rupture: Written words are distinct from "ordinary," "normal," "real" words in that they points to an other—literature. Written work is the death of speech, the organic, spontaneous movement of speech, and the creation of a larger body, that of literature. Fragmentary writing, in poetry or prose, enters into a much larger, oscillating body of literature that promises its repetition. Literature is repetition; it is not just repetition for the writer, but then for Other and the world.

For this reason, literature is a risk. Foucault explains that, "…literature is the risk always taken and always assumed by each word of a sentence of literature, the risk that, after all, this word, this sentence, and all the rest, might not obey the code" (LMD 71). The spoken word has a very limited audience in the immediate present. But the written word becomes timeless, crosses borders, and space. It stretches forward and backward, inward and outward.

The space of the page, bound in the space of the book, bound in the space of literature, all create ample more space for trauma to spill out into. This un-geometricizes trauma even more than in just reference to the body. The thickness of the book intertwines with the thickness of flesh—the flesh of the body touching the flesh of the page, where meaning is transferred, in both directions. The meaning is transferred through the touch of body to text, the semiotic rhythm is

felt in the meaning of the sign, and the signs, with their top coat, express meaning in the specific, material context. Returning back to the point at which knowledge is known through the flesh, we imprint fragments into the flesh of the blank sheet of paper, and simultaneously, seal trauma's fate in the eternal return beyond the body.

4. *And soon, again, you return*

> "Still, it is possible that, as soon as we write, and however little we write (the little is only too much), we know we are approaching the limit—the perilous threshold—the chance of being turned back" (WD 8).

The question of the eternal return featured in Nietzsche's works lends itself to many interpretations, but for the trauma-being, it is not a question of 'what if;' rather, it is a question of responsibility. That is to say, we know that we will be hauled back to the scene of the trauma, by chance; *that* is not uncertain or ambiguous. Acknowledging this horror of knowing is acknowledging the heaviest weight of Nietzsche's proposal. In section 341 of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche proposes:

> What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: "This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same

> succession and sequence--even this spider and this moonlight between the trees and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!"
>
> Would you throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: "You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine." If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, "Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?" would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to *crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate and eternal confirmation and seal? (GS 341)

I would gnash my teeth – I do gnash my teeth. And yet, I pick up my pen and write. The question of the eternal return is not a theoretical question for one who experiences trauma; it is an ethical question—ethical in the sense that it is a call to respond to *le subissement*. As soon as we write, we know we are approaching a perilous threshold—the chance of being turned back, hauled back. And yet, this is our responsibility: *le subissement*—the sudden going under, such that the self dissolves into the saliva of the words. The Other places this burden on us—we must haul this burden along while being hauled along, back to the scene of the trauma. Repetition, as Lacan explains through the transliteration of *wiederholen*, is the "hauling of the subject who always drags its thing into a certain path that he cannot get out of" (XI 51). Recall that what is

proposed by Freud, Lacan, and echoed by Caruth is that the repetition compulsion is an endeavor to master the stimulus retroactively, an attempt to master what was not completely grasped in the first place. From this perspective, writing-trauma would be the materialization of the repetition compulsion, and the repetitive act of writing-trauma could be a function of mastering the painful experience, the memory, the self, and the body.

However, the notion of *le subissement* offers a different way to regard this explanation of repetition for the sake of mastery. The moment the ink bleeds into the natural fibers of the paper, the will bleeds into the paper, with the past, the present, and a future yet to come—the eternal return of that horror of knowing horror, cemented in time and space, moving forward and backward at once. Writing-trauma is not at attempt at mastery but the ultimate *subissement* as it is to *will backwards*. In writing-trauma, "'The will is a creator.' All 'it was' is a fragment, a riddle, a dreadful accident—until the creative will says to it, 'But thus I willed it.' Until the creative will says to it, 'But thus I will it; thus shall I will it'" (TSZ 253). In the sudden going under of writing-trauma, the individual does not attempt redemption in terms of willing 'it could be otherwise,' but rather, the eternal, repetitive seal of writing wills 'it must be.' But of course there is an eternal revolt of being because the individual wants nothing other for it to be otherwise and to expel the trauma from their body. This points to another force within the process of writing-trauma: self-overcoming.

5. *But already gills grow on your breasts.*

"I overcame myself, the sufferer; I carried my own ashes to the mountains; I invented a brighter flame for myself" (TSZ 143).

Nietzsche's notion of self-overcoming is mainly proposed as a form of 'resistance' to self-limiting obedience to the will to truth, scientific knowledge, the desire for certainty, measurement, and mastery. As reflected in Zarathustra's own journey, it is not a state or status that one reaches and resides in; conversely, it is a perpetual drive. Blanchot echoes this sentiment and urges us to abandon the drive for any certainty:

> Abandon the futile hope to find in being the basis for a separation, a break, a revolt that could be achieved, and *verified*. For thus you are still in need of the truth and of putting it above "error," just as you want to distinguish death from life and death from death. Thus you stay loyal to the staunchness of a faith which dares not recognize its emptiness and is content with a transcendence of which *being would still be the measure*. Seek, then—seeking nothing—that which exhausts being exactly where it represents itself as inexhaustible. Seek the vanity of the incessant, the repetitiveness of the interminable where there is perhaps no cause to distinguish to be and not to be, truth and error, death and life, for each refers back to the other, just as similarity depends into sheer resemblance—resembling nothing, incomparable. Seek the ceaselessness of the return, effect of disastrous instability. (WD 88-89)

Writing-trauma is not done for the sake of certainty, truth and error, life and death, or verifying a 'truth-event.' Writing-trauma is letting go of the notion that there can be a cut from the cut; that somehow the flight identity can flee, the revolt of being can usurp the abject, rid the body of traumatic fragments, redeem the subject, reconcile, transcend. There is only repetition, no break in the eternal return. The will to truth, the attempt at mastery, through scientific discourse or verifying the truth-event, is abandoned at this moment. As opposed to transcendence, there is a going-under; as opposed to measurement, truth and error, there is ambiguity and fragmentation—the *Coatlique state*.

In repetition, we tend to focus on the backward moving force of being hauled back to the scene of trauma. But in order to get to a point in which there is a backward moving, there is a going-forward. In this case it is a going-under-going-forward-going-backward. The going-forward of overcoming, is going-under without resistance. This is how it is self-overcoming. The self is that which resists becoming undone. Yet, in *le subissement*, the individual overcomes the illusion of a coherent, solid subjectivity as they unravel. Self-overcoming is dynamic in repetition as one aspect is to overcome the misrecognition of a coherent self. It is self-overcoming in the sense that you have to overcome that sense of security of the self, the distinction between self and other, and accept the horror of the other living within, to be an accommodating host for the other to move in and take over, such that the self is annihilated.

This would be the sense of self-overcoming that is most akin to Nietzsche's presentation of it. Zarathustra confronts his audience: "But the worst enemy you can encounter will always be you, yourself; you lie in wait for yourself in caves and woods… You must wish to consume yourself in your own flame: how could you wish to become new unless you had first become

ashes!" (TSZ 176). To digest it, let it nourish you, and not spit it out; to digest the thick, black tar of darkness, let it enter my blood stream, let it blacken my blood; to allow the eternal return of the trauma—to wish it!—to wish it outside of the space of the body, into the space of language, the space of the blank page, the work, literature—this is self-overcoming and the sudden going-under.

In the case of surviving trauma, and moreover writing-trauma, the notion of self-overcoming goes beyond overcoming self-limiting constructs. Self-overcoming is continuous. It is *self*-overcoming in the sense that undergoing trauma-writing, beyond letting go of the concept of subjectivity, there is an actual abandoning of subjectivity. The individual has to be *willing* to annihilate the self, to return to the scene of the trauma, the immediate, abject feeling of being alive, where subjectivity, identity, agency, and temporality are demolished. It is also self-overcoming in the sense that it is the *body* of the 'self' in the repetitive compulsion, forces a return to the deepest, darkest, most abject 'parts.' It is also self-overcoming in the sense that revolt of being in the immediate force of the flashback, the nightmare, and the unbearable weight of being is suspended: "*I*" carry on. "*I*" repeat. "*I*" haul myself along.

Thus, while we are in *le subissement*, at this point the traumatic fragments, delivered by chance, throws one off into disaster, annihilates the self to be unrecognizable, and yet, aware of the utmost, abject feeling of being alive on the border of death and life—the incessant interruption of trauma is both a going-under and a going-over. But, the residues of the disaster, for instance disassociation, melancholy, depression, existential paralysis, living-death, are not disastrous. Blanchot observes, "The fragmentary imperative, linked to the disaster. That there is, however, practically nothing disastrous in the disaster: this is surely what we must learn to think, without, perhaps, ever knowing it" (WD 60). The body knows the disaster, the revolt of being.

With that, though it corrupts and molts the inner core, there is still a plastic power by which the individual escapes disaster to the point of complete destruction.

We must learn this to write trauma, as disastrous as trauma shows itself to be. Ultimately, we could say, the body already knows this. There is a point in which the individual absolutely enfolded into uncontrollable sobbing—an outpouring of a deepest, most painful embodied knowledge—something happens which cannot be accounted for, other than perhaps the self-overcoming of the body—the body recognizes that it has not been destroyed. The body annihilates the knowledge of the limitless sobbing, this relentless, resounding cry, and establishes a limit one again. It overcomes its own knowledge of the horror of the other living within; the sobbing comes to rest, at some point, and we carry on.

CONCLUSION

I write the words "a smashed up face"—what happens such that I am able to do so? As I write these words, they bring to mind no other image than *his smashed up face*. It is a disturbing image. If I do not push such images out of my mind quick enough, they choke me. In reading or writing the words, remnants of images and pain captured within the words, repeat in the open space of the page, outside and inside of my body, pulling me under. Writing is dangerous as there is always a risk of the chance, the *tuché*, for the individual who writes. Though some inkling of agency is maintained in the process, at any moment, it can be carried off as the words flood my thoughts as images and sensory fragments, no longer language. Attempting to capture trauma in language, is to conjure the inevitable chance.

Returning to the initial question, there is some merit in LaCapra's claim that "There is no such thing as writing trauma itself," in that trauma cannot be localized in discrete, dated experience when thinking of time as linear and writing as a belayed effect. However, *writing* is always becoming; it is the text which is the "telling after-effect." Further, writing-trauma is not "working through in analyzing and "giving voice" to the past;" rather, it is the disaster speaking in the 'language' of pain, as Blanchot describes: "It is not you who will speak; let the disaster speak in you, even if it be by your forgetfulness or silence" (WD 4). In the process of writing-trauma, the sudden going under, the aspects that would allow for a cognitive working through are corrupted along with temporality, agency, and subjectivity. The past is not experienced as past and thus not voiced as having taken place in the past. Writing-trauma is circular as writing and

trauma *are* repetition. Given this, the concept of 'working through' (the familiar expression used to indicate some progress in reaching the other side, moving past the trauma) does not capture the phenomenon of writing-trauma. There is no other side, only a looping going-under-overcoming, but no crossing, traversing, or transcendence. Instead, there is a perpetual, incessant revolt of being. This is the trauma-being's ontology and identity. The expression "coming to terms with" the trauma violates the repetition and betrays the individual, as there is no "revolt that could be achieved, and *verified*" (WD 88).

This is why trauma does not fit the scientific model of knowledge, which is sustained on the possibility of measure and verification. Further, repetition, with the corruption of temporality and subjectivity, undermines the epistemological framework of the 'truth-event,' as well as narrative discourse. But, this is not to say that trauma is unknowable and ineffable. The disaster speaks a language of its own; it is situated in a style of writing of its own, which not only is in contrast to scientific and narrative discourse, but fragments language.

Thus, the value of poetic language and fragmentary writing is found in regard to knowing and writing-trauma. It is not easy to say that there is value in traumatic experience, especially for those who undergo such experience. As has been stressed, those who know the horror of knowing horror do not desire any such knowledge. Yet, this horror is a part of the human condition and a part of our history. It is not something that we are exempt from—we must submit to it. And even if we can never know the trauma of others in the way that they have direct embodied knowledge, for those who endure trauma, one last wish remains: "know what has happened, do not forget, and at the same time never will you know" (WD 82). The more we experience trauma, the more valuable such writing becomes, not because it is a testament of what

has taken place, not because it is a 'working-through,' but because it is a crying out of a fundamental aspect of suffering as human.

Writing-trauma discloses fragments of philosophy. If we can say that literature "gets at" trauma in a way that ordinary philosophical and, certainly, scientific discourse does not, then the fragmentary imperative is also a demand on philosophy. That is, the imperative is for philosophy to allow for a language that, in its functioning, cracks and fissures in meaning.

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