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Hearsay, Testimony and Conference: Citationality in the Works of Marguerite Duras, Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida.

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HEARSAY, TESTIMONY AND CONFERENCE: CITATIONALITY IN THE WORKS OF MARGUERITE DURAS, MAURICE BLANCHOT AND JACQUES DERRIDA

A Dissertation

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In loving memory of
Mary Eloise O'Connor Criner

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation involves an examination of the effects and implications of three modes of citationality: hearsay, testimony and conference. As a term coined by Jacques Derrida, citationality involves the problematization of questions related to borders and limits and to the attempt to re-present the originary event thought to lie beyond the performance of citational acts of bearing witness.

In chapter one I situate my project theoretically through an examination of the principles of deconstruction. In particular, Jacques Derrida's work on the metaphysical concepts of presence and speech, in terms of repeatability or iterability, bears heavily on my study. As a function of iterability, citationality refers to the potential inherent in every element, textual, linguistic, or otherwise, to be disseminated and cited in a plurality of contexts and to assume a new and different meaning. It is from this perspective, from the possibility of citation, of exceeding limits and escaping regulation, that I conduct my analysis of what I call "hearsay," "testimony," and "conference" in certain twentieth century texts.

Chapters two through four focus on an application of the previously mentioned modes of citationality in the texts of Marguerite Duras, Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida, respectively. In chapter two, I examine Marguerite

Duras' Lol V. Stein cycle in which a reliance on hearsay impedes textual closure while generating a multiplicity of other texts that cite and re-cite one another. In chapter three, I analyze several *récits* by Maurice Blanchot in terms of testimony. These texts reveal the problematic in attempting to access and re-present that which has already been present and result in an effect of *mise-en-abîme* of citations. Chapter four involves a reading of several polylogues by Jacques Derrida as instances of conference. Their insistence on a plurality of voices enables a deconstruction of the *logos* of restitution.

While chapters two through four are devoted to a narrow application of a practice of citationality, chapter five marks the expansion of my topic. In this chapter, I situate previously raised questions of citationality in contemporary contexts with political and cultural implications.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation involves an examination of the concept of citationality, a term coined by Jacques Derrida through his extensive work on the deconstruction of fundamental elements of the Western metaphysical tradition. What is to be gained from my study of hearsay, testimony and conference is a discussion of citational modes that problematize questions of borders, of accessing and re-presenting the "true event" that precedes the performance of these acts of bearing witness. This project therefore raises questions pertaining to speech and presence as well as origin through an analysis of the texts of Marguerite Duras, Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida.

In the first chapter I establish the theoretical framework that informs this study. Since my work on hearsay, testimony and conference has grown out of Jacques Derrida's reworking of logocentric concepts, a presentation of the basic principles of deconstruction, as relates to citationality, constitutes the majority of this chapter.

In the first section of this chapter, I will provide a synopsis of Antoine Compagnon's comprehensive study of the citation while revealing how his approach proves too limiting for my project. In *La Seconde main, ou le travail de la citation*, Compagnon insists that citation functions within a closed system where the citation, or foreign textual element, is safely inserted in the host text,

protected by quotation marks which prohibit contact and thus contamination between texts. He declares cases of citation void of quotation marks as out of control and capricious. However, it is my contention that all citation has the potential to escape attempts at control and regulation, as my analyses of various functions of citationality will show.

With the evident limitations of Compagnon's study, I turn to Derrida's work on the iterability, or repeatability, of signs which emphasizes the graphic qualities common to all forms of language that enable their potential citation and re-citation. This, of course, necessarily entails an overview of what Derrida considers to constitute the Western metaphysical tradition. I will commence with an explication of Plato's and Aristotle's privileging of the *phone*, followed by an overview of Ferdinand de Saussure's work on the sign and John Austin's definition of the performative as a component of speech act theory, two further instances of the insistence of speech over writing that bear heavily on my discussion of citationality.[1] These sections prove to be an indispensable step toward achieving an understanding of the concepts informing my project.

Chapters two through four constitute a narrow application of my practice of citationality in the works of Marguerite Duras, Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida.

Through my analysis of their texts, I have found that different functions of citationality are in operation. In chapter two, for example, I focus on hearsay in the series of texts by Marguerite Duras that are collectively known as the Lol V. Stein cycle, which includes three novels and three films.[2] Although numerous critics have already published a considerable amount of work on Duras' various literary endeavors in general, and this cycle in particular, none have explicitly addressed the reliance and insistence on hearsay as a function of citationality in her texts. Many critics, in fact, have employed psychoanalytic and feminist approaches to discuss issues such as feminine writing and voicing and autobiography. Sharon Willis, for example, has such a perspective evident in her discussion of the Lol V. Stein cycle as does Susan Cohen.[3] Certainly, Jacques Lacan's well-known essay "Hommage à Marguerite Duras" is an excellent example of this approach to Duras' work.[4] Trista Selous is one critic who contests the essentialist feminist perspective in her treatment of Duras opting instead to examine gender issues in a non-essentialist manner.[5] These critics are but a few who have worked on the Lol V. Stein cycle and are fairly representative of the types of studies that have been undertaken to date.

Although these contributions are undeniably important to the field of Duras studies, my project marks a departure

from this approach, since I have chosen to explore the effects of the citational mode of hearsay in the Lol V. Stein cycle. This cycle of texts proves an interesting choice for a discussion of hearsay considering the way in which these texts are woven together. In other words, one text generates, in its wake, another text and each text is replete with echoes, or rumors and gossip, of the other texts in the cycle. I contend in fact that there is a gradual radicalization of hearsay throughout the cycle. The textual effects produced by such a movement call into question presumed notions regarding narrative authority.

Following my treatment of hearsay in chapter two, I proceed to discuss testimony as found in the *récits* written by Maurice Blanchot: *La Folie du jour*, *L'arrêt de mort* and *L'instant de ma mort*.[6] Relatively few studies have been done on at all on Blanchot's works, in particular these short narratives, or *récits*. In fact, the majority of the criticism on Blanchot focuses on the implications of his theoretical and philosophical writings, especially *L'espace littéraire* and *L'écriture du désastre*.[7] Emmanuel Lévinas, Roger Laporte, Michel Foucault and Julia Kristeva are among those who have worked on his theoretical texts. Of course, Jacques Derrida stands as the notable exception since he has indeed treated Blanchot's *récits* such as *La Folie du jour*, *L'arrêt de mort*, and *L'instant de ma mort* in "Living

On: Borderlines," "Pas" and *Demeure: Fiction et témoignage*, respectively.

While referring to Derrida's important work on Blanchot, I will offer a fresh approach to Blanchot's *récits* by exploring the impact of citational practices in these narratives. I will treat the texts not in terms of hearsay, as I did for the unique situation of the Lol V. Stein cycle, but rather in terms of testimony owing to the first-person narrative voice common to these *récits*. Like hearsay, testimony produces textual effects that call into question the possibility of re-presenting the event being related. Again, textual progression becomes impossible and the *récit* necessarily remains merely the possibility of re-citing.

For chapter four, I will explore conference as a function of citationality, as found in three plurivocal texts, "Restitutions," *Feu la cendre* and *Droit de regards* by Jacques Derrida. My decision to discuss Derrida's polylogues holds interesting implications for my project. Since Derrida's work on iterability and citationality provides the theoretical framework for my study, which thereby allows the texts of Duras and Blanchot to become objects of analysis, my discussion of Derrida's polylogues enables them, in their turn, to also become objects of reading. This maneuver effectively folds Derrida into my

practice of citationality in that his work helps to establish my practice while also becoming part of it.[8]

Most critical attention granted to Derrida's writings involves discussions of his philosophical perspectives concerning deconstruction. Geoffrey Bennington, Jonathan Culler, Rodolphe Gasché and David Wills, to name but a few, have each written considerably on the issues raised by deconstruction. Yet, the lack of work on Derrida's polylogic writing practice as evidenced in "Restitutions," "Droit de regards" and *Feu la cendre* demonstrates the need for such a study of conference.

Since conference involves a discussion or an exchange of comments, there is obviously a plurality of voices. This marks a significant departure from the texts of Duras and Blanchot. In Jacques Derrida's so-called polylogues, the disunity of narrative voice and, even more importantly, the undecidability of the number and gender of those very voices creates a response to the problems of citationality as seen in the cases of hearsay and testimony. This is accomplished through the deconstruction of the *logos* of restitution, presence and origin.

While chapters two through four involve the narrow application of three modes of citationality in the texts of Duras, Blanchot and Derrida, chapter five expands my examination of citationality to briefly touch on other textual forms of bearing witness, including Latin American

testimonio, Holocaust survivors' testimonies, President Clinton's impeachment and talk shows. By enlarging the scope of my project and situating it the context of cultural studies, I am able to address relevant, contemporary political and sociological issues affected by the questions I have previously raised in terms of citationality.

Notes

1. Aristotle, *Poetics*, translated by Leon Golden (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1981); J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962); Plato, *The Republic*, translated by B. Jowett (New York and London: Doubleday, 1989); Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Paris: Payot, 1973).

2. Generally, the Lol V. Stein cycle consists of the novels *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, *Le Vice-Consul* and *L'amour*. The films of the series are *India Song*, *Son Nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert* and *La Femme du Ganges*. The latter of these films was never released for distribution and is rarely seen. Since I have not had the opportunity to view this film, I have eliminated it from my discussion of Marguerite Duras.

3. Susan Cohen, *Women and Discourse in the Fiction of Marguerite Duras* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1993); Sharon Willis, *Marguerite Duras: Writing on the Body* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

4. Jacques Lacan, "Hommage à Marguerite Duras, du *Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*," in *Marguerite Duras*, ed. Marguerite Duras, Joel Farges and François Barat (Paris: Albatros, 1979).

5. Trista Selous, *The Other Woman: Feminism and Femininity in the Work of Marguerite Duras* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988).

6. Maurice Blanchot, *La folie du jour* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1973), *L'arrêt de mort* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), *L'instant de ma mort* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1994).

7. Maurice Blanchot, *L'écriture du désastre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), *L'espace littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955).

8. This practice is similar to what Jacques Derrida describes as the "re-trait" in "La loi du genre," from *Parages* (Paris: Galilée, 1986).

CHAPTER ONE

CITATION AND CITATIONALITY

Introduction

Citationality is a term I borrow from Jacques Derrida to invoke the radicalized quotational practices inherent in certain twentieth century texts in which there is a problematization of textual borders, or, in other words, a collapse of internal boundaries. Derrida has devoted much attention to what he calls the law of iterability and many of his texts address, in one way or another, its effects as a condition of generalized writing.

In this chapter, I will trace the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and J. L. Austin, among others, as well as Derrida's readings and critiques of them, which remain indispensable to my conceptualization of citationality. For, it is citationality that emerges from the iterability or repeatability that, according to Derrida, conditions all language. This view in turn stems from Derrida's insistence on the generalization of writing, that is, the extension of the rules that condition language, in the conventional sense, to encompass the oral, the written, indeed all forms of utterance. This movement toward a generalization of the conditions governing writing entails a deconstruction of the system that has subjugated writing, in the strict sense, and of the negative terms associated with it such as absence.

What I aim to show in this chapter is that Derrida's movement toward a generalization of writing enables and even evokes my discussion of traditionally oral modes of communication as subgenres of citationality. Through this discussion, I will raise questions of presence and absence, property and authority as well as origin and copy. I will explore how the graphematization of all language and signs problematizes the presumedly rigid borders between speech and writing, producing in its wake textually destabilizing effects.

Since Antoine Compagnon has worked extensively on citation, I will commence with his definition of this term and his explanation of its functioning in terms of semiotics. I hope to demonstrate why such a definition proves insufficient for my project. Having disclosed the limitations of Compagnon's model of citation, I will subsequently turn to Derrida's notion of citationality which holds numerous possibilities for my project since it allows the calling into question of the limits imposed on writing, not only textually, but also linguistically and philosophically. This obviously necessitates an exploration of Saussure's theory of signs and Derrida's critique of it, particularly in *De la grammatologie*. This deconstruction of positive and negative values imposed, respectively, on speech and writing leads in its turn to a reading of speech act theory as promulgated first by J. L. Austin and

subsequently by his successor John Searle. At this juncture in the chapter, Derrida's critical responses to speech act theory and the status of the performative, as seen in "Signature Evénement Contexte" and "Limited Inc a b c..." in particular, are crucial to the development of an understanding of iterability and citationality.

From such a Derridean perspective, citational modes of communication raise questions of property, authority and origin, in addition to a reconsideration of conventional assumptions regarding speech and writing. In this project I will explore how these issues, which stem from quotational practices where there are no quotation marks to delineate host text from cited text, function in a variety of textual forms. This condition of citationality produces effects of textual destabilization in the selected works by Marguerite Duras and Maurice Blanchot. Subsequent to my discussion of those writers, I will then turn to the polylogues of Jacques Derrida which reveal the emergence of a discourse differing considerably from the hearsay and testimony found to inhabit the Duras and Blanchot texts, in that the polylogues are not necessarily a textual manifestation of citationality but rather a response to it.

Citation

In *La Dissémination*, Derrida writes, "tout commence dans le pli de la citation."[1] As the locus of product and production and the repeated utterance and the utterance of

that repetition, this fold does indeed mark the ultimate point of departure for my project. For it is along that very crease that issues I wish to address become problematized. The question of origin emerges with the inability to distinguish it from its citation/repetition, from its source, thereby rendering this problem of origin endemic. If we can consider the functioning of this fold in much the same way as Derrida's notion of the hymen,[2] than we can treat it as a parergonal structure, a boundary on which citation resides that is neither internal nor external but both at once. Citation is within and without host text and, obviously, we can challenge the usage of such terms as host text and cited text as the borderlines between them become blurred. Citation is a mark of origin, of its source, yet citation is also the mark of difference, of differing and of being deferred from its origin. Reading the fold as parergon calls into question notions of the fold especially as they pertain to proprietorship. It becomes virtually impossible to settle the issue of authority since the fold places the citation on either side of itself at once, thereby rendering any claims to ownership necessarily disputable and ultimately indeterminate.

That citation produces such destabilizing effects on speech, writing, presence and authority is no surprise when we begin to contemplate the dictionary definition of the

word "citation" itself. The English verb "to cite" is derived from the French verb "citer," a word that initially appeared in legal terminology meaning "to summon." In being cited one is required to present oneself for scrutiny before a court. In juridical terms, citation is related to adduction and the verb "to cite," therefore, implies the presentation of evidence "as an example or means of proof."[3] Evidently, through its usage in law, citation is related to questions of authority and property as well as to matters of proof and truth, which holds interesting implications for my discussion.

Although they are used synonymously with "to cite" and "citation," the English verb "to quote" and its substantive derivative "quotation" are not related to matters of judgement, but rather to the concept and convention of numbers and measure as in, for example, to divide into chapters and verses (*ibid.*, p. 23). This definition of quotation already carries with it the concept of boundaries and division between texts. It is clear to see how it has come to signify a delineation between primary and secondary texts. Like the word "citation," carrying with it juridical connotations, the word "quotation" bears its own useful connotations since what is at stake in matters of citationality is really the rupture of those divisions and boundaries between cited and host text.

Although "quotation" has now come to suggest the insertion of markers in the text to delineate sections and fragments of "other" texts, it did not always carry with it this significance. Indeed, prior to the use of quotation marks as an indicator of cited passages, italics were employed as early as the 16th century to mark citations in texts. The innovation of quotation marks, or "les guillemets" in French, came with the advent of printing and were first employed by the printer Guillemet from whom these marks received their name in French. In order that a text not be inadvertently attributed to the incorrect source, quotation marks have become common practice in writing. Quotation marks serve then to differentiate the same from the other, the "main discourse" from the secondary, foreign textual fragment.

To arrive at a contemporary understanding of the function of quotation and to provide fundamental background knowledge for my study of citationality, I will first discuss Antoine Compagnon's exhaustive study of the citation, *La seconde main, ou le travail de la citation*.[4] Compagnon commences his work by examining the conditions of repetition which "regulate" citation's use and role in language.

Compagnon undertakes this study by borrowing from both Emile Benveniste and Ferdinand de Saussure. In his *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, Benveniste employs the

distinction between "langue" and "discours," evoking, obviously, Saussure's "langue" and "parole," but with one important difference. For Benveniste, "discours" is not synonymous with "parole." This is due to the fact that Benveniste insists on "discours" as a "manifestation vivante de la langue."[5]

Thus "langue" refers to the system/the global and "discours" to the individual/the actualization of an element of that system. Compagnon extends this notion to the extensive/the infinite and the comprehensive, where the extensive is the ensemble of elements in the system and the comprehensive is the relation of elements within that same system (*La Seconde main, ou le travail de la citation*, p. 50). He writes:

> Sous le régime de l'infini, du hasard, de l'éventuel, la moindre répétition, non plus contrainte mais contingente, est pertinente et signifiante, elle est un fait de langage, une relation à analyser comme telle: elle devient une forme capable d'une fonction. Alors que dans la langue il n'y a que des choses répétées, dans le discours il y a la répétition des choses. (*Ibid.*, p. 52)

In this passage, Compagnon explicates the distinction between "langue" and parole" while attempting to establish the validity of undertaking the study of discursive repetitions, previously dismissed by linguists as impertinent compared to studies of linguistic repetitions.

Yet, if we reconsider the previously mentioned strict legal definition of citation as a presentation of

evidence/proof, citation always already refers to an act of repetition. It establishes, indeed, a double articulation between the singular and the universal. This dialectic of the universal and the singular called into play by an act of repetition is elaborated on by Gilles Deleuzes:

> Si la répétition existe, elle exprime à la fois une singularité contre le général, une universalité contre le particulier, un remarquable contre l'ordinaire, une instantanéité contre la variation, une éternité contre la permanence. A tous égards, la répétition, c'est la transgression. Elle met en question la loi....[6]

In other words, repetition, and likewise citation, as one of its basic forms, concerns an instance that is neither interchangeable nor replaceable. It is, according to Deleuze, the condition of the universality of a singular. Repetition is described as universal, because, to be recognized as repetition, its singular instance must occur more than once; this is not unlike Derrida's insistence on the iterability of the sign, a concept crucial to the phenomenon of citationality to be addressed later in this chapter.

Discursive repetitions are always already interdiscursive since the repetition would occur in at least two different instances, or discourses, and the relationship between one discourse and another must be taken into consideration. For Compagnon, citation is but one example of possible interdiscursivity. Other examples would include pastiche, proverb, commentary and imitation.

I, however, view the above as forms of citation, since the most rudimentary repetition defined by Compagnon is "répétition d'unité de discours dans un autre discours; elle apparaît comme la relation interdiscursive primitive" (*La seconde main*, p. 54). Therefore, for Compagnon, this simplest form of repetition must be considered not only as a product, "enoncé," but also as a production, an "énonciation répétante," a definition the dictionary fails to take into account, acknowledging simply the citation as product.

In order to account for his insistence on citation as a system, incorporating, as mentioned above, both product and production, Compagnon devises a scheme that becomes more elaborate throughout his study. The fundamental system of citation as conceived by Compagnon is composed of two texts, "T1" and "T2" and the authors of those texts, "A1" and "A2," respectively. The citation itself is denoted by the letter "t," representing its function as the object of exchange between the two texts. Obviously, a potential problem inherent in such a formulation is that it assumes that "t," the repeated utterance, appears identical in both texts. There is no allowance made at all for the possibility that the citation will be modified, a fairly serious oversight since repetition itself marks difference; indeed, all repetition is itself difference. As Deleuze writes, "La différence est entre deux répétitions...la

répétition aussi est entre deux différences" (*Différence et répétition*, p. 104).

Yet, the apparently reductive schematization of Compagnon's system of citation does enable, as he aims to demonstrate, one to confer the value of sign to the repeated utterance, or citation, because of its appearance in the two systems, where "S1"="T1"+"A1" and "S2"="T2"+"A2." This move allows Compagnon to undertake a study of citation as discursive repetition in much the same way as linguistic repetitions are studied by linguists as pertinent elements of language.

Compagnon's rather conventional view of the role of citation in texts establishes an apparent dichotomy between so-called good citations and bad ones. For him, good types of citations play by the rules. Quotation marks, for example, escort or accompany "t" into "S2," where it remains distinguished from its host text "T2." There is no confusion instigated by its appearance as a foreign element in another text, because the quotation marks serve not only to mark it as such, but also to prevent the contamination of the host text.

Compagnon devotes the last sections of his study to a discussion of the "bad" forms of citation, which he can only describe as anomalies and perversions of writing. It is these cases that Compagnon views as the particular instances that emerge when there is a loss of markers that

would normally contain the citation within its boundaries in the host text. Once the quotation marks are lost, so too is the regulatory function of citation on behalf of the law of writing:

> La structure 'normale' de la citation, qui a la fonction d'un principe de régulation de l'écriture, met en relation deux systèmes sémiotiques, chacun présumé complet et autonome (composé d'un sujet et d'un texte) ainsi qu'indépendant de l'autre. La liaison instaurée par une citation est donc partielle et ponctuelle. Une aberration pour cette structure est une citation qui abolit l'indépendance des deux systèmes, qui les accouple ou même les confond - c'est le cas de la copie. (*La seconde main*, p. 370-71)

This passage raises several interesting notions that must be addressed. First, if the function of quotation marks is to act as a regulator, as a code of the law of writing that maintains textual boundaries both externally and internally, then it is clear that the loss of such marks jeopardizes this very system and serves to threaten the economy of writing. Any instance of citation is thereby rendered dangerous. As Deleuze insists, all repetition "met en question la loi..." (*Différence et répétition*, p. 9), whereas it is evident that for Compagnon only the occasional "aberrant" citation produces such an effect.

A second problematic arises in the formula for the function of the citation in that it assumes there to be an autonomous, completely closed system of author-producer and text-product that remains impenetrable, immune from "foreign" influence. The allowed exception is the brief

insertion of "t" carefully and protectively bound in quotation marks to keep its impact on the second semiotic system at a minimum. The limitations of Compagnon's study become apparent here through his insistence on the "texte" and "hors-texte," which he clearly delineates and in terms of which citation is the mere partial and temporary insertion of a "foreign" text into another.

What Compagnon evidently views as an aberration and, hence, a negative, unfortunate phenomenon is the deviation of certain contemporary writings from the code of citation which institutes the regulation. He even goes so far as to question "la valeur de cette sorte de répétition" which he finds much too unsystematic and unmotivated (*ibid*, p. 370). Finally, he reproaches Borges who "pervertit systématiquement l'économie classique de l'écriture" (*ibid.*). Therefore, when a citation can no longer be readily recognized as an "insertion" set off typographically from the "main discourse," the relationship between texts becomes what Claudette Sartiliot calls a "form of complicity" (*Citation and Modernity: Derrida, Joyce and Brecht*, p. 20).

It is my contention that all forms of citation fit into the category for which Compagnon reserves "la citation capricieuse." Indeed, my study reveals the potential inherent in all citations to "échappe[r] au contrôle" and

"f[aire] douter de la notion même d'équilibre" (*La seconde main*, p. 362).

Citationality

As stated earlier in this chapter, my project entails an exploration of concepts such as presence, iterability, intentionality and, of course, citation itself. Given the limitations found in Compagnon's definition of citation, it is instructive to consider how Derrida approaches the question of citationality. In order to arrive at an understanding of Derrida's term, we must begin by tracing his re-conceptualization of speech and writing. It is Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* that contributes an essential component to Derrida's critique of the Western logocentric tradition as evidenced by his reading of Saussure in *De la grammatologie*, one of the most elemental texts of deconstruction.[7] In this text Derrida undertakes a deconstruction of Saussure's *Cours* which he views as emblematic of the problematic of western metaphysics in general. He accomplishes this by drawing the connection, as Spivak explains, of:

> ...this *phono*centrism to *logo*centrism -- the belief that the first and last things are the logos, the Word, the Divine Mind, the infinite understanding of God, an infinitely creative subjectivity, and, closer to our time, the self-presence of full consciousness.[8]

Derrida necessarily elucidates the link that has long been established between *phone* and the *logos* by tracing the voice and speech as the closest means of expression and

communication to the soul, to truth and to thought. He relates how speech has come to be intertwined with the phenomenological concept of "hearing-oneself-speak" as a means of coming into self-presence:

> On pressent donc déjà que le phonocentrisme se confond avec la détermination historiale du sens de l'être en général comme *présence* avec toutes les sous-déterminations qui dépendent de cette forme générale et qui organisent en elle leur système et leur enchaînement historial (présence de la chose au regard comme *eidos*, présence comme substance/essence/existence (*ousia*), présence temporelle comme pointe (*stigmè*) du maintenant ou de l'instant (*nun*), présence à soi du cogito, conscience, subjectivité, co-présence de l'autre et de soi, intersubjectivité comme phénomène intentionnel de l'ego, etc.). Le logocentrisme serait donc solidaire de la détermination de l'être de l'étant comme présence. (*De la grammatologie*, p. 22)

This confounding of speech with presence in all its "sous-déterminations" holds rather serious implications for writing. As is the case with traditional binary oppositions (speech/writing, presence/absence, male/female, etc.), one term maintains privileged status over the other. This hierarchization of orality over writing has been documented as far back as Plato and Aristotle and since what is at stake in this project are questions of the "written," I find it necessary to examine these assumptions of speech as opposed to writing in order to demonstrate how they are called into question by the phenomenon of citationality.

In *De la grammatologie*, Derrida addresses the value distinctions imposed on speech and writing, revealing that speech has been privileged for its immediacy and it has

maintained its dominant status over writing as the primary mode of communication due to its presumed accuracy and directness via "un rapport de proximité essentielle et immédiate avec l'âme" (*ibid.*, p. 22).

This tendency to subjugate writing in favor of speech can be traced to Plato and Aristotle, in particular, who wrote of the relation of the voice and speech to the soul. If we briefly review Plato's work, we can trace for ourselves the emergence of such a view. In the famous and often cited Book III of *The Republic*, Plato unveils his classification of literary genres. The two forms of *lexis*, or the way of speaking, are mimesis and diagesis, which compose the two modes of repetition of others' words. Mimesis is basically synonymous with imitation and involves what Plato calls indirect style, where the poet assumes the voice of another. Diagesis, or the simple mode, involves the poet speaking in his own voice to narrate the story.[9]

As explained in *The Republic*, Plato expresses his desire to exclude forms of poetry that invoke dangerous lamentations and excessive laughter which would potentially impede readers from learning the value of shame and self-control. It is during this discussion that Plato proceeds to reproach his contemporary poets, most notably Homer, for the deceitful assumption of another's voice in order to narrate his story. Additionally, poets who employ the mixed style, that is, a combination of direct and indirect

styles of narration, obviously weaken their poetry by resorting to the mimetic form in order to accomplish the story (*ibid.*).

Homer, for example, employed the mixed style and the following passage illustrates the difference between the direct and indirect styles. Simple narration proceeds as: "So now they were in the deep valley of Lacedaimon, and drove up to the gate of the illustrious King Menelaos,"[10] whereas imitation would result in the concealment of Homer as narrator resulting in the narration of the passage in the first person, as if Homer had assumed the identity of one of King Nestor's sons.

In *The Poetics*, Aristotle appears to diverge drastically from Plato's classification of literary genres when he states that mimesis is the form of all literary endeavors. Indeed, he valorizes mimesis as the ambition of all poets. Its two subgenres are direct style and indirect style and it is here that the undeniable proximity to Plato's schema is revealed.[11] Aristotle's direct style corresponds to Plato's notion of imitation or mimesis where the poet assumes the voice of another as a means of narration. Aristotle's notion of indirect style or narrative also finds its synonym in Plato's mode of diagesis. Aristotle however declares the recit of mixed styles as the universal literary form where verbal and non-verbal matters are represented in the same way. Genette

reveals the problems inherent in such distinctions in his essay "Frontières du récit."[12]

Returning to Plato, we see that he proceeds to establish a distinction between *eikon* and *phantasma* in *The Sophist*.[13] He further differentiates between types of repetition and imitation and privileges one form of copy over another. *Eikon* are copies that respect the proportion of the object being copied or represented. Such copies resemble the idea so very closely that the detection of the copy on the very basis of the object copied would not be an easy task. This type of copy flows directly from the thought/idea and as such is the truest form of copy. *Phantasma*, on the other hand, consists of copies of copies, where there is movement from *eikon* to copies of it resulting in the subsequent prevalence of distortion and the creation of a sense of illusion, or of *simulacra*. It is interesting to note that Compagnon actually introduces the question of citation as *simulacra*, a copy of a copy, or the repetition of another's words. This conception renders citation a poor image of thought, already removed from the *eidos*, or thought.

Two discourses arise therefore out of Plato's and Aristotle's contemplations on literary genres and the imitative nature of narration, that of direct and indirect. Whereas Plato dismisses mimetic forms, or the indirect style, for the poet's deception in assuming another's voice

and thereby producing *simulacra*, Aristotle, at first appearance, rehabilitates mimesis by validating its role as the ambition of all artists. Yet, a closer look at Aristotle's divisions of genres actually reveals a proximity to those of Plato and even more importantly, their views on writing indicate its devaluation.

If we consider Plato's formulation of thought/idea and copies drawn directly from it, contrasted with copies based on those copies, we can see, by extension, how these concepts of *eikon* and *phantasma* implicate speech and writing. Speech draws directly from thought or "les états de l'âme" whereas writing is a copy of that copy, a derivative prone to distortion and inaccuracy owing to its distance from thought.

Despite the commonly held belief that Derrida uses the first part of *De la grammatologie* to discredit Saussure's *Cours de la linguistique générale* for being steeped in logocentric views that merely sustain the privileging of the *phonè*, it is indeed true that Saussure actually provides his own limited critique of the metaphysics of presence, an important aspect of his text that readers of *De la grammatologie* often neglect. However, in spite of Saussure's re-articulation of language in terms of the arbitrary and difference, there are, as we shall see, moments where his work does seem to affirm the logocentrism against which he attempts to articulate his theory.

What is especially important in Saussure's conception of language as a system of signs is that it is based on an understanding of their operation as arbitrary and conventional. For example, he illustrates the arbitrariness of the sign with the word "soeur" which is linked "par aucun rapport intérieur avec la suite de sons s-ö-r qui lui sert."[14] In other words, each sign is defined by its relation to other signs and not by any essential properties it may possess. A sign can thus be described as "immotivé, c'est-à-dire arbitraire par rapport au signifié, avec lequel il n'a aucune attache naturelle dans la réalité" (*ibid.*, p. 101).

The relational nature of systems indicates that there are no positive terms; there are only differences. As Saussure explains:

> ...dans la langue il n'y a que des différences. Bien plus: une différence suppose en général des termes positifs entre lesquels elle s'établit, mais dans la langue il n'y a que des différences *sans termes positifs*" (*Ibid.*, p. 166).

This system of differences is in fact how Saussure conceives of what constitutes "langue" or language. If "langue" refers to the system of signs, then Saussure's term "parole" designates the speech events that render the system, or "langue" possible. This is not unlike Derrida's notion of the originary trace which he identifies in Saussure's system in that there is only infinite referral

to other traces without a fixed, inherent meaning in any one trace.

While Saussure's work offers an innovative means of considering language and has had an immeasurable impact on various aspects of post-structuralist thinking, the logocentric aspects with which Derrida takes issue emerge in Saussure's attitude to writing, which, as in Plato, is relegated to a secondary and derivative status in the *Cours*. According to Saussure:

> ...langue et écriture sont deux systèmes de signes distincts; l'unique raison d'être du second est de représenter le premier; l'objet linguistique n'est pas défini par la combinaison du mot écrit et du mot parlé; ce dernier constitue à lui seul cet objet" (*Cours de linguistique générale*, p. 45).

With the spoken word and the spoken word alone constituting the object, writing, therefore, is merely a device that allows for the representation of speech and, if we accept Saussure's contention, does not need to be considered in a discussion of the sign. It is this apparent dismissal of writing that Derrida regards as yet another example of the privileging of the *phonè*. This hierarchization of speech over writing is endemic to the Western metaphysical tendency to treat writing as a dangerous artifice, or like the *pharmakon* offered in Plato's *Phaedrus*, a remedy that is simultaneously treated as a poison.[15]

The fundamental basis of the connection between speech and thought stems from the privileging of presence, as

mentioned previously. Derrida views this problematic as one of equating the "être de l'étant" with "présence," where presence refers to that of the thing, to presence as in essence and existence, to presence as temporal in the "here" and the "now" and finally, presence as in conscious subjectivity:

> Au regard de ce qui unirait indissolublement la voix à l'âme ou à la pensée du sens signifié, voire à la chose même...tout signifiant, et d'abord le signifiant écrit, serait dérivé. Il serait toujours technique et représentatif. Il n'aurait aucun sens constituant. Cette dérivation est l'origine même de la notion de "signifiant." La notion de signe implique toujours en elle-même la distinction du signifié et du signifiant, fût-ce à la limite, selon Saussure, comme les deux faces d'une seule et même feuille. Elle reste donc dans la descendance de ce logocentrisme qui est aussi un phonocentrisme: proximité absolue de la voix et de l'être, de la voix et du sens de l'être, de la voix et de l'idéalité du sens. (*De la grammatologie*, pp. 22-23).

Jonathan Culler elucidates the intertwining of *phonè* with the *logos* seen in the expression "s'entendre parler" which means not only "hearing-oneself-speak" but also "understanding oneself" as in the phenomenological sense of coming into full presence. According to Culler, there are no grounds for claiming that voice delivers thoughts directly and precisely even though that appears to be the case when one hears oneself speak at the moment of speaking. As Culler points out, speech, just as writing, is a "sequence of signifiers...open to the process of interpretation."[16] This view follows Derrida's contention that if writing is defined by qualities traditionally

assigned to it, then speech, by extension, can likewise be considered a form of writing. He states, "Le langage 'originel,' 'naturel,' etc., n'ait jamais existé, [qu']il n'ait jamais été intact, intouché par l'écriture, [qu'il] ait toujours été lui-même une écriture" (*De la grammatologie*, p. 82). It is here that Derrida's formulation of "l'écriture généralisée" emerges as an infrastructure to which oral language, just as writing, in the conventional sense of the word, belongs. Derrida attributes the elements traditionally pertaining exclusively to writing to generalized writing, which encompasses speech as well. Geoffrey Bennington explains:

> "Writing" implies repetition, absence, risk of loss, death; but no speech would be possible without these values; moreover, if "writing" has always meant a signifier referring to other signifiers, and if, as we have seen, *every* signifier refers only to other signifiers, then "writing" will name properly the functioning of language in general.[17]

By rearticulating conceptions of speech and writing and by deconstructing the hierarchy that privileges speech as presence over writing and the absence it denotes, Derrida initiates a movement toward the graphematization of language, both oral and written.

The graphematic in general comprehends five basic systems as outlined by Rodolphe Gasché in *The Tain of the Mirror*. Briefly, these systems are that of the "arche-trace," "différance," supplementarity, "re-mark" and iterability.[18] Although all of these systems are

intertwined and overlap one another, for the purposes of my discussion of citationality, I will focus, obviously, on the question of iterability since it is, quite simply, the possibility of repeatability and, as such, bears most directly on my study. Now that we have viewed all language in general in terms of the graphematic, following Derrida's deconstruction of the binary opposition speech and writing, as found in Saussure's discussion of the sign, we shall consider the performative utterance as defined by J.L. Austin.

Speech Acts

The movement toward the concept of generalized writing enables an examination of Speech Act Theory as promulgated by J. L. Austin that will in turn bring us one step closer to comprehending what is understood by the term citationality. Because Derrida's reading of Austin's text and the subsequent polemic it provoked with Searle, commonly thought of as Austin's greatest disciple, are crucial to the development of the concept of citationality, I find it indispensable to devote attention to the basic principles of this theory.

In *How To Do Things With Words*, Austin offers his working definition of the performative utterance as compared to the constative, where the performative does not describe or affirm and is neither true nor false, but instead "performs" a "speech act."[19] This differentiation

of constatives and performatives arose out of Austin's own critique of the belief that the important element of statements is their "truth" or "falsity." While Austin's argument against this tradition shares some common points with Derrida's work, it, like Saussure's text, ultimately discloses its entrenchment in that very tradition. Through his discussion of what constitutes the performative, Austin ends up reaffirming phonocentrism.

Regarding the constative, Austin describes this type of utterance as a statement of fact, as in a report that can be either true or false. A performative, on the other hand, is an utterance that participates in doing an action (performing something) which normally would not be described as saying something. It is an utterance necessary to accomplish an act and so conforms to pre-established societal norms and conventions. One of the most excellent examples of the performative cited by Austin is the utterance "I do" spoken during a marriage ceremony. Such a phrase is considered performative, since it is indeed "contractual" or "declaratory" (*How to Do Things With Words*, p. 6) and the utterance of those words is part of the performance of an act. Shoshana Felman explains that such an utterance involves the production and the accomplishment of the event and not its description.[20] It is neither true nor false but only successful or unsuccessful. Austin uses the terms "felicitous" and

"infelicitous," respectively, to denote the success or failure of any given performative. According to Austin, a felicitous speech act occurs when correctness of form and propriety of context are followed. As Christopher Norris states, "To fail in any of these counts is to fall into idle talk or other more insidious kinds of linguistic delinquency."[21] Furthermore, Austin categorizes the types of failure of infelicitous performatives, which he considers as either misfires or abuses. Misfires result when the act, or promise, is not carried out. Abuses, on the other hand, are acts achieved, but in bad faith. An example is a marriage ceremony conducted under duress, where one of the parties involved goes through with the act despite (his/her) intentions to the contrary.

At this juncture in *How To Do Things With Words*, Austin commences his categorization of the performative into serious and non-serious types of uses, and he excludes the non-serious performative as an "ill" (*ibid.*, p. 21). He asserts that "a performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy" (*ibid.*, p. 22). On the grounds that such an instance of language use is not serious because it acts in ways "*parasitic* upon its normal use - ways which fall under the *etiolations* of language," Austin excludes it from consideration in his discussion. As Culler points out, the

use of the word "parasitic" to describe non-serious uses of language suggests a certain supplementarity, that such categories are in addition to "normal," serious language uses (*On Deconstruction*, p. 108). Obviously, this alludes to a "restatement of the philosophic stance that privileges 'speech' at the expense of writing," (Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, p. 109). In conformity with the sign as defined by Saussure in terms of the spoken word, writing exists for Austin also outside of the system of language, as a derivative, a signifier of a signifier (*De la grammatologie*, p. 22).

Austin's assertion that literary language should not be considered an ordinary and normal use of language stems from his belief that, as Sandy Petrey notes, "When words enter a text...they move beyond the reach of the social conventions with which they must interact in order to perform."[22] According to Austin, the conventions of correctness and propriety that guide the performative cease to operate when language is used non-seriously. Literary language, in particular, as Petrey writes, is "'parasitic'...an enfeebled 'etiolation' of language...a copy rather than an original, an echo rather than speech" (*ibid*, p. 51). Petrey goes on to question Austin's reasoning for his acts of exclusion by posing the question:

> Agreed that I can't do what Donne orders when I read his injunction to go and catch a falling star or get with child a mandrake root, why does that mean the *absence* of conventions rather than

> the *presence* of the conventions defining literary language? (*Ibid*, p. 52)

Indeed, Petrey concludes, it would make the difference between "interpretation versus execution of the imperative" (*ibid.*).

What is especially interesting in the case of Austin's exclusions of literary language, is his use of such language in order to illustrate his points. Norris and Petrey both astutely point to the fact that Austin himself resorts to "storytelling and fictionalizing to make his claims about speech act theory" (*Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, p. 109) yet he "excludes the literary from his theory as a non-serious and abnormal use of language" (*Speech Acts and Literary Theory*, p. 52). In *The Critical Difference*, Barbara Johnson adds, "Left to their own initiative, the very words with which Austin excludes jokes, theater, and poetry from his field of vision inevitably take their revenge"[23] reiterating the inevitability of Austin's employing the very terms and examples to explicate his principles while attempting to exclude those types of examples.

While Johnson asserts that Austin is "done in" by his words and that the "joke ends up being on Austin" (*ibid.*), Shoshana Felman, however, posits her hypothesis that perhaps Austin's exclusion of jokes and literature is really a joke itself, emphasizing the playful aspects of his work (*The Literary Speech Act Don Juan with J.L.*

Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages, p. 27). In fact, she draws comparisons between Austin's and Don Juan's seductive abilities, which Jonathan Culler contends "only emphasizes the inappropriateness of excluding non-serious discourse from consideration" (*On Deconstruction*, p. 118).

Regardless of the seriousness, or lack thereof, of Austin's writings, his definition of the performative in terms of presence, intentionality and, therefore, authenticity remain points with which Derrida takes issue. Since a performative utterance is contractual under appropriate circumstances, the parties involved must act in good faith. This bears heavily on the speaker of the utterance, obviously, because such an utterance of a promise entails an intention to keep one's word. In addition to the speaker uttering the performative seriously and in good faith, a burden falls on the recipient of the utterance as well. If the speaker uses words seriously with the intention of keeping his/her word, the utterance must be taken and understood as such. The promise must be heard by someone and must be understood as a promise. Therefore, an utterance spoken under appropriate circumstances and in good faith qualifies as a serious use of language.

It is quite evident from the preceding passage that Austin's conception of the serious performative utterance relies on speaker and receiver being face-to-face in an oral exchange. Petrey elaborates on Austin's insistence

upon the interlocutors' presence to achieve the utterance: "The key criterion is *presence*: speaker and listener in the presence of one another, meaning and intention present in spoken words, those words themselves present both as the physical reality of sound and the mental reality shared by the communal parties" (*Speech Acts and Literary Theory*, p. 134).

In "Signature Evénement Contexte," (to be referred to as "SEC") Derrida commences his reading of Austin with a commentary on communication, addressing Austin's requirement that the speaker be fully involved with his/her utterances.[24] Derrida writes that the marks produced by the sender/addressor are cut off from him/her yet these marks "continue[nt] de produire des effets au-delà de sa présence et de l'actualité présente de son vouloir-dire, voire au-delà de sa vie même..." (*ibid.*, p. 372). Whereas writing, in the conventional sense, has been viewed as a mere representation to supplant presence and to act as a placeholder in the absence of a receiver, Derrida asserts that these traits of writing are generalizable and hold true for all signs, even those presumed to be determined by "presence" (*ibid.*, pp. 373-74).

It follows therefore that every sign presupposes "un certain absolu de l'absence" that renders it "répétable - itérable - en l'absence absolue du destinataire ou de l'ensemble empiriquement déterminable des destinataires..."

(*ibid.*, pp. 374-75). Indeed, it is this iterability that structures the mark of writing, regardless of the type of writing under consideration (*ibid.*). Gasché defines iterability as a "repetition...that would be capable of accounting for the fact - the possibility and the necessity - that any singular and unique moment must be repeatable in order to exist" (*The Tain of the Mirror*, p. 212).

The iterability (a word traced by Derrida via the Latin "iter" to the Sanskrit "itara," meaning "other") of the mark thus denotes its ability to function in the absence of the addressor and addressee. If a mark can function without and beyond the conscious presence of addressor and addressee, it functions likewise outside the intentionality of the sender/addressor and the response of the receiver/addressee. The possibility that writing can continue to act under these conditions of absence is, according to Derrida:

> Possibilité de prélèvement et de greffe citationnelle qui appartient à la structure de toute marque, parlée ou écrite, et qui constitue toute marque en écriture avant même et en dehors de tout horizon de communuication sémio-linguistique; en écriture, c'est-à-dire en possibilité de fonctionnement coupé, en un certain point, de son vouloir-dire 'originel' et de son appartenance à un contexte saturable et contraignant. ("SEC," p. 381)

The iterability of the mark implies both repetition and difference, or as Gasché prefers, it "subsumes the possibility of repetition and the possibility of alteration" (*The Tain of the Mirror*, p. 212). In other

words, what is reproduced through repetition or citation can never be identical to itself. There will always be a loss, or remainder. Therefore, language always says something other than what one wishes it to say. This is why, for Compagnon, citation takes on the connotation of a "clin d'oeil," a sort of gaming of opening and closing not at all unlike Freud's fort/da game of disappearance and return (*La seconde main*, p. 34). Therefore, when I quote and wink at you, I am at once both present and absent, meaning and not meaning what I say. According to Sartiliot, Derrida shows "through a disseminative process, that the text says *à son insu* (unwittingly, unconsciously) -- and especially *'à l'insu'* of its author -- something other than what it means to say" (*Citation and Modernity*, p. 47).

This is why Derrida sees citation as both dissemination (of seeds) and theft ("vol," which also carries with it the connotation of flight), not at all unlike Deleuze's definition of repetition as both gift and theft (*Répétition et différence*, p. 11). In other words, any mark is capable of rupturing with its "present" context and becoming situated in a plurality of other (con)texts. This point differs radically from Austin's emphasis on the context of the performative as total and complete, which, according to Derrida, suggests that "no *residue* escapes the present totalization" and that there is no "dissemination escaping the unity of meaning" ("SEC," p. 188). Christopher

Norris adds that the very iterability of the mark, spoken or written, is evidence "that speech acts cannot be confined to the unique self-present moment of meaning" (*Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, p. 110). Indeed they "partake of the *differance*, a distancing from the origin that marks all language in so far as it exceeds and pre-exists the speaker's intention" (*ibid.*).

That speech acts, as a form of generalized writing, can escape the "self-present moment of meaning" demonstrates that there is no totalizing context to contain them. It might be that meaning is context-bound, as Culler puts it, but context is itself boundless and as such is open to alteration (*On Deconstruction*, p. 55). Derrida refers to context as "non saturable." He writes:

> Tout signe, linguistique ou non linguistique, parlé ou écrit (au sens courant de cette opposition), en petite ou en grande unité, peut être 'cité,' mis entre guillemets; par là il peut rompre avec tout contexte donné, engendrer à l'infini de nouveaux contextes, de façon absolument non saturable. ("SEC," p. 381)

Thus, the citationality common to all signs means that all signs are subject to being repeated and to taking on new meaning once grafted or cited in new contexts, and despite any intentionality on the part of the speaker.

In his article "Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida," which appeared in the same issue of *Glyph* as did Derrida's article, Searle disputes Derrida's claims of generalized writing and citationality.[25] He insists that

Derrida has misunderstood Austin's work by confusing the terms parasitic discourse, citationality and iterability. He reverses Derrida's statement concerning iterability, writing instead that "the iterability of linguistic forms facilitates and is a necessary condition of the particular forms of intentionality that are characteristic of speech acts" (*ibid.*, p. 208). Norris discloses the fallacy of Searle's argument by stating that Searle "presupposes what Derrida denies to begin with: that language is properly adapted to communicate meaning, and -- as a corollary to this -- that whatever obstructs communication is either deviant or somehow beside the point" (*Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, pp. 111-12). Searle neglects to realize that Derrida considers all language as containing a certain element of indeterminacy no matter whether it is in a "serious" or "non-serious" context. As Norris explains, "language reveals aberrations and never arrives at a stable order of meaning" (*ibid.*, p. 113).

In "Limited Inc a b c...," Derrida's reply to Searle's "Reply," Derrida cites the example of a personal shopping list, a list destined for himself issued by himself, a list which remains utilizable later, "à un autre moment, en mon absence, en l'absence de moi-présent-maintenant."[26] He goes on to say, "Le récepteur et l'émetteur de la shopping list ne sont pas le même: même s'ils portent le même nom et sont forts de l'identité du moi" (*ibid*). If this were not the

case, if repetition did not occur with alteration, then why would one need to bother with a personal shopping list? If there is an alteration, a differentiation that takes place between moments of presence then producing a list that can be written now but function later, in a different time and place, makes sense.

In his reply, Searle ignores what Derrida calls the marginal or fringe cases; yet, it is the very existence or occurrence of such cases that renders potential failures of all performatives, of any communication, a necessary possibility.

In "Limited Inc a b c ...," Derrida explicates this indeterminacy or undecidability in terms of iterability's engendering not only repetition, but also the transformation of that repetition as an alteration or difference that is a function of something being repeated:

> L'itérabilité altère, elle parasite et contamine ce qu'elle identifie et permet de répéter; elle fait qu'on veut dire (déjà, toujours, aussi) autre chose que ce qu'on veut dire, on dit autre chose que ce qu'on dit *et* voudrait dire, comprend autre chose que...etc. (*Ibid.*, p. 33)

Since iterability alters what it enables to repeat or to be repeated, there is always a difference between what is said and what is meant. Here, I would like to recall Compagnon's comparison of quotation, signalled by the quotation mark, with the blink of an eye. It is precisely this alternance between presence and absence, between what is said and meant, that indicates the instability of meaning what one

says and saying what one means. While Searle accuses Derrida of being obsessed with what lies behind utterances, he seems to regard intention as "something separate, intrinsic and behind the expression" where there is no space between the expression and intention. Searle apparently confounds the two, considering expression, or the "utterances" as serious literal speech.

In terms of performativity then, we must reconsider Austin's and Searle's insistence on intention as a determining factor in the success of any utterance. Since performatives also adhere to certain conventions, they repeat and re-cite those stipulations in order to be completed and in this sense are derivative of those very conventions.

In "Burning Acts: Injurious Speech," Judith Butler addresses questions of the prosecution of hate speech in terms of the performative, a category of utterances which exceeds the singularity of its eventhood/occurrence as event owing to the iteration always already inscribed in every mark.[27] She writes:

> If a performative provisionally succeeds...then it is not because an intention successfully governs the action of speech, but only because that action echoes prior actions, and *accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior and authoritative set of practices.* It is not simply that the speech act takes place *within* a practice, but that the act is itself a ritualized practice. (*Ibid.*, p. 157)

Butler's view of the performative basically reiterates the claims that Derrida made in "Signature Evénement Contexte" and points to the fact that the driving force of iterability or citationality must always remain open, must always remain a possibility: "Could a performative utterance succeed if its formulation did not repeat a "coded" or iterable utterance..." (*ibid.*). The answer is obviously no. The success of a performative relates directly to its recognition as conforming to a certain, pre-determined convention. A wedding, for example, could not be considered successful if it did not cite or repeat the code for such ceremonies.

The questions of iterability and contextualization form the crux of David Wills' forthcoming article "Lemming: Reframing the Abyss." Wills explicates the process of iteration or citation as that which is capable of breaching one context only to broach, or to be called to function, in a newly engendered context:

> Once one accepts that sense "moves" in order to function, and Derrida insists that there must be such a break with the intactness of a self-presence in order for there to be any meaning whatsoever -- a play of sense rather than some impossibly ideal immediate and permanent transparency of meaning -- then limiting the extent of that "movement" or spacing becomes an insoluble problem or question. From this point of view language and meaning take place as a form of rupture; they occur over an abyss.[28]

Once citationality comes into play, it enables the generation of a plurality of new contexts, actualized

through the dissemination or grafting of the mark. While the possibility of such an operation must be a given, according to Derrida, the effects of citationality remain to be explored. First, the creation of new contexts stems from Derrida's insistence that there is no "hors-texte;" there are only contexts. Because context begets context interminably, citationality produces an abyssal structure. In other words, the incessant emergence of new contexts in which one finds the iterated mark -- the repeated and altered mark -- places that mark *en abîme*.

This process of *mise-en-abîme* serves to reinforce the rupture with the originary mark, or rather its deferral, therefore rendering access to it impossible and perpetually displaced.

Geoffrey Bennington writes:

> No natural necessity prevents any statement from being lifted from "its" context and grafted into another. Once more, it is writing which best illustrates this general property of language: writing is by definition destined to be read in a context different from that of the act of its inscription (*Jacques Derrida*, p. 85-86).

Citationality therefore emerges from the graphematization of all signs, all language. It allows speech to be discussed in the same ways as writing and holds speech subject to the same problems and questions that have been commonly attributed to writing. While allowing a reformulation of what elements constitute speech and writing, that is, what is "proper" to each, citationality

also produces effects that call into question borders and frames, private and public, authority and property and origin and repetition.

What happens then to traditionally oral modes of communication when they are indeed shown to be subject to the same problems/questions facing writing, in the conventional sense? What happens when these modes function in narrative, in writing? How does this problematize narrative? What does this mean in terms of the performative when these categories of orality subscribe to juridical conventions? How are borders and frames affected, indeed exceeded and ruptured as the result of citationality? These are but a few of the questions to which the following chapters will attempt to respond.

It is precisely this citationality or iterability and its effects that I wish to study in the works by Marguerite Duras, Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida. What I see as the different functions of citationality manifest themselves in the various texts I have selected for this project.

I call such functions "hearsay," "testimony" and "conference" where an insistence on the juridical aspects of these terms allows a questioning of presence, property and authority and as such introduces a problematic, as previously discussed, inherent in all signs: that is, their possibility of being repeated, disseminated and therefore

of coming to function in a variety of contexts escaping attempts to control or regulate their appearance and use in these new contexts. This slippage between contexts and the resultant inability to affix a stable order of meaning merits textual analysis, and has been conspicuously absent from otherwise productive work on Duras, Blanchot and Derrida.

Notes

1. Jacques Derrida, *La Dissémination* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972), p. 351.

2. For Jacques Derrida, the term "hymen" proves useful since it allows for a play with borders. It stands as what separates desire and its fulfillment. For more on this concept see *La Dissémination*.

3. Claudette Sartiliot, *Citation and Modernity* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), p. 22.

4. Antoine Compagnon, *La seconde main, ou le travail de la citation* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1979).

5. Emile Benveniste, *Problèmes de la linguistique générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

6. Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et répétition* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1968), p. 9.

7. Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1967).

8. Gayatari Spivak, introduction to *Of Grammatology*, by Jacques Derrida, translated by Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. lxviii.

9. Plato, *The Republic*, trans. B. Jowett (New York and London: Doubleday, 1989), pp. 71-107.

10. Homer, *The Odyssey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 44.

11. Aristotle, *The Basic Works of Aristotle*. Edited by Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941).

12. Gérard Genette, *Figures III* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972).

13. Plato, *Plato's Sophist* (Savage, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 1990).

14. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Paris: Payot, 1973), p. 100.

15. See "La Pharmacie de Platon" in *La Dissémination* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972).

16. Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 101.

17. Geoffery Bennington, *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 44.

18. Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror* (Cambridge Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1986).

19. J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 4.

20. Shoshana Felman, *The Literary Speech Act Don Juan With J.L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 15.

21. Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (London and New York: Methuen, 1982), p. 109.

22. Sandy Petrey, *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p. 106.

23. Barbara Johnson, *The Critical Difference* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 66.

24. Jacques Derrida, "Signature Evénement Contexte" in *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), p. 369.

25. John Searle, "Reiterating the Difference: A Reply to Derrida" in *Glyph 1* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. 198-208.

26. Jacques Derrida, "Limited Inc. a b c...," (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 21.

27. Judith Butler, "Burning Acts: Injurious Speech" in *Deconstruction is/in America*. Edited by Anselm Haverkamp (New York and London: New York University Press, 1995).

28. David Wills, "Lemming," in *The Cambridge Companion to Derrida*. Edited by T. Cohen (New York: CUP, forthcoming).

CHAPTER TWO

HEARSAY: MARGUERITE DURAS' LOL V. STEIN CYCLE

Introduction

Marguerite Duras' 1964 novel, *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, marked a departure from her previous works and a move toward a more experimental type of writing. Through effects of citationality which prevent an absolute closure of the narrative, *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* in turn generated a multiplicity of texts, including novels, screenplays and films, known collectively as the Lol V. Stein cycle.

Most of the critical work dedicated to this phase of Duras' writing focuses on *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*. Psychoanalysts and feminists in particular have devoted much attention to the character of Lol V. Stein and to the ball scene at T. Beach, especially addressing questions of memory and oblivion as well as feminine writing and desire.[1] Certainly, the importance of these contributions to studies of Duras' work cannot be underscored.

Yet, what I see at work in certain phases of Duras' writing, in particular the Lol V. Stein cycle, which includes the texts of *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, *Le Vice-Consul*, *L'amour*, *India Song* and *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert* are citational practices which undermine the classical economy of textual production to such an extent that the narratives resist closure and remain for

the most part simply a series of attempts at narrative. Such citational practices operate at both the intertextual and intratextual levels in the Lol cycle.[2]

At the intratextual level, that is, within each of these texts themselves, the use of hearsay as a (oral) function of citationality serves to underscore the lack of textual stability, as the narrators are dependent upon it in order to attempt their narratives.

Further destabilization and disruption occurs among the above-mentioned texts where we find a citation and re-citation of narrative aspects of the other texts. The texts of the Lol cycle cite each other. Therefore, the narratives consist of an attempted re-writing, re-constitution of various facets of Lol's own story. The narratives feed off each other, appropriating and thus repeating, yet always with a difference, certain textual threads of the other texts. Citationality among the texts destabilizes the entire cycle by preventing closure from text to text and allowing the generation of a plurality of texts.

While I will certainly discuss textual elements such as characters, places and events which are disseminated and cited within and among these texts, I will also show that what is at stake in this cycle is the progressive radicalization of the function of hearsay marked by the "mot-trou," or "word-hole," as first mentioned in the seminal narrative of the cycle, *Le Ravissement de Lol V.*

Stein. This impossible word or "would-be word" functions as the mark of the origin, which necessarily remains inaccessible. It is my contention, therefore, that since access to the origin is severed, the narratives of the cycle exhibit a strong reliance on hearsay in a futile attempt to recuperate this lost originary event. These repeated efforts manifested in the citational practices of hearsay generate the production of numerous narratives while rendering absolute narrative closure impossible.

In *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, for example, the hearsay upon which the text is built focuses on the effort to recuperate the lost scene of Lol's ravishing, or abandonment, at the T. Beach ball years earlier. The trace of this ball is carried in the "mot-trou" and subsequently becomes articulated through the "cri," or scream. As discussed in the previous chapter, any sign, linguistic or not, is subject to the condition of a potential iterability and, by extension, to citational modes such as hearsay. Yet, the scream is an utterance that is neither within speech nor exterior to it. Therefore, the scream can be viewed as treading the borderline of speech itself, threatening to collapse into the abyss of the "mot-trou."

What I will show is that it is indeed in the subsequent texts of the cycle that the scream is put into circulation through an insistence on hearsay and that this hearsay becomes increasingly focused on the scream. In *Le*

Vice-Consul, for example, the "mot-trou" is found in the scream of both the Vice-Consul and the beggar woman, who are two characters figured as impossible owing to the inability of naming the unnameable of their stories. In other words, the inability to achieve access to what has rendered them impossible in the text results in the marginalization of these two characters by the European community. The impossibility of accessing their stories leaves them incapable of uttering anything other than a scream. This (in)articulation of the "word-hole" remains in circulation throughout the cycle and progressively consumes what is being heard and said.

Proceeding to *L'amour*, we will see how the use of hearsay in the cycle becomes indeed increasingly disjunctive. In this telegraphic-style text that incessantly cites and re-cites itself, the "cri de S. Thala" resonates most clearly and frequently.

Hearsay becomes further radicalized in the film-text *India Song* through the discontinuity between the visual and auditory fields of the film. I see hearsay in this text as condensing further into the re-citation of the "mot-trou," or scream, since the citation of other textual elements, such as places and characters, appears to be increasingly filtered out of circulation.

This condensation of hearsay culminates in *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert*, a film that discloses the

irrecuperable disjunction between the visual and auditory domains through its citation of *India Song*'s soundtrack and its characterless shots of the embassy in ruins. With this final text in the Lol cycle, hearsay has moved from the heard and said to simply the heard. Since all other textual elements of the cycle are apparently portrayed as dead or "deserted," all that remains to circulate is the scream as the (in)articulation of the "mot-trou." As stated earlier, a scream is on the threshold of speech; it is an utterance that, in these instances, is difficult to determine. Therefore, what *Son nom* involves is the point at which everything is still heard, since all is carried within the scream of the word-hole, but nothing is said any more.

It is within this framework that I will first explore each of these texts individually before moving to the cycle as a whole, where I will examine the process and implications of hearsay from a larger intertextual perspective. However, before delving into an analysis of the Lol V. Stein cycle of texts, I intend to first discuss how hearsay and its modes operate as a function of citationality.

Hearsay

Derived from the verbs "to hear" and "to say," hearsay commonly denotes the repetition of what another has already said. In its legal definition, hearsay is "information relayed from another person to the witness before it

reaches the ears of the court or jury."[3] Contrary to testimony, where the (twice present) witness offers first-hand knowledge obtained through the observation of or participation in the event, hearsay suggests the possession of second-hand information by the witness and hearsay evidence therefore consists of extra-judicial statements made by the witness or another. Due to its unreliable and often incompetent character, hearsay evidence is generally inadmissible in court.

Hearsay is a term I choose to use in my discussion of Duras owing to what it evokes between writing and speech as well as property and authority with regard to Derrida's notion of citationality. Often used interchangeably with rumor and gossip, hearsay actually denotes a more general, traditionally oral mode of communication and information dissemination. In order to dispel the commonly held belief that two of hearsay's modes, gossip and rumor, are synonymous, I will briefly differentiate them from one another.

Gossip appears dependent on a pre-established social network for the dissemination of typically personal information regarding a member of the social group. It is therefore spread in a highly selective manner within a fixed social network.

The word gossip is derived from "god-related" and was used to designate godparents. Eventually the meaning of

gossip expanded to include any close friend. In the 18th century Samuel Johnson offered another definition of gossip which linked the word to women for the first time: "one who runs about tattling like women at a lying-in."[4] It was only at the beginning of the 19th century that gossip came to signify a type of conversation and not a person: "idle talk, trifling or groundless rumor; tittle-tattle" (*OED*). The current definition of gossip as given by Patricia Meyer Spacks is "chat or light writing" or "idle talk about someone not present" (*Gossip*, p. 14).

Whereas gossip has traditionally been attributed to women, Duras, in the Lol cycle, employs male narrators in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* and *Le Vice-Consul* who rely on gossip in order to attempt the narrative. Such a technique itself raises interesting questions related to gender and gossip. Indeed, I view this as an oppositional maneuver on Duras' part that destabilizes traditionally held assumptions of women as purveyors of gossip.

Sociological studies have in recent years examined the process and the implications of gossip in social groups as compared with rumor, which will be addressed below. Studies in general have found that gossip holds relevance only for a specific group and as stated above is disseminated selectively only through friends and acquaintances and remains limited to them. According to one researcher, the law of gossiping, of hearing and subsequently repeating

information, is "a privilege extended only to those who mutually recognize themselves as members" of the group.[5] It represents, in other words, an excellent case of "clique phenomenon" (*ibid.*).

In her book entitled *Gossip*, Spacks distinguishes two modes of gossip, distilled malice and serious gossip. The former plays with truths and falsehoods and serves the speaker who seeks some sort of political or social gain at the expense of others by playing with their reputations. Serious gossip, on the other hand, serves to solidify a group's sense of self, by distinguishing insiders from outsiders. As a function of intimacy, serious gossip is talk about others in order to reflect on oneself (*Gossip*, p. 19).

Considered "intellectual chewing gum," gossip usually denotes simple idle talk, as both Heidegger and Kierkegaard suggest. According to Spacks, their definition of gossip is the desire to say something without having to think too much (*ibid.*). Yet there is a danger lurking in the definition of gossip as "idle talk," presumably harmless, for its potential destructiveness is concealed. It does not announce its intention. This contributes to the suspicion that gossip is subversive, particularly in terms of the question of public versus private discourse. It appears that gossip blurs the boundary between the two, giving rise to an anxiety over where gossip goes and how far-reaching

its effects are. For even the most private of communications can create an impact of "incalculable scope" (*Gossip*, p. 23).

Sociological researchers, such as Jörg Bergmann, have found that gossipers themselves are "border-runners" who delight in excursions into the improper. Fully aware of the boundaries, gossip producers disdain the borders between public and private, decent and indecent, truth and lies (*Discreet Indiscretions*, p. 118).

Interestingly enough, gossipers often resort to the use of citations as a means of presenting a "true event" (*ibid.*). At the same time, citation provides the opportunity for a fictionalization since it is a mode of reconstruction. In other words, an event is not copied in quotations in the form of a document, but instead it is re-written. Its subjects, as Bergmann points out, are not imitated, but imitatively stylized, as evidence in the Lol V. Stein cycle suggests, where events are not replicated in the narratives, but reconstructed.

Citations, commonly used in gossip, allow the possibility of exaggeration of what is disseminated. The gossip producer's presentations cannot be verified by the recipients and are as a consequence difficult to doubt. This is especially true when the gossiper indicates through quotations that s/he possesses first-hand information. With such speakers, who possess privileged information, however,

minor deviations from the truth seem harmless, as they are undetectable by the receiver. Gossipers accentuate the extraordinary in order to prove or justify the worthiness of their communication, which enables a dramatization of the original event. Exaggeration can also express a heightened experience of an extreme situation for which there is no adequate possibility of communication.

Quotations therefore constitute a structural basis for exaggeration while at the same time functioning as a means of authentication of the disseminated information. In summary, gossip "raises questions about boundaries, authority and the nature of knowledge" and has "subversive implications" for operations of knowledge (*Gossip*, p. 12).

Although the *Random House Dictionary* offers rumor as a synonym for gossip, rumor is distinguishable in that it suggests a more easily disseminated piece of information. Since it is spread in an unspecific way, its origin is lost. Rumor is information that is neither substantiated nor refuted, and it is spread when there is a strong desire for meaning or a quest for clarification and closure. Like gossip, rumor usually has a pejorative connotation as it is often associated with scandal and mischief. Some social scientists, though, view the purpose and function of rumor more positively (*Discreet Indiscretions*, p. 27). For them rumor is not pathological, but essential to the social process of group problem solving, since it reflects a

normal desire for meaning in events. The propensity for rumor is established when events are important and the news concerning them is ambiguous or lacking.

To briefly summarize, rumor can generally be defined as a piece of unverified information, which suggests a process of widespread oral dissemination occurring in a rapid and unspecific manner. The quick and easy dispersion of the information results in the nearly always guaranteed loss of its source of origin. Gossip, on the other hand, appears to be dependent on a pre-established social network for the dissemination of typically personal information regarding a member of the social group. It is therefore spread in a highly selective manner within a fixed social network, yet still involves the loss of the information's origin. These two modes of unauthenticated second-hand information dissemination are to be considered as different functions of hearsay, as hearsay refers to a more general dissemination of second-hand information. In addition to denoting simply the general circulation of second-hand information, the use of the term hearsay, furthermore, allows a discussion of property and authority since it carries with it juridical connotations.

Based on the above definition of hearsay and the fact that courts generally prohibit the introduction of hearsay evidence due to its unreliable nature and the lack of competence associated with it, we can now examine how this

translates into hearsay's role in narrative. In *Gossip*, Spacks contends that gossip (and likewise, hearsay) is indeed a very useful narrative technique serving to impel plots. While on a certain level the transmission of information concerning a text's characters provides the reader with the background necessary to arrive at an understanding of characters' motives and actions, I contend that the punctuation of a narrative by gossip or hearsay is potentially more disruptive than useful, as evidence found through an analysis of Duras' texts seems to suggest. As Ross Chambers articulates in his work on gossip's role in the novel, its disruptiveness stems from the destabilizing effect it has on the authority of the narrative, thereby rendering the narrator unreliable and decentering, fragmenting even, the formerly stable, omnipotent authorial voice.[6] In *Room for Maneuver*, Chambers states that gossip's status as unreliable is "structural" and not "accidental" since once "'truth' has become inaccessible, *all* information without exception becomes *mis*information, there being no guaranteed criterion against which to measure its veracity and/or accuracy."[7] This inaccessible truth (of Lol's ravishing, of the beggar woman's story, of the Vice-Consul's unspeakable incident at Lahore) is in fact what appears to propagate the hearsay responsible for the Lol V. Stein cycle. With this in mind, we can explore hearsay's

impact within and among the texts of the cycle, beginnning with an analysis of *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein.*

Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein

The first example from the Lol cycle I wish to examine is *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein,* the generative text of the cycle. Composed almost exclusively of hearsay, this text involves an attempted re-writing of Lol V. Stein's story by the narrator, Jacques Hold, a 36-year old doctor newly arrived in S. Tahla to work in the hospital. Hold has an affair with Tatiana Karl, the wife of Hold's colleague Pierre Beugner. As it turns out, Tatiana is the childhood friend of Lol. Introduced to Lol by Tatiana, Jacques Hold subsequently becomes obssessed with her and driven to re-construct her story after hearing how her fiancé Michael Richardson abandoned her at the Casino ball, by leaving with the mysterious Anne-Marie Stretter. The locus of Lol's ravishing is therefore this ball scene which terminates with Lol's scream as she leaves the casino ballroom.

Having occurred a decade before the actual beginning of the novel, this event around which the whole of the text centers is lost and the novel immediately sinks into an attempt at the recuperation of this lost event, which Jacques Hold tries to accomplish by means of questioning and probing various sources of information on Lol, her childhood and the ball itself. As Leslie Hill states:

> What the novel dramatises is a crisis in knowledge; it is continually citing, juxtaposing

> and thereby questioning a range of different discourses of interpretation as represented by each one of the characters in the novel - all of which claim some purchase in the story of Lol, but none of which are finally validated or proven to be adequate by the writing of the text."[8]

The narrator's account of obtaining information from other sources in order to reconstitute the ball scene where Lol's ravishing took place ultimately culminates in the re-enactment of it, when Hold accompanies Lol to T. Beach. It is as if the story attempts to repeat the event it is trying to tell, collapsing eventually and inevitably into the citation of citations of a lost event.

"Difficile à capter" and "étrangement incomplète," Lol V. Stein is herself figured as a sort of presence-absence, neither here nor there, but rather quite fragmentary in nature. Numerous critics have found evidence of this in Lol's name itself. Perhaps the most notable of these is Jacques Lacan for whom the "V" in Lol's name represents both wings and scissors which cut her into pieces.[9] Further evidence of Lol's fluid, mobile and fragmentary character exists, for example, in the names she is called throughout *Le Ravissement*, and indeed in its citations of that text in subsequent texts of the cycle, which reinforce the fact that Lol is not a fixed character at all. She is called everything from Lola Valérie Stein to Lol V. Stein to Lol and, by the time, of *L'amour*, simply "la femme." At any one time in the text she appears as only a fragment of the whole, a partially present, partially absent figure,

never complete or anchored. "Lol est en cendres" (p. 49) gives one indication of how her character is portrayed in the text. In general, descriptions of her in *Le Ravissement* focus on the negative and at one point in the text, Hold announces, "Elle n'est personne" (p. 47) thereby utterly negating her.

Tatiana sheds light on Lol's childhood when she explains to the narrator, "Au collège, dit-elle, et elle n'était pas la seule à le penser, il manquait déjà quelque chose à Lol pour être - elle dit là" (p. 12). As Hold continues his investigation of Lol's childhood, he provides another account of Lol, as relayed to him by Tatiana:

> Une part d'elle-même eût été toujours en allée loin de vous et de l'instant. Où? Dans le rêve adolescent? Non, répond Tatiana, non, on aurait dit dans rien encore, justement rien. Tatiana aurait tendance à croire que c'était peut-être en effet le coeur de Lol V. Stein qui n'était pas - elle dit: là... (p. 13)

This passage reveals the fragmentary nature of Lol - not only is she not really "là," but it is even impossible to pinpoint exactly what about her is lacking, as Tatiana can only hypothesize that it is possibly "le coeur."

Later in the text, Hold comments, "Je reconnais l'absence, son absence d'hier, elle me manque à tout moment, déjà" (p. 136). Hold finds himself already subjected to the oddly, partially absent Lol: "L'approche de Lol n'existe pas. On ne peut pas se rapprocher ou s'éloigner d'elle" (p. 105). Lol's effect on Hold becomes

more evident as he explains, "...il manquait quelquechose à Lol, déjà elle était étrangement incomplète..." (p. 80). Hold states:

> Je sais: je ne sais rien.
> Ne rien savoir de Lol était la connaître déjà. On pouvait, me parut-il, en savoir moins encore, de moins en moins sur Lol V. Stein. (p. 81)

Instead of drawing nearer and nearer to Lol, Hold now finds himself in the peculiar position of not being able to draw closer to her, but of experiencing a sort of recoil by her. In other words, the closer he gets to her, the further away she goes, leaving Hold with less and less knowledge of her. This effect of Lol's is painful for Hold, as he is so driven to write her story. Yet, this story remains an impossibility, given Lol's present-absent nature and her constant fragmentariness. Hold is, therfore, prevented from accomplishing of her story.

What I consider to be a physical citation of Lol's and the story's impossibility arises on the actual pages of the novel. The disruption of the printed text by lacunae of plain white space seems to be a manifestation of what is taking place within the printed text and serves as yet another means of destabilizing the narrative, by impeding continuity.[10]

Faced with the impossibility of knowing Lol, who is neither complete nor fixed, Hold's narrative is therefore already on shaky ground. This lack of narrative stability is most evident in Hold's narration itself and its reliance

on hearsay. The first part of the text is comprised of first-person narration without any indication at all concerning to whom the "je" of the narrator refers. There is however a sudden shift to third-person narration, as the narrator describes Lol following and being followed by an unnamed man on the street. At this juncture in the text the narrator names himself as Jacques Hold and only then does it become clear that the "je" and the "il" are one and the same. The slippage from first- to third-person and back undermines the integrity of the narrator and calls into question the authority he maintains over his narrative.

Although one would tend to expect the destabilizing effects of the shifts in narrative voice to diminish subsequent to the revelation of the narrator as Jacques Hold, one senses more acutely that Hold, obviously overwhelmed by Lol and his feelings for her, actually has no "hold" whatsoever over the narrative. In fact, the slippage from "je" to "il" provides evidence of the little control he actually retains over his attempt at narrative.

In *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, Jacques Hold's authority over Lol and the text becomes further questionable and undermined as it is revealed that he bases much of what he feigns to know of Lol on unauthenticated second-hand information obtained from friends and acquaintances of Lol. The narrative's insistence on citationality calls into question the authority of that

very narrative by casting Hold as unreliable and the text overall as destabilized. Jacques Hold's impossible attempt at and desire for a re-writing or a re-construction of Lol's story for himself is indicated at the novel's onset, where Hold states, "je raconterai mon histoire de Lol V. Stein" (p. 14). Hold proceeds to piece together "his narrative" with fragments of various aspects of Lol's life and story that he acquires from Tatiana, Lol's mother, Jean Bedford and Pierre Beugner, in addition to various other anonymous sources.

Here, I would like to recall the process of hearsay as was previously discussed, whereby the speaker often relies on quotation in an attempt to lend authentication to his/her information/story. Since the one who allegedly relayed the information to the speaker is not present, there is no means of verification of what is passed on. The tendency of the interlocutor is to accept the information rather than doubt it since the use of quotation lends an air of authority to the speaker. Therefore, when Hold states that "Tatiana dit que" and "Tatiana dit encore que," Hold expects the interlocutor to accept what he relates as true because he is the one in possession of privileged information about Lol.

Yet, the very fact that he relies on hearsay in order to write his story renders him immediately suspect as a narrator. Since verbal citation enables a fictionalization

of what is being said, strictly because it is impossible to verify and because it demands a suspension of disbelief, trust as to the accuracy of the reported information is weak. As far as accuracy is concerned, one must remember that hearsay, coupled with the use of quotation, amounts to a reconstruction of an event, meaning that the event is not merely copied or replicated but entirely re-written, as Hold attempts to do.

If Hold feigns authority by presenting his information as authenticated due to his use of quotations he attributes to others, he begins to call his authority into question as a narrator by moving from "Tatiana dit que" to phrases such as "Tatiana avait tendance à croire que c'était peut-être..." (p. 13). This raises two possibilities. First, it provides an indication of the pressure Hold could be applying on Tatiana to give as much story as possible to him, in which case she is in the position of resorting to conjecture in order to fulfill Hold's desire. This assumes however that Hold relates *verbatim* what Tatiana tells him, without fictionalization or exaggeration on his part. Second, it is rather more probable that Hold himself begins to resort to fictionalization or exaggeration of Tatiana's alleged account of Lol since he in fact reveals his distrust for the information supplied him by Tatiana: "Je ne crois plus à rien de ce que dit Tatiana, je ne suis convaincu de rien" (p. 14). Once he himself begins to

question the hearsay he receives from his sources, one can hardly avoid questioning his reliability as narrator.

Since his sources can provide only fragmentary information concerning Lol, about whom information can be only fragmentary at best, Hold supplements this with his own first-hand observations. Yet, this still fails to complete Lol's story. The narrator's reliance on unauthenticated second-hand information reveals the lack of a unified, stable narration.

The narrator's effort at narrative thus turns out to be based on hearsay, that is unverified information he obtains second-hand, which automatically renders it suspect, and on sheer speculation and conjecture on his part. It becomes apparent in fact that the text is nothing more than the citation and re-citaion of hearsay concerning various aspects of Lol. The absence of the traditional quotation marks, which would attribute specific pieces of information to the rightful sources, serves to destabilize further the authority of the narrative, as it becomes impossible to distinguish the hearsay from the narrator's first-hand observation and then from his apparent inventions of what possibly happened to Lol.

In fact, desire for "mon histoire de Lol V. Stein," for access to the locus of her ravishing, accentuated by Hold's increasing distrust for what Tatiana Karl tells him and the ultimate failure on Tatiana's part to ever fill in

the gaps of Lol's story for Hold, forces Hold to resort to utter invention in a desperate attempt to recuperate her story. As Ross Chambers states, when information is unavailable, as is the case in this text:

> People interpret signs as best they may...They thus invent for themselves an alternative knowledge to substitute for the information that is unavailable. (*Room for Maneuver*, p. 206)

This is quite often the case involving hearsay, when the desire for knowledge about a certain subject is very strong and the access to complete information from various sources is impossible. The tendency exists to plug in pieces of information, either through exaggeration or distortion of the information at hand or through the invention of other information to substitute for what is lacking. Obviously, in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, much indeed is lacking, due to Lol's nature and to the general function of hearsay as well. Having established early in the text his distrust for what Tatiana tells him, Hold moves toward the inevitable invention of various fragments of Lol's story. The text subsequently becomes punctuated by Hold's interjections which directly precede his "writing" of the story. The following examples are but a sampling of expressions replete within the text, "J'aime à croire ceci..." (p. 48) followed several pages later by "J'invente, je vois" p. 56) and then "Je ne sais plus...je crois voir ce qu'a dû voir Lol V. Stein" (p. 59). The speculation and uncertainty of these expressions again

offer evidence of Hold's unreliable status. One of the most telling moments is found on page 121 when Hold recounts his observation of Lol through a window. Right at the end of the passage Hold announces, "Je mens. Je n'ai pas bougé de la fenêtre."

Lol's figuration as a sort of presence-absence "difficile à capter" and "étrangement incomplète" forces Hold to confront the impossibility of ever achieving the story and grasping, "holding" both Lol and the narrative. The impossibility of saying what is impossible to be said resonates like the "mot-trou" and threatens the text with the collapse of any and all narrative stability and authority. This is obviously set in motion by Hold's reliance on hearsay for the re-constitution of Lol's story, and once he realizes the inevitable failure of hearsay to accomplish his project, he resorts to invention in an impossible attempt to fill the lacunae. Rather than provide him with all the missing links and pieces of Lol's life, the hearsay and conjectures fail miserably and eliminate any remaining shred of narrative authority by casting Hold as utterly unreliable.

Le Vice-Consul

The propagation of hearsay in response to the scene of Lol's ravishing in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* functions like the "mot-trou" where the event or word itself is inaccessible yet its reverberations are incessantly

produced. The failure of the novel to gain access to the originary event results therefore in the dissemination of certain textual elements throughout the subsequent texts of the Lol cycle.

In *Le Vice-Consul* the word-hole resonates in the "cri" or scream of two of its characters and re-cites the "cri" uttered by Lol at the end of the ball. The reliance on hearsay in *Le Vice-Consul* produces a problematization of textual borders. It is in effect a story set within a story. In fact, this text is the attempted narrative of the mysterious Vice-Consul of Lahore intertwined nearly seamlessly with Peter Morgan's attempted writing of the story of the "mendiante," a bald-headed beggar woman roaming the streets of Calcutta with the lepers. The story of the "mendiante" parallels in some respects that of the Vice-Consul, as they are both figured by Duras as impossible, as marginalized from the same society and as two characters for whom a lack of information exists, provoking the desire for knowledge of their stories among the members of the European circle.

The demarcation between the beggar woman's story, narrated by Peter Morgan, and the story within which it is framed, and within which Peter Morgan and the beggar woman are placed, is not always distinct. In other words, the beggar woman who is a character in Morgan's story is not confined to the pages of his story but re-surfaces in the

framing story of the Europeans, a story in which Morgan is himself a character. What happens in this text is the observation of and limited interaction with the beggar woman by the Europeans as recounted in the main story. For example, reference is made to Anne-Marie Stretter giving instructions to leave left-overs for the beggar woman and others. In addition, Morgan often discusses this woman with other Europeans to obtain ideas about her life for the story he is writing. But, as Sharon Willis states, the writing of the story and the observation of the beggar woman on the streets are not always two distinct occurrences in the text (*Marguerite Duras: Writing on the Body*, p. 103). The seam between the two in fact is mostly obscured and the text switches from what could constitute the Europeans' observation of the beggar woman to what could be considered Peter Morgan's account of her life. The lack of definitive borders between the two tales produces a contamination between them, as Mieke Bal writes:

> On ne sait plus lequel de ces deux récits est l'hypo-récit...La structure narrative, si nette, si rassurante au début signifie sa propre impossibilité...La destruction, comme la lèpre, est contagieuse: les deux récits s'infectent l'un l'autre.[11]

Much as Jacques Hold attempts to write Lol's story by piecing together his observations with second-hand information, Morgan also relies on conjecture and on information on the beggar woman supplied to him by others, including Anne-Marie Stretter:

> La vente d'une enfant a été racontée à Peter Morgan par Anne-Marie Stretter. Anne-Marie Stretter a assisté à cette vente, il y a dix-sept ans, vers Savannakhet, Laos. La mendiante, toujours d'après Anne-Marie Stretter, doit parler la langue de Savannakhet. Les dates ne coïncident pas. La mendiante est trop jeune pour être celle qu'a vue Anne-Marie Stretter. Cependant Peter Morgan a fait du récit d'Anne-Marie Stretter un épisode de la vie de la mendiante. (pp. 72-73).

The preceding passage demonstrates how the beggar woman's story is being (re-)constructed in the text through Peter Morgan's reliance on second-hand information, or hearsay provided by his friends. Morgan in fact appropriates and re-cites that which is told to him in order to complete his story, thereby subjecting his narrative to the same uncertainty as was found in *Le Ravissement*.

Figured as an impossibility, "enfermée dans le mot Battambang" which is her "maison fermée," the beggar woman protects herself with the word "Battambang" and as such is constructed as lost and cut off from her past, her only memory being "Battambang": "Battambang la protegera" (p. 65). Her impossible nature is disclosed in examples such as "Un rien l'amuse" (p. 81) and "Elle fait des discours inutiles" (*ibid.*) which negate any access one might have to her. Later, we read, "A Battambang, il y avait une école. Y en avait-il une à Battambang? Elle a oublié." Although it is not clear at this point if this belongs to Peter Morgan's story or not, he apparently decides that the beggar woman retains no memory of her experiences because the text states, "Peter Morgan voudrait maintenant

substituer à la mémoire abolie de la mendiante le bric-à-brac de la sienne." (p. 73). The very "bric-à-brac" of Peter Morgan's memory is constructed as such owing to all the unverified information and speculation on the beggar woman's life that he has obtained. "Peter fait un livre à partir de ce chant de Savannakhet?" Peter replies, "Je prends des notes imaginaires sur cette femme" because "rien ne peut plus lui arriver..." (p. 157).

Described by Anne-Marie Stretter during the ball as "un homme mort" (p. 128), the Vice-Consul himself is figured as impossible, which is the word repeated most often whenever he is mentioned in the text. His face, for example, is described as "impossible encore" (p. 78) and he is considered "quelqu'un d'impossible" (p. 104) before being told by Charles Rossett at the end of the ball, "Vous êtes impossible, décidément" (p. 146). He is rendered as such by what occurred at Lahore before his arrival in Calcutta as a letter in his dossier indicates, "Je me borne ici à constater l'impossibilité où je suis de rendre compte de façon compréhensible de ce qui s'est passé à Lahore." (p. 39). When his aunt is questioned about his childhood, all she is able to offer is, "presque rien" for the dossier (p. 46). Reference to the contents of the dossier surface several times in the text, with Michael Richard at one point stating, "Il y a dans le dossier le mot impossible" (p. 159).

The impossibility of the Vice-Consul is again indicated at the end of the ball when Peter Morgan replies to his pleas to remain with them, "Ce n'est pas possible, dit Peter Morgan, excusez-nous, le personnage que vous êtes ne nous intéresse que lorsque vous êtes absent" (p. 147).

Curiosity over the Vice-Consul and the lack of knowledge about what exactly happened to him at Lahore causes much speculation and conjecture about him, in very much the same way as happens in the case of the beggar woman. Hearsay concerning him spreads rapidly throughout the European group in Calcutta, neatly placing the Vice-Consul into circulation, "Le Vice-Consul fait des confidences au directeur du Cercle, dit Charles Rossett, et il ne doit pas ignorer que presque tout est répété." (p. 42). Yet oddly enough, the Vice-Consul seems oblivious to what happens to his words after speaking with the director.

Thirst for knowledge about the Vice-Consul is further demonstrated in the following, "Le directeur du Cercle est souvent questionné sur ce qui lui raconte Le Vice-Consul. A Calcutta on veut savoir." (p. 75). Desire for information on Lahore coupled with the lack of available information prompts a demand for any and all information, because, "on veut savoir." Yet, here, as is the case with *Le Ravissement*, there are indications that information concerning the Vice-Consul will remain sketchy or fragmentary at best.

Charles Rossett speaks to the Vice-Consul at the ball and broaches the subject of Lahore and the dossier, in which the Vice-Consul is described as "quelqu'un d'impossible" followed by the words "le pire, c'est Lahore" (p. 104). Rossett continues trying to discuss Lahore with the Vice-Consul, by stating "Je m'excuse de vous dire ça, mais on ne peut pas comprendre Lahore" (p. 104-5).

Anne-Marie Stretter subsequently dances with the Vice-Consul, during which time she speaks to him about Lahore, which is yet again marked by the impossibility of saying what is impossible to be said:

> Le mot le plus juste pour dire ça...Elle ne cherche pas le mot. - Le mot pour le dire? - C'est-à-dire que le premier mot qui paraît convenable, ici aussi, empêcherait les autres de vous venir, alors...(p. 123)

This passage again offers further evidence of hearsay contaminating the narrative of *Le Vice-Consul* as the "mot-trou" of *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* seems to resurface. The impossibility of finding the word to express what took place at Lahore is also reflected in the voice of the Vice-Consul, which seems strangely anomalous with the character who speaks through it:

> La voix du vice-consul, quand il parle à Anne-Marie Stretter pour la première fois, est distinguée, mais bizarrement privée de timbre, un rien trop aiguë comme s'il se retenait de hurler. (pp. 123-24)

Since "le mot pour le dire" cannot issue forth from the Vice-Consul as it does not even exist, a shout or a cry

appears to be the only means of articulating this lack, "On a peur. L'heure du vice-consul est arrivé. Il crie." (p. 146). Mieke Bal views the cry of the Vice-Consul as the only means of communication remaining open for him; it signifies "la communication échouée, la tentative ultime et désespérée d'échapper à l'isolement. Les cris établissent une communication en-deça des mots, négative, qui dénonce l'échec de communication verbale" (*Narratologie*, p. 79). In accordance with Bal, Viviane Forrester writes that the cry takes the place of what cannot be said or proposed.[12] Therefore, it follows that the cry is the (in)articulation of the impossible and as relates to hearsay, the cry is *heard* but not *said*:

> Parce que j'ai l'impression que si j'essayais de vous dire ce que j'aimerais arriver à vous dire, tout s'en irait en poussière...- il tremble -, les mots pour vous dire, à vous, les mots...de moi...pour vous dire à vous, ils n'existent pas. Je me tromperais, j'emploierais ceux...pour dire autre chose...une chose arrivée à un autre...(p. 125).

Again, the Vice-Consul attempts to verbalize Lahore for Anne-Marie Stretter and again, he is unsuccessful, realizing that if he were to use the only words available, he would say something else entirely. This passage reveals another displacement that arises out of the impossibility of saying that which is impossible to be said. We are left instead with the "poussière" of the "mot-trou" which resonates here again as "un gong vide." Yet another discussion over what happened at Lahore is attempted at the

ball and one overhears, "Il a fait le pire, mais comment le dire?" (p. 94). Indeed, how to articulate, verbalize, the impossible? Here again can be felt the resonance of the "mot-trou" of *Le Ravissement*.

When the ball begins, the narrative suddenly becomes punctuated by phrases such as "On dit: Vous avez vu?" or "On dit, on demande." This change in narrative voice disrupts the continuity of the story concerning the Europeans, as the previously unremarkable narrative voice suddenly allows the intrusion of what "on" sees, hears and discusses at the ball. Such expressions as "on dit" or "on pense" indicate the free circulation of hearsay at the ball, where much of the attention of the evening is focused on the Vice-Consul (here we recall that "A Calcutta, on veut savoir"); it appears that all eyes are upon him and that all the guests chat in clusters, discussing the Vice-Consul's actions and appearance, "tout Calcutta est au courant" (p. 137). Somehow the interruption of the narrative by "on" places the reader, temporarily at least, within the group of guests at the ball. Yet, this status is short-lived as the "on" voice disappears and the reader loses the privilege of obtaining other perspectives on the evening.

To conclude, *Le Vice-Consul* concerns the textual attempts to access the event(s) which rendered the beggar woman and the Vice-Consul mad. Their difference or rather

the impossibility of naming their unnameable stories marginalizes them from the European community. Yet, the narrative persists in its impossible movement toward the originary event of both characters which in turn propagates hearsay in order to fill in the gaps concerning them. As in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, the reliance on hearsay problematizes the narrative; in the case of *Le Vice-Consul* the boundaries between the two stories is obscured in such a way as to weave them together and to allow one to cite the other.

L'amour

The following text in the cycle, *L'amour*, commences some seventeen years after the ball scene of *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* where Lol had been abandoned by her fiancé Michael Richardson. In this novel, as in the preceding texts of the cycle, the narrative hinges on hearsay and marks the increasing condensation of that hearsay as the narrative is considerably more barren in its information. Hearsay in this case contains residual information from *Le Ravissement* that is only vaguely recollected. The characters incessantly cite and re-cite each other and seem to have heard certain things, but they cannot quite say them, since they lapse repeatedly into states of forgetfulness.

The text involves three characters, two men and one woman. One of the men is designated "le voyageur" and can

later in the text be considered Michael Richard(son). The other man is known simply as the madman and the woman as "la femme." The traveler has apparently returned to this seaside town after having abandoned his wife and children. It appears he has come to commit suicide and speaks incessantly of the voyage he has undertaken to arrive there. This voyage culminates in his return to the casino ballroom which has long since been deserted.

This text opens on the beach in S. Thala with two men and one woman moving about:

> Le triangle se ferme avec la femme aux yeux fermés. Elle est assise contre un mur qui délimite la plage vers sa fin, la ville. Du fait de l'homme qui marche, constamment, avec une lenteur égale, le triangle se déforme, se reforme, sans se briser jamais. (p. 8).

The triangle formed by the three on the beach reflects the narrative(s) of the Lol cycle in that the triangle, like the narrative, remains fluid and mobile. The lack of a fixed or anchored form at the text's opening hints at the fluid circulation of hearsay within the text itself.

The telegraphic style of the narrative also suggests the repetition by transformation of numerous phrases and textual threads. For example, "Il la regarde" (p. 10) is re-cited several lines later as "La femme est regardée" (p. 10). In this way the narrative stops and starts, moves tentatively forward then seems to regress or become momentarily static just as the triangle on the beach "se déforme, se reforme" (p. 8):

> Le pas reprend.
> Irrégulier, incertain, il reprend.
> Il s'arrête encore.
> Il reprend encore. (p. 11)

The textual emphasis on the word "pas" which is repeatedly employed throughout the narrative raises some interesting points for discussion. In this sense "pas" refers to the steps of the characters, implying forward motion. Of course, "pas" also forms part of the negative expression "ne...pas" itself suspended, as Sharon Willis observes in *Marguerite Duras: Writing on the Body*, around the verb it negates (*ibid.*, p. 122). Therefore, the narrative moves forward while it negates itself. The characters' memories reawaken only to be forgotten. Repeated throughout *L'amour*, these steps remain spaced out, punctuating the text and mimicking its own attempt to narrate itself.

This narrative repetition that somehow punctuates while remaining incomplete, also surfaces in the characters' discourse, in which one character's lines are subsequently repeated by another character without ever filling out the thought or statement. For example, the woman explains to the traveler that, "Ici, c'est S. Thala jusqu'à la rivière" (p. 15); yet the traveler later re-states the phrase and adds "Après la rivière c'est encore S. Thala" (p. 20).

Numerous examples of such inter-textual citations exist, with one of the most-often repeated being "Vous êtes

venu" sometimes extended to "vous êtes venu pourquoi?" or "vous êtes revenu."

The individual characters cite and re-cite themselves in addition to citing each other. Each time it seems as if they have heard something said about what they are saying, but the access to the source of the statement is cut off and they seem to retain only a vague recollection of their previous statements. Therefore, the woman announces, "Je suis venue vous voir pour ce voyage que vous voulez faire" (p. 62) which is subsequently repeated as "Je suis venue vous voir pour ce voyage" (p. 107) and then as "Ce voyage à S. Thala, vous savez." (p. 107).

In *L'amour* there is again the citation of the impossibility of articulation found previously in *Le Ravissement* and in *Le Vice-Consul*. The characters are speechless at various instances in the text, trapped in the "impossibilité de répondre" (p. 18). At one such point, the woman, speaking about the man, "voit l'effort qu'il fait pour essayer de parler, son impuissance à y parvenir" (p. 92). This indicates the inaccessibility of the originary event bound up in the "mot-trou," the would-be response or resolution.

Pages after the opening of the text the story itself begins. Just as the triangle formed by the three characters ultimately dissolves, so too does the story ultimately begin again, introduced by the scream or cry that seems to

re-cite that of *Le Vice-Consul* and the resonance of the "mot-trou." This cry stirs something within the woman and only then does the story appear to begin:

> L'histoire. Elle commence. Elle a commencé avant la marche au bord de la mer, le cri, le geste, le mouvement de la mer. Le mouvement de la lumière. (p. 13).

Anterior to its explicit textual form, the story has (always) already begun, despite its announcement several pages into the narrative. It too, though, is punctuated, is fragmented: "L'histoire. Elle commence." Sharon Willis views this passage as an "autonomous inscription" of the story which remains "suspended, in a sentence of its own" (*Marguerite Duras: Writing On the Body*, p. 122). She elaborates:

> ....the story begins after the text has begun, only to begin by telling us that it has already begun, before. It has begun anticipating the cry already emitted. It has, in effect, just remembered, only to forget again, its own beginning -- its own anteriority. (*Ibid.*)

This forgetting, or even obliteration of memory, by the story itself, manifests itself in the characters as well. Once at the casino where "il n'y a plus de bal" (p. 127), the traveler asks the man to recognize the woman. Yet when he is asked her name, he answers, "Je ne sais plus rien" (p. 131). The man then says a name for the traveler, who asks, "Voulez-vous répéter ce nom?" Yet the man appears to have already forgotten the name he had said just moments before, since the traveler has to prompt him, "celui que

vous venez de dire..." (p. 131). The man, we read, "répète clairement, complètement, le nom qu'il vient d'inventer" (p. 131).

The preceding example is representative of the exchanges of recollection and forgetting taking place among the characters. The text is in fact riddled by this perpetual forgetting and reawakening to memory which subsequently collapses into an obliteration of that memory on the part of the characters. This oscillation between memory and forgetting reveals, on another level, the indeterminacy which emerged figuratively in the fluidity of the triangle formed by the characters.

For Sharon Willis, *L'amour* is precisely as much about this fluidity and indeterminacy as it is about a crystallization of *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*. In what she terms a story of "suspense," *L'amour* is itself suspended with *Le Vice-Consul* on the flanks of *Le Ravissement*. Textually, everything in the narrative deals with suspense -- the suspension of memory, of thoughts, of looks, of sentences, of movements (*Marguerite Duras: Writing on the Body*, p. 125). Obviously, the suspension of narrative devices indicates that the story can never be accomplished. The indeterminacy of the narrative derives from the impossibility of recuperating the scene of Lol's ravishment. The fact that this event remains severed from the characters results in the multiplication of citational

effects -- instances of hearsay/recollection coupled with informational void. In *L'amour* is once again the impossible attempt to articulate the impossible articulation of Lol's ravishing that is carried in the cry which opens the text.

As Lucy Stone McNeece writes in *Art and Politics in Duras' India Cycle*:

> The story has no content: It is trace, resonance, reflection, echo. It is sensation, not action; place, not event...The story is important because it is about the impossibility of telling a story.[13]

Coinciding with the impossibility of telling the story, as evidenced in the indeterminacy and suspension operating at various textual levels, is the impossibility of achieving some sort of closure. In fact the last word of the text is "extérieure" which serves to figuratively push the narrative in an outward direction and to maintain its openness. Carol J. Murphy remarks on the explicit lack of finality to *L'amour*, as well as to the other texts of the cycle: "What is important is the shifting or *glissement* between two poles (the beginnning and the end) with the hint of a new beginnning at the story's 'tentative' end."[14] This is accomplished through the use of the future tense in the last passage of the novel:

> -- Pendant un instant elle sera aveuglée. Puis elle recommencera à me voir. A distinguer le sable de la mer, puis, la mer de la lumière, puis son corps de mon corps. Après elle se séparera le froid de la nuit et elle me le donnera. Après seulement elle entendra le bruit vous savez...? de Dieu?... ce truc...?

> Ils se taisent. Ils surveillent la progression de l'aurore extérieure. (p. 143)

This closing passage reveals how the text itself impedes its own closure, which enables, in its turn, the textual multiplication and generation already instigated by the first text of the cycle, *Le ravissement de Lol V. Stein*. Of course, this possibility of engendering other texts develops as a result of the reliance on hearsay. As we have seen in this text, hearsay forms the basis of the narrative in a more radicalized way than seen in the previous texts.

India Song

While the insistence on hearsay in the other texts of the Lol V. Stein cycle has operated as a compelling force behind each of those narratives, the function of hearsay moves increasingly toward a focus on the scream. In what I call a condensation, other textual elements become less integral to the circuit of hearsay. With the increasing emphasis on re-citation of the scream as the (in)articulation of the "mot-trou," hearsay becomes progressively radicalized in the citation of what is heard; yet, nothing is really said at the limits of speech itself.

This movement becomes especially acute in *India Song* since it marks a discontinuity between the visual and auditory fields. Although the characters of the beggar woman and the Vice-Consul are heard screaming, they do not produce any comprehensible utterances.

The multi-genred text *India Song*, subtitled "texte-théâtre-film" was first published in script form in 1973. The following year Duras directed the film version of the text. As Carol J. Murphy points out, the doubling of *India Song* -- that is, its double production as text and film -- echoes and re-cites *ad infinitum* other aspects of the Lol V. Stein cycle, while rearticulating much of *Le Vice-Consul* (*Alienation and Absence in the Novels of Marguerite Duras*, p. 79). Again, this text, as others previously discussed, hinges on the circulation of hearsay as it weaves together three characters: the beggar woman, who is often heard chanting Laotian phrases, but never seen, the Vice-Consul of Lahore and Anne-Marie Stretter.

In the film, the characters on the screen rarely speak. Instead, as Trista Selous explains in *The Other Woman*, one overhears voices questioning each other about the general story of *Le Vice-Consul*, while on screen, one sees several actors "represent, rather than portray the protagonists in a way which is linked to the story that unfolds, but which is obviously not meant to be an accurate depiction of that story."[15] Lucy Stone McNeece cautions against making the assumption that *India Song* is the mere cinematographic adaptation of *Le Vice-Consul*. As she explains, it produces a "new signifying structure organized according to different principles" (*Art and Politics in Marguerite Duras' India Cycle*, p. 122).[16]

In what Michel de Certeau refers to as a writing "en cendres,"[17] *India Song* accomplishes a rupture between the visual and the auditory, which we will find pushed to its extreme in *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert*, a film that in its own way stands as the re-citation and irrevocable destruction of *India Song*. This break in *India Song* that occurs between the visual and auditory is effected, as we shall see, through a reliance on voice over.

The discrepancy between the voices of the soundtrack and the images seen on the screen produces an interference of sorts that in turn creates an air of uncertainty for the viewer. As Trista Selous explains:

> Nothing is present, the images may refer to the story, but they do not tell it, the story itself is a reconstruction of something in the past, the protagonists are dead. (*The Other Woman*, p. 136)

Selous in fact sees the disconnection between sight and sound as an impossibility of "visual representation of where that knowledge might be" (*ibid.*).

Duras' use of voice-over, a technique conventionally reserved for commentaries in documentary-style films by male voices, subverts that tradition in this film in several ways. First, and most obviously, there is no unified, singular voice. Instead, there are four principal voices, two of which are female. In addition, other voices, echoing those of the characters encountered in *Le Vice-Consul*, are granted audible space. These voices include the

beggar-woman, the Vice-Consul and Anne-Marie Stretter. Furthermore, these voices are completely disembodied. The viewer has absolutely no idea as to the identity of these voies.

Whereas voice-over traditionally comprises a commentary on the visual images on screen, in *India Song*, these voices actually partake in a limited commentary since they address one another without demonstrating a full cognitive realization that there are spectators listening to their dialogue. Indeed, they randomly "disseminate the elements of narrative" (*Art and Politics*, p. 131).

The first two voices are feminine and hold an "illogique" and "anarchique" memory of their own relationship with each other. The fragmented recollection of their rapport is juxtaposed with fragments of other texts of the Lol V. Stein cycle to which the viewer does not have access. What becomes readily apparent is Voice 1's attraction for Anne-Marie Stretter while Voice 2 remains impassioned for the first voice. Their desires are deferred and never requited during the course of the film as neither voice obtains access to the object for which she pines. This slippage underscores the impossibility of the story of *Le Vice-Consul*.

While the two female voices are caught in a game of desire, the two male voices demonstrate in a different way the effects of this slippage of memory. Voice 3 has

apparently forgotten the chronology of the story and asks Voice 4 questions regarding events, people and places. Voice 4 willingly supplies the missing information.

The destabilizing effects of Duras' technique of voice-over are evident to the viewer upon hearing the voices in the film and seeing the disconnection between them and the images. As Madeleine Borgomano states, these voices:

> demeurent sans aucun lien avec l'histoire qui se déroule sous nos yeux; elles ont l'air de découvrir, elles aussi, de regarder en même temps que nous les images, et de récolter autour d'elles des bribes de vieux souvenirs.[18]

This strange sensation of the voices not really commenting on the visual aspects of the film, that is, the failure of the voices' remarks to coincide with the images on screen, disrupts the continuity of the film and raises more questions, as Susan Cohen observes:

> Projecting towards something they barely remember, they create a past not their own. Its equivocal "truth" status results from the impossibility of verification, from faulty memory, from the implied interchangeability in memory of knowing and reading. Did the speakers "know" the events as witnesses? Were they told the story? If they read it, what did they read, Duras' novels or something else? In contrast to classical techniques, Duras' manipulation of narration undermines her speakers' authority. Filtered through the disembodied voices, these ambiguities open the play of intertextual reference to the earlier works.[19]

The "impossibility of verification" and the "play of intertextual reference" are the result of the circulation of what I am calling hearsay in the cycle. The fragmentary,

incomplete information possessed by the speakers stems from the denial of access to the full story. The voices operate within the circuit of hearsay, thereby perpetuating its propagation. For example, the second speaker states, "Pour elle il avait tout quitté. En une nuit" (p. 14). Voice 1 replies, "La nuit du bal?" before apparently reading from a text:

> Michael Richardson était fiancé à une jeune fille de S. Thala. Lola Valérie Stein. Le mariage devait avoir lieu à l'automne.
> Puis il y a eu ce bal. Ce bal de S. Thala...(p. 15)

Another example of the hearsay staged by the speakers occurs later in reference to the Europeans' sojourn in the Delta of the Ganges where the beggar woman appears to have followed them. This re-citation of *Le Vice-Consul* reads as follows:

> Voix 3: Elle devait suivre Anne-Marie Stretter.
> Voix 4: L'invité dit qu'elle l'a suivi jusqu'au portail. Qu'elle lui fait peur. Il a dit: "Le sourire sans fin fait peur." (p. 136)

While the use of these voices, in their number and gender, coupled with their lack of information and their inability to comment on the visual elements of the film, ruptures the auditory aspects, the visual field itself undergoes a breakdown of sorts.

The extremely slow movement of the camera is yet another example that underscores the discontinuity of various levels of the film. Here, Duras destabilizes the viewer's sense of temporality by having the camera pause

for minutes at a time in one position. The opening sunset, for example, lasts approximately ten minutes and the camera remains focused on it for its duration.

When the camera does pan across the visual field, it does so extremely slowly, lending the film the impression of having been shot in slow-motion. This sensation of slow-motion camera movement is doubled, in effect, since the characters' movements appear equally drawn out. For Borgomano, the characters' heavy movements give them the appearance of being dead and empty, again figuring them in terms of absence and alienation as Carol J. Murphy has commented. Borgomano explains:

> Leurs mouvements ont toujours l'air de venir de très loin et de rencontrer, dans leur développement, une terrible pésanteur. Leur danse même participe de ce caractère somnanbulique. Nulle part nous n'avons l'impression de voir des vivants; ils sont devenus des automates, aux mouvements difficiles, aux yeux vides. (*L'écriture filmique de Marguerite Duras*, p. 117)

As if to emphasize this emptiness and deadness, the characters remain detached and distanced from one another. They rarely interact and for the most part appear oblivious of others' presence. For example, during a long sequence they lie motionless on the floor: "Les trois corps aux yeux fermés dorment" (p. 40).

Coupled with this disruption of the conventional sense of temporality is the use of frames and mirrors, which serve to separate and distance while also amplifying, creating an effect of *mise en abîme*. Curiously, there is a

notable absence of windows in the salon; in this way, the salon remains completely cut off visually and physically from the outside. Even when the camera ventures to the exterior of the chateau, there is still the overwhelming sense of the absolute detachment of the exterior from the salon.

To conclude, *India Song*, while on one level cognizant of other texts of the Lol V. Stein cycle, evidenced through the use of hearsay in its fragmentary and unsubstantiated forms, creates a new a narrative composed of "mémoires déformantes, créatives" (p. 10) that upholds the resistance to closure found in the other texts. This porosity signals not only the impossibility of achieving full access to the story, but also the possibility that story has of persisting and generating other narratives in its wake.

Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert

Whereas *India Song* is the recalling of the memory of the ball where Anne-Marie Stretter first encountered the disgraced Vice-Consul of Lahore, *Son nom* enacts the obliteration of that memory. Through the progression of the Lol cycle, the use of hearsay to engender new narratives has become increasingly radicalized. What we have just seen in *India Song* with the disjunction between the visual and auditory fields becomes irrevocably ruptured in *Son nom*. This film therefore involves the citation of the scream, an utterance traced to *Le Ravissement* as the "mot-trou."

Since we established in the first chapter that any sign, any mark, can be cited and re-cited, we have been able to view the hearsay and citation of the scream in such a way. With this film we will see the breakdown of hearsay itself.

The title of the film itself is a citation from the end of the reception in *India Song*:

> Que crie-t-il?
> Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert:
> Toute la nuit dans Calcutta, il a crié ce nom
> (*Marguerite Duras*, p. 63)

The repetition of this phrase and its inscription in the title of the film alludes to the film as both reading and destruction, as appropriation and effacement. As Madeleine Borgomano explains there is a paradox inherent in the title of the film, of Calcutta as desert, as deserted:

> Pour accomplir la destruction 'capitale,' il fallait faire disparaître cette image, il fallait que Calcutta devienne désert, pour que son nom puisse résonner dans le vide, avant de s'effacer dans la nuit de l'oubli. (*L'écriture filmique de Marguerite Duras*, p. 129)

This desertification occurs through the piercing cry of the Vice-Consul. For Lucy Stone McNeese, *Son nom*, rather than a destruction of the cycle, is more an epilogue, "a decomposition of spectacle" necessitated by the "resignation to the impossibility of re-presenting the story in an unified form" (*Art and Politics*, p. 152). This impossibility manifests itself through the irrevocable rupture between the visual and the auditory. Save for the final few minutes of the film, there are no characters

visible on the screen. Duras leaves the visual field deserted. The women who do appear near the film's end are immobile and, in Borgomano's words, "mémoires d'ombre et de pierre" (*L'écriture filmique de Marguerite Duras*, p. 130). This absence of characters in *Son nom* radicalizes the disjuncture of sight and sound found initially in *India Song*. In *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert*, the voices, repeating exactly the soundtrack of *India Song*, relate instead the récit of a deserted story with music remaining from a long deserted ball held at a deserted chateau, found in ruins.

Furthermore, as Borgomano observes, the mirrors which enabled the repetition of story in *India Song* are shattered in *Son nom*, no longer reflecting nor repeating. Window panes too are cracked, representing a destruction of their previous function as frames, as repetition of what was viewed within them:

> Vitre, fenêtres, miroir, tous ces procédés qui servaient à découper, à encadrer, à séparer et qui multipliaient à l'infini des distances, d'emblée le film nouveau nous montre qu'il y renonce, qu'il les brise, les détruit. (*Ibid.*, p. 131)

The camera slowly moves through the chateau, periodically pausing to focus on an object, such as a doorway or the staircase. The dim, dusk light contrasts remarkably with the brightness that illuminated the same rooms of the chateau in *India Song* when they were still intact. Here in *Son nom* the eeriness of the poor lighting in the ruined

rooms underscores the deadness of the story and the chateau while at the same time blurring what would normally clearly delineate frames and borders. At times during the film, the camera ventures outside the chateau exploring its exterior and the vegetation encroaching on its walkways and walls. By traversing potential borders and by the broaching of separations, such as doorways, between the interior and the exterior, the camera itself reinforces the effacement of *India Song*.

The disjuncture between the visual -- the poorly lit rooms with their broken mirrors and window panes, debris and dust -- and the auditory renders the radicalization of hearsay that was undertaken by *India Song* as extreme. Furthermore, the lack of physicality of characters on screen juxtaposed with the soundtrack that re-cites that of *India Song* radicalizes the sight-sound rupture to such a degree that it signals its destruction. The cry of the beggar woman serves as an auditory frame for the film, as it both opens and closes it. The replay of the sounds from the ball, including snippets of "India Song," the upbeat, jazzy blues, and a polyphony of indistinguishable voices of ball guests re-cites scenes from *Le Vice-Consul* and *India Song*, the locus for which is now dead and in ruins, eliminating therefore any attempt at a reconstruction of the event.

The visual conclusion of *Son Nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert* suggests that there is still no termination at all for the Lol V. Stein cycle. With the cry of the beggar woman resonating across the screen, the film closes with the camera peering out over the infinite horizon of the sea, highlighted by the setting sun. While bringing the film to a close, the scream marks the definitive rupture of hearsay in that all that remains is what is *heard*. Since a scream inhabits the borderline of speech, I view this utterance as approaching speechlessness. Therefore, nothing is articulated, or *said* anymore.

The Lol V. Stein Cycle and Hearsay

To briefly summarize the textual analyses, I will state that hearsay is placed into circulation by the crisis in knowledge in each text. At the same time, hearsay disseminates certain textual threads that cannot be contained or controlled by the text or the narrator. This is one of the anxiety-inducing effects of hearsay -- its impact can be far-reaching and immeasurable. As a result, the information cited and re-cited within the texts can only be fragmentary at best since hearsay itself can provide only a possibility of the reconstruction of the event and not the verbatim copying of it, which is what the narrators attempt. The reliance on hearsay to re-construct or to recover the lost event guarantees the failure of the narrative because the "true event" cannot ever be captured

and repeated. The shifts in narrative voice, which are a direct result of the use of hearsay as a means of attempting the story, call into question the authority of the narrator and prevent the achievement of the narrative. While the circulation of hearsay has been explored within the individual texts themselves, hearsay is also found to destabilize the relations among the different texts of the Lol V. Stein cycle itself, an effect made possible because it exceeds limits that would be imposed on it.

Between one and another of the texts of the Lol cycle there exists the citation and re-citation of certain aspects of each. They cite each other in an attempt at re-writing Lol's story. Such citational practices among the texts impede closure within each and therefore destabilizes the entire cycle in general.

This sense of destabilization and lack of closure is effected more precisely by means of a *mise-en-abîme* of citations. Lol's desire for a repetition and, therefore, a remembering of the ball scene, coupled with the characters' quest for knowledge of Lol's story, both of which remain impossibilities -- impossible to be contained and impossible to be fulfilled -- result in the citation of traces, fragments of the lost event of the ball. Faced with the impossibility of what is impossible to be said, yet impossible to be closed off, contained, the narratives are the reverberation and citation of fragments which approach

the locus of the loss. Of course, the narratives cannot reconstruct it or fill it in. Citationality among these texts thus manifests itself on numerous levels, from the physical pages of the texts themselves to the characters as well as to other textual threads.

Physical evidence of what occurs among the texts can be found in the lacunae of the pages of the texts themselves. The spacing of the printed text in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* results in numerous textless sections, or blank spaces, separating portions of the print. These gaps are re-cited in the other texts of the cycle, most strikingly in *L'amour*. Furthermore, in *India Song* there are auditory blanks between the utterances made by the pairs of voices that constitute the dialogue(s). These periods of silence in the film can be construed as oral lacunae, re-citing in a way that of the written in the other texts of the cycle.

Numerous feminist critics of Duras' works have addressed the questions raised by the aforementioned textual blanks. For Susan Cohen, Duras seems to "stage silence on the page" (*Women and Discourse in the Fiction of Marguerite Duras*, p. 149) by leaving gaps between segments of text. Marini contends that Duras' writing "creates silence and empty space" that for Cohen and other feminists indicates the invention of a new "feminine" syntax in which silence is included as a component of speech. Xavière

Gauthier reads the blanks as the place of the woman, a view shared by other feminists who state that the occurrence of the blanks is the eruption of the feminine into the construct of masculine language.[20]

Whereas critics such as Cohen and Gauthier celebrate the blanks, as well as Duras' writing in general, as the emergence of a new "feminine" syntax, which at last affords space to woman, critics like Trista Selous, for example, view these "visual silences" as the impossibility of articulation.

The characters themselves are also subjected to this citational practice and, as is expected with such repetitions, they are deformed with each subsequent citing. As I have mentioned previously, the most obvious example of this is found, of course, in the character of Lol referred to as Lola Valérie Stein, Lol V. Stein, Lol and, by the time of *L'Amour*, simply "la femme." Michael Richardson, Lol's fiancé, who left the Casino ball with Anne-Marie Stretter in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, is recalled as Michael Richard in *Le Vice-Consul*, a member of the European circle to which Anne-Marie Stretter belongs, as Michael Richardson again in *India Song* and as "le voyageur" in *L'Amour*.

Striking descriptions of Anne-Marie Stretter appear in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, *Le Vice-Consul* and in *India Song*. From *Le Ravissement* comes the following:

> Elle était maigre. Elle devait l'avoir toujours été. Elle avait vêtu cette maigreur...d'une robe noire à double fourreau de tulle également noir, très décolletée. (pp. 15-16)

Reference to Stretter's appearance is again made in *Le Vice-Consul*:

> Ce soir à Calcutta, l'ambassadrice Anne-Marie Stretter est près du buffet, elle sourit, elle est en noir, sa robe est à double fourreau de tulle noir...Aux approches de la vieillesse, une maigreur lui est venue. (p. 92)

Whereas the description of her dress is practically the same, there is a discrepancy with regard to Stretter's physical stature. In *Le Ravissement*, she is described as "maigre," something she has likely always been. Yet, in *Le Vice-Consul* this "maigreur" seems to have been brought on by age. Here, direct reference is made to what could be considered the source of descriptions of Stretter's appearance, *Le Ravissement*. It is quite interesting to note that each of the preceding descriptions of Stretter are connected to a ball in the respective texts. It is, after all, the locus of Lol's ravishing by her fiancé and Stretter and marks the event to which access remains impossible.

Place names as well are cited and re-cited: S. Thala, where *Le Ravissement* takes place becomes repeated as S. Thala in *L'amour*, where, as I have commented earlier, the town appears to have spread all the way to the beach, swallowing up T. Beach from *Le Ravissement* where the Casino ball occurred. The woman in *L'amour* comments, "Ici, c'est

S. Thala jusqu'à la rivière" (p. 15), which is subsequently cited by the man who adds, "Après la rivière, c'est encore S. Thala" (p. 20). The S. Thala of *L'amour* not only seems to be a reconstruction of the S. Thala of *Le Ravissement* but it also surpasses the boundary of the river, spilling out beyond it.

The hunger of the beggar woman and her vomiting which occurs continously during her ten-year trek southward to Calcutta, "Elle vomit, s'efforce de vomir l'enfant" (p. 18) finds its reverberation in *L'amour* when the woman announces, "J'attends un enfant, j'ai envie de vomir" (p. 23). The inability to control the story and the vomiting is revealed in her next statement about it, "ça ne sert à rien, ça recommence" (p. 23). The "ça" that recommences can in fact been seen to refer not only to the beggar woman's pregnancy and vomiting, but also to the event itself, underscoring its ability to begin again in a quite different context.

Various narrative threads are also found to run across and through the texts. For example, the ball scene in *Le Ravissement* has certainly been "heard about" in *Le Vice-Consul* though no direct mention of it is made within the text. The mere (re-)appearance of Anne-Marie Stretter and Michael Richard in the novel evokes an indirect recollection of the ball scene where Michael Richard(son) left Lol for Anne-Marie.

If *Le Vice-Consul* contains no apparent explicit memory of Lol's ravishing at the ball, *L'amour* provides a clearer citation of it, with the traveler's return to what is presumably the ballroom of the Casino. Prior to his visit to the Casino, reference is made to Lol's ravishing when the traveler says to her, "Dix-huit ans -- il ajoute -- C'était votre âge..." (p. 110-11). He continues attempting to cite the event of the ravishing, "Quand pour la première fois vous êtes tombée malade -- il ajoute -- Après un bal" (p. 112). This elicits some response from the woman who seems to recall "j'ai été mariée avec un musicien, j'ai eu deux enfants..." (p. 113), a citation of *Le Ravissement* in which she had married Jean Bedford.

The traveler returns to the woman, who awakes upon his arrival. She states simply, "Vous êtes allé demander" (p. 132). The traveler replies that he found the place "entre les murs" and that "on voit aussi la porte par laquelle nous sommes sortis...séparés" (p. 132). This return to the locked room where "il n'y a plus de bal" (p. 127) fails to recreate the scene of the ravishing, lost forever, but allows it to once again take place by means of its re-citation.

The text of *India Song* contains an important citation of the ball from *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* by the first voice, who sounds as if she is reading directly from a text: "'Michael Richardson était fiancé à une jeune fille

de S. Thala. Lola Valérie Stein. Le mariage devait avoir lieu à l'automne. Puis il y a eu ce bal. Ce bal de S. Thala'" (p. 15). The line from this passage concerning the wedding is a direct quotation from *Le Ravissement* (p. 12). Another such occurrence is found pages later when the first voice appears to again be reading from a text concerning the Casino ball. This time she indicates the moment of Lol's ravishing, when Richardson and Stretter left her behind at the ball:

> Derrière les plantes vertes du bar, elle les regarde. Ce n'est qu'à l'aurore...quand les amants se dirigèrent vers les portes du bal que Lola Valérie Stein poussa un cri. (p. 36)

Here, I would like to note that in the written text of *India Song*, Duras has placed the preceding two passages in quotation marks, to lend an air of authority to the voices which do not, however, seem to quite remember the story they discuss. By reading the above passages in quotation marks, one is led to believe that the voices are reading directly from a text, as the notes suggest. Yet, these notes fail to disclose from what text the voices read, although the passage obviously recalls *Le Ravissement*.

Lol's cry emitted following her ravishing at the ball, "Lol cria pour la première fois" (*Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, p. 22) can be said to be cited in the cry of the Vice-Consul which doubled that of the beggar woman's "battambang" in *Le Vice-Consul* and in *India Song*. At the end of the ambassador's reception in *Le Vice-Consul*, the

Vice-Consul screams as he is excluded from the group of Europeans. His cries merge smoothly into those of the beggar woman. The cry also has its citation in *L'amour*: "l'homme crie" (p. 12).

The inaccessibility of the origin, or the lack of access to the event itself which is responsible for the narrative cycle reveals itself as the "mot-trou" in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*. The following passage, which is arguably the most celebrated one from the entire Lol V. Stein cycle and has been treated by the likes of Lacan, Marini, Montrelay, among others, forms the crux of the cycle. It is what circulates throughout all of the texts by means of hearsay.

> Que serait-il? Lol ne va pas loin dans l'inconnu sur lequel s'ouvre cet instant. Elle ne dispose d'aucun souvenir même imaginaire, elle n'a aucune idée sur cet inconnu. Mais ce qu'elle croit, c'est qu'elle devait y pénétrer, que c'était ce qu'il lui fallait faire, que ç'aurait été pour toujours, pour sa tête et pour son corps, leur plus grande douleur et leur plus grande joie confondues jusque dans leur définition devenue unique mais innommable faute d'un mot. J'aime à croire, comme je l'aime, que si Lol est silencieuse dans la vie c'est qu'elle a cru,l'espace d'un éclair, que ce mot pouvait exister. Faute de son existence, elle se tait. Ç'aurait été un mot-absence, un mot-trou, creusé en son centre d'un trou, de ce trou où tous les autres mots auraient été enterrés. On n'aurait pas pu le dire mais on aurait pu le faire résonner. Immense, sans fin, un gong vide, il aurait retenu ceux qui voulaient partir, il les aurait convaincus de l'impossible, il les aurait nommés, eux, l'avenir et l'instant. Manquant, ce mot, il gâche tous les autres, les contamine, c'est aussi le chien mort de la plage en plein midi, ce trou de chair. Comment ont-ils été trouvés les autres? Au décrochez-moi-ça de

> quelles aventures parallèles à celle de Lol V. Stein étouffées dans l'oeuf, piétinées et des massacres, oh! qu'il y en a, que d'inachèvements sanglants le long des horizons, amoncelés, et parmi eux, ce mot, qui n'existe pas, pourtant est là: il vous attend au tournant du langage, il vous défie, il n'a jamais servi, de le soulever, de le faire surgir hors de son royaume percé de toutes parts à travers lequel s'écoulent la mer, le sable, l'éternité du bal dans le cinéma de Lol V. Stein. (pp. 47-49).

The "mot-trou" is therefore impossible to (be) utter(ed), since it does not exist, although "on aurait pu le faire résonner" and it does reverberate, cited "sans fin" as a sort of *mise en abîme* "creusé en son centre d'un trou," contaminating all others through its incessant repetition. Its reverberation or echoing erupts in *Le Vice-Consul* and in *L'amour* in several ways. In *Le Vice-Consul*, this "mot-trou" re-emerges first in the form of "Battambang." Sharon Willis calls it a "perpetually displaced syllabic flow" which "plies its way between presence and absence, life and death, 'death in the midst of life, death following but never catching up' -- the perpetually missed encounter" (*Marguerite Duras: Writing on the Body*, p. 70).

The quest for the absent, non-existent word continues and the "mot-trou" remains in circulation by means of hearsay, the infinite citation of something that has always already been heard. The beggar woman's cry of "Battambang" is doubled in Lahore in *Le Vice-Consul*, particularly in the previously discussed exchange between the Vice-Consul and Anne-Marie Stretter. It takes on more of an inarticulate

quality, Anne-Marie Stretter finds herself unable to express it, "je ne sais pas comment le dire." The Vice-Consul is similarly unable to address it. Saying, "Il n'est pas important maintenant," he merely defers it yet again, re-instating it into the circuit of hearsay, concluding with, "Je cherche le mot. Il y a un autre mot?" Achieving access to this word, to the originary event will remain impossible, infinitely deferred save for traces, for the hearsay erupting in and disrupting the texts of the cycle.

In *L'amour*, the word-hole of *Le Ravissement* -- "c'est aussi le chien mort de la plage en plein midi" -- is literally transformed into a dead dog on the beach of S. Thala. In this example we read that the woman "cesse de montrer, se détourne de tout, rentre dans le chien mort" (p. 104). The incarnation of the absence-word as a dead dog on a beach is but yet another manifestation of what Willis calls a "circuit of repetition" and what I have developed as hearsay.

The preceding pages offer but an indication of the citationality functioning in the Lol cycle as hearsay, operating within and across all the texts we have studied. While some critics see the cycle in terms of a cannabilization or an annulation of prior texts by the subsequent texts of the cycle, Susan Cohen sees Duras' rewriting as a means of opening and pluralizing each of the texts. She refers to the intertextual citations as

"conjugations" of previously appearing narrative elements with new ones to create yet another narrative permutation (*Women and Discourse in the Works of Marguerite Duras*, p. 63). I have argued that such conjugations are possible due to the process of hearsay, of hearing and saying previously heard information. We have found that hearsay operates within each text, as a means of disseminating unverified and unverifiable information in order to attempt the narrative. However, the insistence and reliance on such a citational practice serve to undermine the very narrative that is being attempted. In addition, the authority of narrative/narrator becomes questionable as it is revealed that hearsay constitutes the text. The result, as we have seen, is a failure of traditional textual production in that the expected forms of closure are impeded and the narrative remains an effort at, rather than an example of, a complete and absolute narrative.

I contend that it is indeed the effects of hearsay that propel the generation of "conjugations" or a plurality of texts from *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*. This becomes increasingly apparent in the hearsay involving the "mot-trou" which circulates among all the texts pointing to the repeated and re-cited efforts to achieve access to the originary event. The "mot-trou" appears initially in *Le Ravissement* and, as I have previously stated, is re-cited as the scream of the beggar woman and the Vice-Consul in *Le*

Vice-Consul and the dead dog on the beach in *L'amour*. The "mot-trou" persists in being re-cited as heard in the resonating screams of *India Song* and ultimately as its radicalized (in)articulation in *Son Nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert*.

As the scope and impact of hearsay in general is immeasurable, so too are its effects in narrative. Due to the lack of closure of the texts of the Lol V. Stein cycle, hearsay places into circulation, in unlimited and unlimitable contexts, certain textual threads of the individual narratives, motivated in part by the inaccessibility of the original event of Lol's ravishing. The result is the dissemination of narrative elements, which have been previously disclosed, within and between the Lol texts. At the outside, hearsay seems to function like the "gong vide" of the "mot-trou" whose reverbation is continously felt but whose source is cut off and fallen into the abyss of the repeating textual forms and fragments of the cycle.

Notes

1. As mentioned in the introduction, these critics include Sharon Willis, Jacques Lacan, Susan Cohen and Leslie Hill.

2. My understanding of narrative closure and resistance to closure stems from the narrative theory practiced by Roland Barthes, especially in *S/Z* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970). My use of the term narrative is similar, therefore, to Barthes' notion of "scriptibilité." For a broader discussion of narrative, see Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1984). See also Ross Chambers, *Story and Situation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

3. "Hearsay Evidence" in *Texas Jurisprudence*, 2nd edition, vol. 24, p. 54.

4. Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 13.

5. Jörg Bergmann, *Discreet Indiscretions* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1993), p. 70.

6. Ross Chambers, "Gossip and the Novel" in *Australian Journal of French Studies*, vol. XXIII, no. 2. (Clayton, Australia: Monash University Publishers, 1986), p. 41.

7. Ross Chambers, *Room for Maneuver* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 204.

8. Leslie Hill, *Marguerite Duras: Apocalyptic Desires* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 73.

9. Jacques Lacan, "Hommage à Margeurite Duras," in *Marguerite Duras* (Paris: Albatros, 1979), p. 198.

10. Several feminist critics, most notably Susan Cohen and Carol J. Murphy, read these blanks as the eruption of feminine language into masculine discourse.

11. Mieke Bal, *Narratologie* (Utrecht: Hess Publishers, 1984), p. 82.

12. Viviane Forrestier, "Territoire du cri" in *Marguerite Duras* (Paris: Albatros, 1979), p. 172.

13. Lucy Stone McNeece, *Art and Politics in Duras' India Cycle* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1996), pp. 93-94.

14. Carol J. Murphy, *Alienation and Absence in the Novels of Marguerite Duras* (Lexington, KY: French Forum Publishers, 1982), pp. 142-43.

15. Trista Selous, *The Other Woman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 136.

16. McNeece goes further to explain that what is at stake in *India Song* is the deconstruction of "myths and meanings that have become an integral part of post-colonial discourse" while simultaneously distrubing our conception of identity.

17. Michel de Certeau, "Marguerite Duras: On dit," in *Ecrire dit-elle* (Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1985), p. 257.

18. Madeleine Borgomano, *L'écriture filmique de Marguerite Duras* (Paris: Albatros, 1985), p. 120.

19. Susan Cohen, *Women and Discourse in the Fiction of Marguerite Duras* (Amherest, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), p. 59.

20. Xavière Gauthier, "Dépossédé," in *Marguerite Duras* (Paris: Albatros, 1979).

CHAPTER THREE

TESTIMONY: THE CASE OF MAURICE BLANCHOT'S *RECITS*

Introduction

As one of this century's most enigmatic yet prolific writers, Maurice Blanchot has made immeasurable literary and theoretical contributions to the domain of French literature. His career as a writer stretches back some sixty years to the early 1930s when he first worked as a journalist for *Journal des Débats*. In addition to the critical essays Blanchot produced during the 1940s, he also wrote several fictional texts including his last novel, *Le Très-Haut*, and his first *récit*, *L'arrêt de mort*, both published in 1948. The renouncement of the novel in favor of the *récit* signalled a movement toward Blanchot's exploration of the "space of literature," culminating with 1955's publication of *L'espace littéraire*, a crucial text in his oeuvre.

The 1950s saw Blanchot embark on further critical forays including essays written in response to Barthes, Lacan and Lévi-Strauss. In addition, the exploration of the *récit* and its limits continued. From the 1960s on, Blanchot's work became increasingly situated in the experimental mode of fragmentary, plurivocal writing as best exemplified in *Le Pas au-delà*, a text whose genre -- literary or theoretical -- is impossible to determine.

Finally, after having abandoned the *récit* form for years, Blanchot published *L'instant de ma mort* in 1994.

Critics have isolated phases in Blanchot's work and have a tendency to focus on the significance of his more theoretical texts such as *L'espace littéraire* and *L'écriture du désastre*. I do not seek to ignore the importance of these texts and indeed they play an important role in anyone's reading of his fictional works, for in them he establishes the framework within which he writes his novels and *récits*.

Although Blanchot's critical contributions are quite relevant to literary studies, I choose, however, to focus on three of his *récits*, because of their staging of the question of citationality. In terms of testimony, the citational effects produced by *La Folie du jour*, *L'arrêt de mort* and *L'instant de ma mort* problematize notions of narrative.

Testimony: The Legal Tradition

Defined according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "personal or documentary evidence or attestation in support of a fact or statement," testimony can be any form of evidence or proof, especially an open attestation, acknowledgement or confession. Despite being commonly used as an interchangeable term for evidence, testimony is defined in criminal law usage as statements of witnesses taken under oath or affirmation. It is the spoken word of

witnesses and is considered evidence, although "evidence may or may not be testimony, and in most cases, does consist of more than testimony."[1]

In other words, the law stipulates that the witness must be twice present, both during the alleged event(s) and during subsequent court proceedings. Therefore, testimony is admissible where it appears possible for the witness to have first-hand or personal knowledge of the facts to which s/he testifies. Considered "the eyes and ears of justice," the witness does not seem dependent for his/her information on the statements of another witness who is unavailable for testimony and absent during proceedings.[2] The requirement of first-hand information and the witness' presence clearly distinguishes testimony from another function of citationality, that of hearsay which is, as I have discussed, generally inadmissible in court as it is comprised of second-hand information considered unreliable.

At the time of an appearance during court proceedings, the witness must offer his/her spoken word under oath according to a procedure known as the right of confrontation. Due to the requirement that testimony must be given with a live voice in the first person, other forms of testimony, such as technological reproductions, including audio and video recordings, for example, are hardly ever allowed to take the place of the witness' presence. A curious exception however is that some

jurisdictions allow the introduction of a deposition, or written record of the witness' statements outside of the court, on the grounds that his/her presence is impossible owing to good cause. Such an exception was recently made in the case of President Clinton's testimony for the grand jury investigating his involvement with Monica Lewinsky.

Obviously, testimony is more effective if given in person rather than if read before the court because it is live and therefore both immediate and direct. This notion valorizes the witness' spoken word and as such once again demonstrates the juridical privileging of the present and the oral, the status of which will prove to be illusionary once we explore the doubling of presence and the citational nature of testimony.

While the general consensus is that bearing witness will result in a few discrepancies in testimony due to the time and space differential between the moment of occurrence of the alleged event and the witness' re-presentation of that event before a court, other instances of inaccuracy can be attributed in part to the commonly used technique of embroidery. Unlike perjury, which is deliberate untruthfulness under oath, embroidery involves alteration of peripheral facts in order to strengthen a case (*Courtroom Testimony*, p. 35). Facts which are not necessarily material to the case are inserted and elicited

in the testimony. Such a technique will come to bear heavily on our reading of testimony as narrative and vice versa.

Testimony As Narrative

As its definition suggests, testimony involves making something public; that is, disclosing a secret, the private. Such a notion suggests a transgression or border-crossing.

In addition to rendering the private public, testimony also makes what once was present, present again. This doubling of presence raises two conditions: the possible and the impossible. In *Demeure: fiction et témoignage*, Jacques Derrida describes the possible as the necessity of the witness' presence in order for the court to conduct testimony procedure.[3] Yet, this is, in a sense, rendered impossible because the witness has already been present in another time and another place, in that s/he was physically present as a witness during the occurrence of the alleged event(s). Testifying thus destroys its own condition of possibility since testimony itself requires the witness to be present and subsequently re-present. Following Derrida's explanation, we see that the witness must have already experienced the event and that that experience must be made present again. In other words, two moments involving the witness can be isolated, removed both temporally and spatially from one another. The initial "moment of the

witness" is his/her presence during the alleged event, which remains distanced from the "moment of bearing witness," in which the witness becomes present again. This requirement of and attempt at a double presence, established by the procedure of testimony itself, denotes that there is always already repetition or citation during proceedings, in spite, and as a result of the insistence on a testimony that is live and spoken in the first person.

Testimony is neither immediate nor accurate since the event it refers to has already been experienced. Consequently, testimony is always a repetition. As Derrida explains, when I say I will tell the truth, I say I will repeat myself; I will re-cite and re-present my experience (*ibid.*). The lack of immediacy is clearly seen as resulting from the temporal distance between the two moments of witnessing, whereas the lack of accuracy stems from the previously discussed technique of embroidery. According to Derrida, who addresses the question of embroidery in terms of its narrative elements, "le témoin doit à la fois se conformer à des critères donnés et inventer, de façon quasi-poétique, les normes de son attestation..." (*ibid.*, p. 26). Despite the accepted use of this technique, which for Derrida is not merely a technique but, in fact, the constituting structure of testimony itself, authority is granted to the witness due to the singularity of his/her experience and testimony: "Il faut me croire parce qu'il

faut me croire. Je suis irremplaçable" (*ibid.*). Derrida elaborates:

> Même si nous avons été plusieurs à participer à un événement, à assister à une scène, le témoin ne peut témoigner que là où il affirme qu'il était à une place unique et où il pouvait témoigner de cela et cela en un ici-maintenant, c'est-à-dire en un instant pointu qui supporte justement cette exemplarité, c'est-à-dire irremplaçable. (*Ibid.*)

The uniqueness of each witness is made clear in the preceding passage as each witness can testify from only a specific position about what s/he experienced. Since testimony depends upon the singularity of the witness and his/her ability to testify in the first-person, it renders each witness irreplaceable and testimony itself thus becomes autobiographical in nature. Derrida adds, "Je ne peux témoigner...qu'à l'instant où ce dont je témoigne, personne ne peut témoigner à ma place. Ce dont je témoigne est d'abord, à l'instant, mon secret, il reste à moi réservé" (*ibid.*, p. 32).

In *Fragments of Redemption: Jewish Thought and Literary Theory in Benjamin, Scholem and Lévinas*, Susan Handelman views testimony as:

> An inevitable part of the language of the survivor, one who comes from the "other" side indeed - who must bring the indescribable to description, who tries to say the unsayable, who speaks for the impossible and says the unthinkable by speaking his own vulnerability and exposure.[4]

For her, the principle objective of testimony is to bear witness for the other and not so much to confess what one

has experienced. The witness who comes from the "other" side, comes from this privileged position of singularity where s/he cannot be replaced.

In *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub seem to follow Derrida's notion of testimony as embroidery in that, as a process, testimony is not so much a statement of truth but a means of access to it:

> The emergence of the narrative which is being listened to - and heard - is, therefore, the process and the place wherein the cognizance, the "knowing" of the event is given birth to as the creation of knowledge **de novo**.[5]

Through her work as a practicing psychoanalyst eliciting the testimonies of Holocaust survivors, Laub asserts that bearing witness to a traumatic event involves the "process by which the narrator (the survivor) reclaims his position as a witness..." (*ibid.*, p. 85). Yet, this act both "makes and breaks a promise: the promise of the testimony as a realization of the truth" (*ibid.*, p. 91). For Laub, the cognizance of the event fulfills the promise of a return to the sane and normal. This promise however fails because, despite a commitment to truth, the testimony cannot capture or re-create it (*ibid.*).

Felman and Laub's definition of testimony as the "creation of knowledge" and the recognition of its impossibility to capture the truth, or the event, provides us with further evidence that allows us to consider all

testimony as embroidery, as narrative, as inhabiting the structure of fiction. However, it should be emphasized that this does not disqualify testimony, or mean that all testimony is simply fiction, rather that it is caught in the paradox of citationality whereby what enables it also disables it.

The structural complicity that exists between fiction and testimony is therefore self-evident. Although testimony is not merely storytelling, but rather a re-citation, it does possess narrative elements and even Laub's discussion of testimony in which she employs words such as "narrator" and "narrative" lends further support to this formulation. Obviously, the act of testimony reflects the structure of narrative/storytelling itself. There is necessarily distance in time and space between the event and the relation or the narration of that event. This complicitous relationship is most apparent in the fiction of Maurice Blanchot.

Testimony and Blanchot

In the case of Maurice Blanchot, testimony constitutes the narrative comprising several of his fictional texts, or *récits*, three of which I will analyze in this chapter in terms of testimony as a function of citationality. Before proceeding to these textual analyses, I will first discuss what constitutes Blanchot's definition of *récit* in order to facilitate an understanding of the connection between his

work and testimony. In "Le Chant des Sirènes" from *Le livre à venir*, Blanchot explicates his concept of *récit*.[6] According to Blanchot, a *récit* must be comprised of several different criteria. First, it must deal with a single event which appears to be out of the ordinary, and, consequently, is not subject to laws of ordinary time or reality. Furthermore, the *récit* is not the exact relation or disclosure of this unusual event as reported by the narrator; it is not an account of the event, but the event itself:

> Le récit n'est pas le relation de l'événement, mais cet événement même, l'approche de cet événement, le lieu où celui-ci est appelé à se produire, événement encore à venir et par la puissance attirante, duquel le récit peut espérer, lui aussi, se réaliser...Le récit ...ne 'relate' que lui-même et cette relation, en même temps qu'elle fait, produit ce qu'elle raconte. (*Le livre à venir*, pp. 13-14)

Timothy Clark addresses the reflexive nature of the *récit* inherent in this definition (in that the *récit* becomes the event it narrates) by citing one of Blanchot's early *récits*, *L'attente l'oubli*, in which the encounter that forms the basis of the narrative is the encounter to which it refers.[7] A series of repetitions and quotations from different parts of the text aids in disrupting narrative time and the event narrated is therefore the narration as event (*ibid.*).

Since a *récit* is a re-citing or rather a *récit*-ing of an event, it is undoubtedly testimonial. According to

Blanchot, access to the event itself about which the narrator-witness testifies is impossible due to the problems of time and space which in turn lead to the failure of conventional narrative. The witness' inaccessibility to the event is additionally related to what Blanchot calls the limit-experience; that is, the impossible attempt to put into language what has not yet been said and what cannot be said. In *L'entretien infini*, Blanchot writes of the limit experience as something that "Nous en parlons comme d'une expérience et pourtant nous ne pourrons jamais dire que nous l'avons éprouvé...Expérience de la non-expérience."[8] As Gary Mole writes in *Lévinas, Blanchot, Jabès: Figures of Estrangement*: "Beyond memory, the event lies beyond representation (it cannot be re-presented, brought into the fictive present of the récit)."[9] The *récit* attempts to be the relation of an event but it becomes the event itself. The act of testimony functions in similar manner, as an attempt to reconstitute the present-ness of the event, but it fails structurally, since the moment of the event's occurrence remains severed temporally and spatially from the moment of bearing witness.

In *La Folie du jour*, *L'arrêt de mort* and *L'instant de ma mort*, the insistence on testimony, on forcing the narrator to bear witness in order to achieve the narrative,

results in its own failure, such that narrative closure remains deferred and appears impossible.

Although the reasons for this failure are text-specific, the impossibility of achieving narrative can generally be attributed, in these works, to the effects of citationality itself. The impact citationality produces on narrative is such that it inhibits textual closure and tends to collapse the text into citation and re-citation. As I will reveal in my analysis of *La Folie du jour*, the entirety of the text is the mere citation of itself as citation, or rather a *mise-en-abîme* of its own citation, whereas in *L'arrêt de mort* the narrator's attempt to bear witness by writing his testimony in the form of a book is never completed or even able to be achieved. The testimony that comprises *L'instant de ma mort* problematizes the narrator's testimony about his own death. That narrator thus becomes a first-person "impossibility," which necessitates a shift to the third-person in order for him to "accomplish" the text.

However, it is not just in these particular *récits* that citationality figures in Blanchot's works. In fact, it can be seen to function among and between several of his texts, as I will examine in the following section, before proceeding to an analysis of the aforementioned works.

Citationality in Maurice Blanchot

The publishing history of several of Blanchot's texts remains a curiosity, particularly in light of my discussion of citationality. Different versions of the same text appear as citations of that very text. A first example: *Thomas l'obscur*, a "roman" first published in 1941, reappears in 1950 as a "nouvelle version" and no longer a "roman." The preface to the new version reads as follows:

> Il y a pour tout ouvrage, une infinité de variantes possibles. Aux pages intitulées *Thomas l'obscur*, écrites à partir de 1932, remises à l'éditeur en mai 1940, publiées en 1941, la présente version n'ajoute rien, mais comme elle leur ôte beaucoup, on peut la dire autre et même nouvelle, mais aussi toute pareille, si, entre la figure et ce qui en est ou s'en croit le centre, l'on a raison de ne pas distinguer, chaque fois que la figure complète n'exprime elle-même que la recherche d'un centre imaginaire.[10]

The preceding captures perhaps the essence of citation itself in that any text can in its turn generate numerous versions or citations of itself, each different yet the same, once its center of authority or origin is displaced in the way Blanchot describes.

Some of Blanchot's texts, as indicated above, have been published on separate occasions with textual discrepancies. *La Folie du jour*, for example, made its initial appearance in the literary journal *Empédocle* and from the outset its very title problematized questions of borders, in the sense of interior/exterior and origin/citation. In *Parages*, Derrida addresses the issue of

the *récit*'s title stating that it was indeed Andrzej Warminski who informed him of the irregularities in its appearance in the journal.[11] On the cover page of *Empédocle*, there is a listing of the table of contents which includes *Un Récit?*, the title of a contribution by Maurice Blanchot. This title appears to neatly cite two instances found within the text of "Un récit?" (*La Folie du jour*, pp. 36 and 38). Yet, the table of contents page reproduced inside the journal as well as the first page of the *récit* itself reveal the loss of the question mark in the title; it reads simply *Un Récit*. In 1973, this *récit* was once again published and this particular re-citation of the text involves a title change from *Un Récit* to *La Folie du jour* with no other alterations to the text itself.

A third text of Blanchot which has appeared as two versions of itself is *L'arrêt de mort*. This text was originally published in 1948 with the notation "récit" beneath its title. The second version of the text sees the deletion of the word "récit" along with the last two pages of the narrative.

In addition to the appearance of several versions or citations of Blanchot's texts, there have also been citations of or references to certain texts within others. Although more of a faint echo which recalls the other text by citing it without citing it, these instances do stand out for one familiar with Blanchot's work as a whole. For

example, in *L'instant de ma mort*, "ni l'absence de crainte et peut-être déjà le pas au-delà" cites the text *Le Pas au-delà* without directly or explicitly citing from it. By means of this mention of its title, the text of *Le Pas au-delà* is at least potentially folded within that of *L'instant de ma mort*.

In *Le Pas au-delà*, *L'arrêt de mort* is ever so subtly cited on page 135, "Survive, not to live, not living, to maintain oneself, without life, in a state of pure supplement, movement of substitution for life, but rather to arrest dying, arrest that does not arrest, making it on the contrary, *last*."[12] Obviously, while citing or recalling *L'arrêt de mort*, this phrase also exploits the phrase as not only a death sentence but also a halting, or arresting ("arrêt") of death and dying.

The preceding examples, although by no means comprehensive, demonstrate the effects of citationality at work amongst and between Blanchot's various texts. I will now turn to the specific *récits* I intend to analyze.

La Folie du jour

One of Blanchot's early *récits* I have chosen to analyze is *La Folie du jour*, a text which poses particular problems concerning narrative as testimony, in that the text is a citation of itself as testimony.

Mentioned in the previous section of this chapter, the discrepancies in the publishing history of *La Folie du jour*

indicate the impact of citational effects on it from the outset. The re-publication, in 1973, of this text with its new title, *La Folie du jour*, occurs with no other apparent modifications to the text. As in the previous title(s) of *Un récit(?)*, this newly published title appears to be a citation from within the text, "...je fus convaincu que je voyais face à face la folie du jour" (p. 22). Derrida reminds us however of the impossibility of determining if the different titles of the *récit* are indeed citations from the text, or if, instead, the textual instances of these phrases "la folie du jour" and "un récit(?)" are citations of the titles (*Parages*, p. 131). In other words, deciding which appearance of these phrases is the origin or source and which is its citation remains impossible. With the indeterminacy of the function of the title as source or citation of the in-text phrases, the *récit* poses itself as problematic from the outset. In *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary*, Leslie Hill states, "...Each proposed title doubles both as a naming of the text and an integral part of it, as an address to the text and a quotation from it..."[13] Indeed it is this very confounding of textual borders springing from the indeterminacy of source and citation that is exploited throughout the text.

The *récit* itself concerns of the testimony of the narrator, who bears witness to his interrogators, an opthamalogist and a psychiatrist, about the events in his

life prior and subsequent to his admittance to hospital, a move precipitated by the injury to his eyes. The emergence of the narrator-witness' madness ("je suis devenu fou quand ce coup m'a frappé, car c'est un enfer" (p.11)) apparently precedes this incident while coinciding with "la folie du monde" or the eruption of war:

> Peu après, la folie du monde se déchaina. Je fus mis au mur comme beaucoup d'autres. Pourquoi? Pour rien. Les fusils ne partirent pas...Le monde hésita, puis reprit son équilibre. (p. 11)

Here, it is interesting to first note that in *L'instant de ma mort* there is a citation of this autobiographical passage in which the witness finds himself placed against the wall of his house where he is to be executed by German soldiers: "Le nazi mit en rang ses hommes pour atteindre, selon les règles, la cible humaine" (*L'instant de ma mort*, p. 9). Additionally, in contrast to "la folie du monde," the madness of the narrator remained "sans témoin" and as such, a secret yet to be disclosed, because it surfaced during the concealing darkness of the night:

> Or, j'étais brûlé des pieds à la tête; la nuit je courais les rues, je hurlais; le jour, je travaillais tranquillement. (*Ibid.*)

The *récit* focuses on the non-event of the narrator's eye injury, "Je faillis perdre la vue, quelqu'un ayant écrasé du verre sur mes yeux" (p. 21). As in many other instances in this text where there is a play between and on boundaries, it must be stated that the eye injury does not quite blind the narrator; yet, it does not enable him to

maintain his eyesight unharmed. He states, "Je ne pouvais ni regarder ni ne pas regarder; voir c'était l'épouvante, et cesser de voir me déchirer du front à la gorge" (*ibid.*).

The narrator in fact only begins to see when his eyes are bandaged. In his essay, "The Trace of Trauma," Michael Newman comments on the double meaning of "verre" as both glass and lens. While it is glass that was crushed into the narrator's eyes, nearly blinding him, it is "verre" in the form of glass or a lens that enables him to see.[14] Therefore, it can be stated that the crushing of glass in his eyes harms them in such a way as to precipitate his ability to clearly see.

What he sees, or experiences, is indeed the "folie du jour":

> A la longue, je fus convaincu que je voyais face à face la folie du jour; telle était la vérité: la lumière devenait folle, la clarté avait perdu tout bon sens. (p. 22)

His initial vision of the "folie du jour" can be linked to what Derrida calls the "principe de contamination" (*Parages*, p. 256). In fact, Derrida discusses the exploitation of the word "jour" in this *récit* by reading "jour" as synonymous to the law. The glass thrown into the narrator's eyes induces the "sept jours ensemble, les sept clartés capitales devenues la vivacité d'un seul instant" (p. 22). It is in this phrase that Derrida finds oblique connections to the law in Genesis and in the number seven, the number of days in the week as well as the number of

deadly sins. Yet, within this law, within this day resides what defies juridical convention and what incites the narrator:

> Et si voir, c'était le feu, j'exigeais la plénitude du feu, et si voir c'était la contagion de la folie, je désirais follement cette folie. (pp. 22-23).

This "feu" or "contagion de la folie" for which the narrator yearns so intensely can indeed be viewed as that "principe de contamination" inhabiting the law. In fact this "contagion" is indeed the "loi de la loi du genre" which ultimately inhibits compliance with it. According to Derrida, the "principe de contamination" is actually "une loi d'impureté, une économie du *parasite*" (*Parages*, p. 256). This contagion that contaminates the *récit* by disrupting boundaries prevents it from abiding by the law that prescribes how a text should function.

The parasitic economy marks what Emmanuel Lévinas describes in *Sur Maurice Blanchot* as "itération infiniment répétée de la folie désirée comme lumière du jour et du jour qui blesse l'oeil qui le cherche."[15]

Although not initially apparent, this infinite repetition of the narrator's testimony eventually becomes clear through the re-citation of the following opening statement by the narrator:

> Je suis ni savant ni ignorant. J'ai connu des joies. C'est trop peu dire: je vis, et cette vie me fait le plaisir le plus grand. Alors, la mort? Quand je mourrai (peut-être tout à l'heure), je connaîtrai un plaisir immense. (p. 9)

It is only at the end of the text that we learn that this opening corresponds to the statements made by the narrator to his interrogators. Therefore, the discourse that constitutes the text is actually an attempt to force a narrative, a testimony, out of the narrator. His interrogators tell him, "Racontez-nous comment les choses se sont passés 'au juste'." (p. 36). Their request for what happened exactly, for all the facts - the truth - raises two observations. First, it suggests that he is not giving us the whole story, as the interrogators' surprise reveals when he arrives at the end, prompting them to further pressure him for the whole story, "Après ce commencement...vous en viendrez aux faits" (p. 36). Second, their demand presupposes that "un homme qui parle et raisonne avec distinction, est toujours capable de raconter des faits dont il se souvient" (pp. 37-38). Yet, this requirement that the narrator abide by the law and fully complete his testimony remains couched in impossibility for two reasons. First, the act of testimony, as I have discussed, borders on the impossible of re-presenting what was previously present. Second, the eye injury can be viewed as constitutive of a non-event since the narrator was not blinded. These reasons leave the *récit* as nothing more than the *récit* of itself. As Lévinas writes, it is the iteration "d'un récit racontant ce récit même" (*Sur Maurice*

Blanchot, p. 59). In other words, the only thing *récit*-ed is the re-citation of the *récit* itself.

This re-citation as testimony disrupts any clear sense of temporality as well. In *L'espace littéraire* Blanchot describes what can be viewed as the perpetual citationality of writing as a function of "la fascination de l'absence du temps" (*L'espace littéraire*, p. 20). Thus we encounter in *La Folie du jour* certain instances where references are made to impending occurrences, yet any sense of their actual passing is lost as it is revealed that the text is already a re-citation. For example, the following phrase appears in the opening passage of the text: "Quand je mourrai, (peut-être tout à l'heure), je connaîtrai un plaisir immense" (p. 9). Written in the future tense, this phrase is rendered disruptive upon arrival at the "end" of the text, where the text re-begins, with this phrase still in the future tense. There is no understanding of when or if "tout à l'heure" takes place, since what is read is already a citation which at the end becomes re-cited again. As Lévinas states there is a:

> Suppression du temps comme événement dans le temps. Ce rebondissement que la syntaxe tolère n'est pas non-sens..."Peut-être tout à l'heure" - la parenthèse de l'auteur suggère le retour inévitable de l'heure, l'infaillibilité de l'heure juste. (*Sur Maurice Blanchot*, p. 59)

This impending arrival of "tout à l'heure" is never achieved in effect because of a *mise-en-abîme* of citations; the narrative folds back on itself infinitely so that there

is never a first *récit* ("sans fin. sans commencement. sans avenir," *L'espace littéraire*, p. 21), but there is always a recommencement, infinitely, "Cela n'est pas, mais revient, vient comme déjà et toujours passé de sorte que je ne le connais pas, mais le reconnais" (*ibid.*).

The preceding example in the future tense demonstrates the impact that citationality, in the form of testimony, has on temporality, the disjointedness or disjunction that occurs between a present and a past or a present and a future. If an utterance can *always already* be repeated, it never just *occurs*. Another striking example is found midway through the *récit* when the narrator interjects in the present, "Tout cela était réel, notez-le" (p. 20). Yet, since the end of the text only marks its re-beginning, the temporality of this intercedent as a present is skewed. To recall, the act of testimony, the moment of bearing witness, is dependent upon the here and now, the presence of the witness who offers testimony orally. This has previously been shown to be problematic as testimony itself is a re-citation of the moment of the witness, when the events/facts to which the witness testifies were first experienced. Yet in *La Folie du jour*, the here and now, the presence of the witness and his testimony, is even further removed from its initial presence during the moment of the witness due to the citational effects of *mise-en-abîme*. Additionally, curiously, the *récit* is always already a re-

citation in which the narrator offers his testimony to the doctors, including references to the doctors themselves. This detachment, the narrator's participation in, yet distance from, the interrogation disrupts further the temporality of the text. How can he participate in the testimony, offering his story, yet at the same time talk about the goings-on related to his "present" act of bearing witness? Any real sense of narrative time is skewed as it becomes impossible to ascertain the moment of the doctor's interjections since the *récit* has been re-cited *en-abîme*, thereby repeating itself countless times. The testimony that constitutes the text of *La Folie du jour* is revealed through the interrogatory nature of the *récit* itself, presented as a story forced out of the narrator by his interrogators. The questioning which marks the interrogation persists throughout the text as the interrogators search for "un savoir invisible dont personne n'avait la preuve" (p. 27).

The narrator remains unable to provide the lacking evidence, proof, or truth -- to complete the story: "je dus reconnaître que je n'étais pas capable de former un récit avec ces événements" (p. 37) to the satisfaction of the interrogators who search for the whole truth, the whole story. The testimony of the narrator-witness' involvement/response to the interrogators becomes part of the testimony that forms the *récit* itself. In other words,

aspects of the interrogation that force and draw out the testimony are incorporated into that very testimony.

Midway through the *récit*, there is the appearance of a curious interjection that seemingly marks a movement toward the end of the narrator's testimony, "Voici qu'elle arrive, me disais-je, la fin vient, quelque chose arrive, la fin commence" (p. 19). Despite the narrator's attestation that the end was beginning, the only thing beginning, or even happening, that emerges in *La Folie du jour* is its own re-beginning.

Although the narrator claims to recount "les faits" and "un événement vrai," his announcement of the end of the *récit* remains a surprise for all precisely because the *récit* is clearly no longer a *récit* at all; there is no beginning, there is no end. When the interrogators request the story with the real facts, ("Racontez-nous comment les choses se sont passées 'au juste'" (p. 36)), the narrator eagerly begins again ("Un récit?" (*ibid.*)), with what turns out to have always already begun:

> Je commençai: Je ne suis ni savant ni ignorant. J'ai connu des joies. C'est trop peu dire. Je leur racontai l'histoire toute entière qu'ils écoutaient, me semble-t-il, avec intérêt, du moins au début. Mais la fin fut pour nous une commune surprise." (pp. 36-7)

In what Derrida terms the chiasmic double invagination of the borders, the story quite simply folds back on itself (*Parages*, p. 132). As we have seen, the opening statements reappear at the end of the *récit* only to be reinscribed in

the *récit* again. The leading edge of the text becomes just a fragment that is in its turn just a quotation of its quotation and the text ends exactly where it begins: "Je ne suis ni savant ni ignorant..." With all these citations punctuating the text, the original source of the performance, of the event, becomes difficult if not impossible to identify.

What we have seen in *La Folie du jour* is a textual destabilization occurring to such a degree that conventional linear narration and narrative become disrupted. The narrative rupture of temporality and linearity and the break between the double presences of the narrator-witness bring about the text's re-citation of itself as citation.

L'arrêt de mort

If *La Folie du jour* demonstrates the difficulty and possible impossibility of *récit*-ing, of developing a narrative that does not stall as a web of citations, *L'arrêt de mort* then renders this difficulty absolute through the interminable testimony of the narrator who shows himself incapable of terminating the narration he has set into motion.

First published in 1948, this *récit*, like *La Folie du jour*, has a curious publishing history. The first publication of the text includes a sort of cryptic epilogue: a two-paragraph page at the end of the *récit*. In

subsequent printings of *L'arrêt de mort*, this final section no longer appears. The deletion of the final page accompanies the elimination of the word *récit* which initially appeared just beneath the title. From the outset, therefore, the text has been doubled, with the appearance and subsequent deletion of *récit* and the last page. We shall see that this act of doubling operates within the pages of the text as well.

The narrator of the text devotes the beginning of the *récit* to the testimony regarding his attempt to achieve his testimony of events to which he was a witness in 1938. The *récit* opens as follows:

> Ces événements me sont arrivés en 1938. J'éprouve à en parler la plus grande gêne. Plusieurs fois déjà, j'ai tenté de leur donner une forme écrite. Si j'ai écrit des livres, c'est que j'ai espéré par des livres mettre fin à tout cela. (p. 7)

This initial documentation of several previously failed attempts at bearing witness stands as evidence itself of the continuation of the rupture seen in *La Folie du jour* where the event becomes the *récit* and the *récit*-ing is the event as it collapses into its citation and re-citation. Here, rather than the entirety of the text posing as a citation of itself, failing to achieve textual closure, the *récit* of *L'arrêt de mort* reveals the perpetual commencement of the narrator's testimony -- "plusieurs fois déjà -- with the hope of being at last able to "mettre fin à tout cela."

However, as the title suggests, the testimony of the *récit* is an "arrêt de mort" or a "death sentence." Yet, the "arrêt de mort," read literally, is also just that -- an "arrêt" or a halting or arresting of death. Extending this double connotation of the title to the narrator's predicament as witness prepared to "livrer un secret" enables us to comment on the nature of bearing witness in this text. The narrator finds himself compelled, even condemned, to tell his story, promising that even "les paroles, qui ne devraient pas être écrites, seront écrites," (p. 8) because he says, "je n'ai pas peur de la vérité" (p. 7).

Despite this commitment on the part of the witness-narrator to testify and thereby succumb to the testimonial imperative, he finds himself incapable of following through:

> Cependant je dois le rappeler, une fois je réussis à donner une forme à ces événements.... Mais, quand elle fut écrite, je la relus. Aussitôt je détruisis le manuscrit. (p. 8)

The narrator's *récit*-ing is interrupted and halted with each successive attempt, so that the beginning of his testimony has already begun and its ending is never ending.

In *Parages*, Derrida equates "l'arrêt de mort" with "pas de mort," or, as stated previously, with an arresting or halting of death. "Pas" also signifies "step" in that "l'arrêt de mort" is also a step toward death in addition to being a halting or negation of that step. Derrida then

extends this notion of "pas de mort," as derived from the recit's title, to a "pas de récit," as ample textual evidence illustrates. In other words, just as *L'arrêt de mort* is a "pas de récit," a step or movement toward accomplishing the *récit*, it is also simultaneously a halting of that very movement in that the *récit* is never accomplished and the narrator is never able to "mettre fin à tout cela."

Textually, this "arrêt de mort" as a "pas de récit" manifests itself as the continual dying yet the impossibility of death of the narrator and his friend J., whom the entirety of the first half of the text concerns. Disease stricken for a decade, J. persists in living. As the narrator states:

> Normalement, elle aurait dû être morte depuis longtemps. Mais, non seulement elle n'était pas morte, elle avait continué à vivre, à aimer, à rire, à courir par la ville comme quelqu'un que la maladie ne pouvait atteindre. (p. 13)

Yet, J. places her doctor in a bind between life and death as well when she informs him, "Si vous ne me tuez pas, vous êtes un meurtrier" (p. 29), a citation the narrator is able to attribute to Kafka. Yet, contrary to everyone's opinion, J. miraculously defies death. Her survival right at the brink of death contradicts even the predictions of her doctor of whom the narrator says that "il la tenait pour morte depuis 1936" (*ibid.*).

In a manner similar to J.'s survival at the limit, or borderline, between dying and death itself, the death of the narrator has been imminent as well for quite some time and there are in fact several references in the text to the doctor's predictions of his death:

> "Comme vous devriez être mort depuis deux ans, tout ce que vous reste à vivre est surnombre." Il venait de m'octroyer six mois de survie et il y a de cela sept ans. (p. 14)

While the narrator, however, does remain alive, what does come to pass in the text is J.'s death and inexplicable resurrection:

> Tout de suite après, elle me dit d'une voix basse et rapide: "Vite, une piqûre." (Elle n'en avait, depuis la nuit, jamais réclamé.) Je pris une grosse seringue, j'y réunis deux doses de morphine et deux doses de pantopon, ce qui faisait quatre doses de stupéfiants. Le liquide fut assez lent à pénétrer, mais, voyant ce que je faisais, elle resta très calme. Elle ne bougea plus à aucun moment. Deux ou trois minutes plus tard, son pouls se dérégla, il frappa un coup violent, s'arrêta, puis se remit à battre lourdement pour s'arrêter à nouveau, cela plusieurs fois, enfin il devint extrêmement rapide et miniscule, et "s'éparpilla comme du sable."
> Je n'ai aucun moyen d'en écrire davantage. Je pourrais ajouter que, pendant ces instants, J. continua à me regarder avec le même regard affectueux et consentant et que ce regard dure encore, mais ce n'est malheureusement pas sûr. De tout le reste, je ne veux rien dire. Les histoires avec le médecin me sont devenues indifférentes. Moi-même, je ne vois rien d'important dans le fait que cette jeune fille qui était morte, à mon appel revint à la vie...Il faut que ceci soit entendu: je n'ai rien raconté d'extraordinaire ni même de surprenant. L'extraordinaire commence au moment où je m'arrête. Mais je ne suis plus maître d'en parler. (pp. 51-53)

In this passage, J. actually undergoes an "arrêt de mort." Not only has she been living suspended between death and dying, condemned by an "arrêt de mort," or a death sentence, but she has also managed to bring about an "arrêt" or stop to her death, preventing it from becoming a decisive finality. In *Maurice Blanchot: L'Ancien, l'effroyablement ancien*, Roger LaPorte comments on this preceding passage:

> Cet événement...récuse son nom et tout nom: plus vieux que tout passé, tout proche, voire imminent --perpetuellement imminent -- il n'accède pas à la présence 'elle-même,' il ne deviendra jamais présent, et c'est pourquoi J, l'héroïne de *L'arrêt de mort*, condamnée à mort par les médecins, en vient à agoniser, son pouls 's'éparpille comme du sable,' mais l'arrêt du coeur est indéfiniment différé.[16]

Her survival, or infinitely differed death, also brings about the "arrêt," or halting, of the narrator's testimony, rendering it impossible and leaving the narrator "plus maître d'en parler" because he no longer has any "moyen d'en écrire davantage" having arrived himself at the very limits of testimony and *récit*-ing. As the narrator states, "L'extraordinaire commence au moment où je m'arrête."

In effect, this passage marks the moment where the narrator does indeed stop himself and his testimony. This break within the narrative of *L'arrêt de mort* is even visible in the text itself since the last line of the previously cited passage precedes just over one page of blank space before the story resumes. Here, the "arrêt de

mort" or death sentence for the *récit* erupts in this blank space where the *récit* falters and skips a beat. Yet, this blank space is in turn halted and is the halting of death of *L'arrêt de mort*. In *Parages*, Derrida elaborates on this passage:

> Comme cela était défini, indéfini, dans le passage de *Le pas au-delà*, l'arrêt de mort n'est pas seulement la décision arrêtant l'indécidable; il arrête aussi la mort en la suspendant, il l'interrompt ou la diffère dans le sursaut d'une survie. Mais alors ce qui suspend ou retient la mort cela même lui rend toute sa puissance d'indécidabilité...Comme la mort, l'arrêt reste (s'arrête, s'arreste) indécidable. (*Parages*, p. 159)

The text however resumes subsequent to this passage and lacuna without any further reference to J. and other aspects that constitute the "first *récit*" of *L'arrêt de mort*. As Derrida observes, the last passage of the first part of the text marks "la bordure inférieure ou finale du 'premier' des deux 'récits' intitulés *L'arrêt de mort*. Cette bordure externe peut aussi être considérée comme un pli intérieur" (*ibid.*, p. 158).

The (re)commencement of the story raises with it numerous questions as nothing in the text itself announces the start of a different or new *récit*. The testimony begins again:

> Je continuerai cette histoire, mais maintenant, je prendrai quelques précautions. Ces précautions ne sont pas faites pour jeter un voile sur la vérité. La vérité sera dite, tout ce qui s'est passé d'important sera dit. Mais tout ne s'est pas encore passé. (p. 54)

Although this is announced as a continuation of the same story, it apparently has no recollection of what preceded it; there lack, obviously, any narrative threads that would normally stitch the two parts together. As a result, many elements remain in suspense between the double stories: characters, narrator, narrative time, story. One must wonder, for example, what story is continuing. Is it one which preceded the "first" one? Is it even related by the same narrator?

Of course, the use of the future tense in the opening passage of the "second *récit*," cited above, is quite striking itself for its disruption of temporality. As Derrida suggests, what the narrator promises to tell has not yet happened; it will not yet be situated in the past. It is as if:

> le récit serait donc la cause -- disons aussi la chose -- de cela même qu'il semble raconter. Récit comme cause et non comme relation d'un événement...La chose est le récit. (*Parages*, p. 189)

With the *récit*-ing of the *récit* presented as the event of the *récit* itself, the text deals with the non-presentation of the event:

> Ce qui se récite ici, cela aura été cette non-présentation de l'événement, sa présence *sans* présence, son avoir-lieu *sans* avoir-lieu, etc. (*Ibid.*)

Since the narrator arrived at the very limits of narrative and testimony in the first *récit*, he now is faced with necessity of taking precautions to tell the story, yet the

story still remains suspended between its possibility and its impossibility. Incapable of being recounted, the *récit* necessarily stopped itself right on the very threshold of the event it undertook to recount. Derrida explains:

> L'arrêt de mort est donc aussi la décision interdictrice qui arrête *L'arrêt de mort* au bord de l'événement qu'il n'a pas le droit de raconter, mais qui, aussi bien met en oeuvre, le fait raconter, le décide à raconter depuis ce suspens interdicteur, le fait repartir vers le récit impossible, pour raconter (ce) qu'il ne racontera pas. Ce texte commente le titre...mais le titre énonce aussi l'impossibilité du texte...Sa condition de possibilité et d'impossibilité. (*Ibid.*, p. 172)

In conclusion, then, what is at stake in *L'arrêt de mort* is the problematization of the testimony of an event that defies its own articulation. The title of the text itself announces the suspension of the narrative between its failure or collapse as an impossibility, as subjected to a death sentence, and its possibility, as the halting of that collapse. In any case, efforts by the narrator-witness to testify are starts and stops and can never be fulfilled.

L'instant de ma mort

The impossible possibility raised by the title of the *récit L'instant de ma mort* problematizes from the outset the testimony offered by the witness-narrator. As previously discussed, testimony involves making something twice present in view of the requisite temporal spacing between the two presences. In other words, the first presence, that moment of the witness-event precedes the

moment of the testimony itself -- the moment of bearing witness. The stipulation that a witness have first-hand or personal knowledge renders testimony autobiographical in nature, resulting in first-person narration. Given the status of the personal in testimony, one clearly sees how potentially problematic a *récit* such as *L'instant de ma mort* is since it proposes in its title to talk about one's own death. The impossibility of the possible arises when the witness offers testimony about his death. According to the rules of testimony, as I have previously discussed, "I" am the only one capable of testifying, because "I" am the only one in the position of possessing first-hand personal knowledge of my experience of that event. Each witness is irreplaceable. However, in the case of "my" death, "I" can not say "I died" or "I am dead." In *Demeure: fiction et témoignage*, Derrida elucidates on the particularities posed by considering the case of death and testimony. There is a place/instance where there is no witness for the witness. No one can testify about someone else's death because it was not something experienced by that person. Yet, the person who dies obviously cannot testify, cannot make it, the experience, and her/him-self re-present. Derrida refers to this unique situation as the impossible possibility of the sentence "Je suis mort." He writes:

> Je ne peux pas dire, de bon sens, je ne devrais pas pouvoir dire: je mourus ou je suis mort...S'il y a un lieu ou une instance où il n'y a pas de témoin pour le témoin, ou personne n'est

> témoin pour le témoin, ce serait bien la mort. (*Demeure: fiction et témoignage*, p. 55)

The possibility of this phrase, "je suis mort," lies in death itself. It is quite possible, even inevitable, to die. The catch is the impossibility of the enunciation "Je suis mort" (p. 31).

Whereas Derrida has written of the impossibility of bearing witness to one's own death and the enunciation "I am dead," Natalie Sarraute in *L'usage de la parole* addressed related issues of speaking about death.[17] She cites the story of Tchaikovsky who, prior to his death, uttered, "I am dying." More interesting than his cognizance of what was happening is the fact that he stated "I am dying" not in his native tongue of Russian, but rather in the foreign language of German. For Sarraute, this represents the impossibility of conceiving of one's own death as anything but "other" (*ibid.*, p. 78). Indeed, it is the very otherness of the experience that prohibits one from discussing it in the familiar, in one's native language.

Sarraute's observation coupled with Derrida's notion of the impossible possibility of testifying to "l'instant de ma mort" bears heavily on Blanchot's *récit*. Although *L'instant de ma mort* is not written in the language of the "other" as was Tchaikovsky's statement, the effects of attempting to enunciate the impossible reverberate throughout the text.

Faced with the aforementioned impossibility; that is, the presentation of testimony about one's death, the narrator must make a compensation for it in his text. As one would expect, following the juridical definition of testimony, the moment of bearing witness registers in the first-person. However, the moment of the witness-experience, the impossible "instant de ma mort," is carried out through the third-person. This experience-limit of attempting to bear witness about one's own death deals with the limit of language itself, of attempting to put into words what has not yet been said because it cannot be said; it is indeed Blanchot's "sentiment inanalysable" of a "légèreté que je ne saurais traduire..." (p. 16).

This impossibility forces a rupture in the subject-witness which occurs in the opening passage of the text:

> Je me souviens d'un jeune homme - un homme encore jeune - empêché de mourir par la mort même - et peut-être l'erreur de l'injustice. (p. 7)

This rupture manifests itself not through the use of a foreign language, as was the case just referred to concerning Tchaikovsky, but through a lapse from first- to third-person which enables the "I" to discuss the "self" through the detachment of a "he," or "un jeune homme." The narrator can only attempt a discussion of this event through a split or a fissure between the two moments of the witness outlined earlier in this chapter.

In addition to the preceding passage, *L'instant* contains other instances which serve to demonstrate further the rupture between the moment of testimony, of "je," and the moment of the "lived" experience of what should have been and, in a sense, was his death. The most notable of these occurrences involves the use of the first-person to describe or introduce evidence of events belonging to that moment of death. This is not surprising considering that such textual instances find the testimony at its most unstable as the limits of the limit-experience are approached. What is interesting about these examples is that the narrator is able to testify from the position of "je" about the "jeune homme" because he himself had been in the position of a witness. Yet, it is this "sentiment inanalysable" (p. 17) which marked his death and "changea ce qui lui restait d'existence" (*ibid.*) creating an irrevocable rupture between the moment of the event and the moment of testimony. This first emerges when the lieutenant positions the witness against the wall for his execution:

> Je sais - le sais-je - que celui que visaient déjà les Allemands, n'attendant plus que l'ordre final, éprouve alors un sentiment de légèreté extraordinaire, une sorte de béatitude... (p. 10)

This "sentiment de légèreté" upon which the *récit* is constructed is the closest articulation for the witness of the feeling of death encountering death. With the indescribable on the verge of taking place, the narrator poses the question, "la rencontre de la mort et de la

mort?" (*ibid.*). The question mark that terminates this phrase accentuates the uncertainty and, ultimately, the impossibility of attempting to articulate that which remains impossible to be articulated, situated right at the limits of experience and bearing witness about one's own death.

Apparently making an effort to address the questions of this "sentiment" the narrator-witness adds:

> A sa place, je ne chercherai pas à analyser ce sentiment de légèreté. Il était peut-être tout à coup invincible. Mort - immortel. Peut-être l'extase. Plutôt le sentiment de compassion pour l'humanité souffrante, le bonheur de n'être pas immortel ni éternel. Désormais il fut lié à la mort, par une amitié subreptice." (p. 11)

Allowed to flee by the Russian soldiers who had already assumed the firing squad formation for his seemingly imminent execution, the narrator retreated "toujours dans le sentiment de légèreté" to the woods for an indeterminate amount of time (p. 12). After having regained "le sens du réel," all that the narrator-witness discovers upon emerging from the woods "post-mortem" is the remains of people and animals ("...il apprit que trois jeunes gens...avaient été abattus. Même les chevaux gonflés...attestaient une guerre qui avait duré." (*ibid.*)) as well as the still burning fires of the farms. The narrator-witness' brutal return to the post-war world is underscored by an interesting inversion. The witness who should have died has survived and people who should still

be alive were, for no apparent reason, killed. Further compounding the senselessness of the war is the fact that all the surrounding farms were destroyed by fire and yet the chateau of the narrator was spared ("Tout brûlait, sauf le Château" (p. 15)).

The unjust destruction of local farms marks the narrator's entrance into a period of survival escaping his comprehension: "Alors commença sans doute pour le jeune homme le tourment de l'injustice" (p. 16). This torment of injustice is indeed the veritable torment of survival. It is, in other words, the burden of living with the fact that one is living due to social status and class. Being spared the firing squad's bullets does not enable the narrator to overcome this torment of injustice, for although he was spared at the last moment from certain death, the escape from death has in a sense left him dead ("la rencontre de la mort et de la mort?" and "Mort - immortel"). The deadness inhabiting him stemming from the experience of senselessly not having been killed is clearly demonstrated in the following passage:

> Demeurant cependant, au moment où la fusillade n'était plus qu'en attente, le sentiment de légèreté que je ne saurais traduire: libéré de la vie? l'infini qui s'ouvre? Ni bonheur ni malheur. Ni l'absence de crainte et peut-être déjà le pas au-delà. Je sais, j'imagine que ce sentiment inanalysable changea ce qui lui restait d'existence. Comme si la mort hors de lui ne pouvait désormais que se heurter à la mort en lui. "Je suis vivant. Non, tu es mort". (pp. 16-17)

There are several points I would like to make in view of this passage. First, the "sentiment de légèreté" incapable of being analyzed earlier is now pronounced untranslatable, and certain indeterminacy surrounds any attempt to define it. Untranslatable, the "sentiment" remains inaccessible in its otherness. Additionally, the reference to "pas au-delà" is a direct citation of Blanchot's plurivocal text of the same name in which Blanchot explicates his concept of the Neuter ("il"). Gerald Bruns describes this notion as involving the other in the same and as always in displacement, which appears to be how the rupture in the witness-narrator functions.[18] Furthermore, the final sentence of this excerpt is set off in quotation marks. This provides yet another example indicating that the narrator as witness cannot access the event of the limit-experience in terms of "I."

For Gary Mole, this inaccessibility is also revealed through a certain paralysis of the witness-narrator. In fact, he reads *L'instant* as a double event of passivity situated on two levels. The first is the level of the story: the witness does not seek escape; indeed, he is "passive, frozen before the firing squad, a real-fictive event, real because supposedly experienced, fictive because related" (*Lévinas, Blanchot, Jabès: Figures of Estrangement*, p. 164). Ample evidence of the narrator's passivity abounds in the text which, moreover, can be read

as the inevitable rupture of temporality and the loss of a "sens du réel." Numerous times in the text words are used to suggest immobility and fixedness.

Second, the repeated use of the word "demeurer" and its various forms provides an excellent example of this passivity which in turn disrupts any real sense of time. "Les Allemands restaient en ordre, prêts à demeurer ainsi dans une immobilité qui arrêtait le temps" (p. 12) ("il demeura abrité..." (p. 12); "Demeurait cependant...le sentiment..."(p. 16); "Seul demeure le sentiment..."(p. 20)).

In contrast to the immobility denoted by the appearance of "demeurer" in the text, the passage of time remains indeterminate and this disrupts the progression of the *récit*. Examples are found in the following statements: "Après combien de temps" (p. 13) and "En réalité, combien de temps s'était-il écoulé?" (*ibid.*).

The passivity/immobility permeates the relation of the event and the fluid indeterminacy of the "sentiment de légèreté," described repeatedly as "inanalysable" and defined as "ni bonheur ni malheur." Despite its indeterminate status, the "sentiment" is the only thing that remains at the *récit*'s conclusion, "l'instant de ma mort désormais toujours en instance" (p. 20).

The narrator's acceptance of his impending fate, according to Mole, occurs because "the relating is the

experience, the narrator passive before his own event, the *récit* itself, deprived of his "'I'" in remembering his "'self'" (*ibid.*).

Because the event lies beyond representation it cannot be brought into the fictive present of the *récit*, it cannot be *récit*-ed and therefore necessarily remains "ce sentiment inanalysable." Thus, the attempted relation of an event is impossible and the relating, the testimony, in turn becomes the event.

Conclusion

In concluding this chapter, I will provide a brief recapitulation of my discussion of testimony. First, I have figured testimony itself as a mode of citationality differing from that of hearsay. With testimony, the law stipulates the first-person presentation of facts pertinent to the case that only that witness in particular has experienced. The fact that the witness maintains privileged access to this information renders him/her irreplaceable and therefore unique, an important consideration in *L'instant de ma mort*. With the presentation of the testimony, there is the problematization of the presence of the witness, who was first present during the event's occurrence and who re-presents him/herself in an effort to re-present the event as testimony. This doubling points to the citational effects of testimony, which we have examined in terms of Maurice Blanchot's *récits*.

In *La Folie du jour*, for example, we find a text that is merely the *mise-en-abîme* of itself as a citation. The text as testimony is already cut off from the initial moment of the witness and event and therefore, can only be the citation of the moment of bearing witness.

L'arrêt de mort problematizes the attempt at testimony through the narrator's perpetual recommencement of his testimony, a testimony that remains interminable. The aporia which Derrida considers to be the "pas de Blanchot," where each step toward completion of the testimony is also the negation of that movement, leaves the narrator-witness suspended between dying and death, as the title indicates. It is in this *récit* that the rupture becomes definite, that the possibility of testimony becomes impossible to achieve.

L'instant de ma mort radicalizes the testimony to such an extent that it remains necessarily an impossible possibility. In other words, the narrator-witness finds himself placed in the impossible position of attempting to testify about his own death.

The following chapter on Derrida's polyvocal texts marks a departure from these chapters on Duras' and Blanchot's texts where we have explored the textual implications of the citational modes of hearsay and testimony. In Derrida's work, we will discover how conference is employed as a response to the effects of citationality.

Notes

1. *Black's Law Dictionary*, p. 1646.

2. Kevin Tierney, *Courtroom Testimony*, (New York: Funk and Wagnall's, 1970), p. 62.

3. Jacques Derrida, *Demeure: Fiction et témoignage* (Paris: Galilée, 1998), p. 27.

4. Susan Handelman, *Fragments of Redemption: Jewish Thought and Literary Theory in Benjamin, Scholem and Lévinas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 91.

5. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 57.

6. Maurice Blanchot, *Le Livre à venir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979).

7. Timothy Clark, *Derrida, Heidegger, Blanchot* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 106.

8. Maurice Blanchot, *L'entretien infini* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), p. 311.

9. Gary Mole, *Lévinas, Blanchot, Jabès: Figures of Estrangement* (Gainsville: University Press of Florida, 1997), p. 162.

10. Maurice Blanchot, *Thomas l'Obscur* (Paris: Gallimard, 1941).

11. Jacques Derrida, *Parages* (Paris: Galilée, 1986), p. 135.

12. Lycette Nelson, trans. *The Step (Not) Beyond* (New York: SUNY Press, 1992), p. 135.

13. Leslie Hill, *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 94.

14. Michael Newman, "The Trace of Trauma," in *Maurice Blanchot: The Demand of Writing* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 154.

15. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Sur Maurice Blanchot* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1975), p. 64.

16. Roger LaPorte, *Maurice Blanchot: L'ancien, l'effroyablement ancien* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1987), p. 39.

17. Natalie Sarraute, *L'usage de la parole* (Paris: Gallimard, p. 1987).

18. Gerald Bruns, *Maurice Blanchot: Refusal of Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 180.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONFERENCE: THE POLYLOGUES OF JACQUES DERRIDA

Introduction

The previous chapters on Duras and Blanchot have considered their works as the instanciation of two functions of citationality. Both hearsay and testimony enter into operation as citational practices that disrupt and destabilize narrative progression. The insistence on hearsay in the Lol V. Stein cycle demonstrates, for example, the impossibility of containing textual threads with the result that a plurality of other "texts" is engendered. In Blanchot's *récits*, testimony problematizes narrative progression to such an extent that it renders narrative impossible.

In this chapter I will focus on Derrida's polyvocal texts to discuss how he radicalizes the question of citationality through what I will call the "conference" of his polylogues. These texts establish a new discourse which is neither fiction nor criticism yet stands as something of each, on the borderline between the two, functioning therefore like the hymen he describes in "La Double séance" and other texts. The conference he enacts to accomplish these polylogues results in an irrevocable rupture of boundaries. My use of the term "conference," as in the case of my other terms "hearsay" and "testimony," arises out of Jacques Derrida's work on citationality. Therefore, my

analysis of Derrida's polyvocal texts is indebted to his concept of citationality. This chapter then marks a shift in my project from using Derrida's work on citationality to enable my analyses in the previous chapters to reading him as another object of analysis which renders him a practitioner of citationality in the same way as Duras and Blanchot.

Conference

In the legal sense of the term, conference refers to a formal meeting or colloquy invoked in order to address a matter of serious consequence. In juridical proceedings in the courtroom, a conference takes place secretly. Its purpose is to allow a meeting between the judge and lawyers to clarify technicalities of the law or the proceedings in progress. Additionally, the judge may use the forum of a conference to admonish lawyers. Occasionally, the judge may call a recess of the proceedings and summon the lawyers into his chambers to conduct a conference in secret. The closed doors obviously prevent the jury or others in the courtroom from being privy to what is discussed.

I choose to use this term of conference in my discussion of these texts because of what it suggests about the polyvocal and the way it accounts for how Derrida calls into question issues of authority, property and origin while deconstructing the boundaries that traditionally regulate them. Whereas a conference, in the conventional

sense, subscribes to a certain set of rules governing its procedure, Derrida uses the format of the conference to deconstruct that very system. He effectuates this by demonstrating that the conference, while subject to laws regulating it, cannot indeed be contained by those laws. The subject of the conference will always overrun or exceed its parameters. Derrida's polylogues carry this out through their exploitation of a plurality of voices.

The three polylogues I have chosen to discuss in this chapter are "Restitutions," *Feu la cendre* and *Droit de regards*. What I see as a practice of conference in these texts developed out of various cases of "double session" in other texts by Derrida, notably "La Double séance," *Glas* and "Envois." The notion of a double session refers to a writing informed by indecision and instability as denoted by the hymen:

> L'hymen, confusion entre le présent et le non-présent, avec toutes les indifférences qu'elle commode entre toutes les séries de contraires...produit un effet de milieu (milieu comme élément enveloppant les deux termes à la fois: milieu se tenant entre les deux termes). Opération qui "à la fois" met la confusion "entre" les contraires et se tient "entre" les contraires. (*La Dissémination*, p. 261)

The "double séance" therefore is what functions in two places at once; it is a writing that "opère en deux lieux absolument différents, même s'ils ne sont séparés que d'un voile, à la fois traversé et non traversé, entr'ouvert" (*ibid.*, p. 273). The "indécidabilité" invoked by the

concept of the hymen comes into play in the three polylogues discussed in this chapter. Through a blurring of borders that delineate fiction from criticism, these texts situate themselves on that very boundary and in so doing play out the rule of the hymen. They are at once fictional texts and critical texts and yet they are neither one nor the other. While functioning in the sense of the hymen, these texts also call into question "conference."

"Restitutions"

An aspect of the secrecy surrounding a conference is that it allows only the participants themselves to be privy to each other's identity. If others, who are actually not part of the conference, heard the voices of the participants, they would not be able to restitute these voices to the people they see. Indeed, it is this undecidability which Derrida exploits in "Restitutions." This text comprises the final section of *La Vérité en peinture*, a title which cites Cézanne who promised: "Je vous dois la vérité en peinture, et je vous la dirai."[1] The performative nature of this utterance is explored by Derrida throughout the text, as he reveals the ultimate impossibility of fulfilling such a promise and successfully restituting a work of art. Cézanne's affirmation underscores Heidegger's assertion that art "lets truth originate" and "is the spring that leaps to the truth of beings in the work."[2] Indeed, according to Heidegger, the

very nature of truth is "aletheia" a "dévoilement" or "unconcealment," an event where the truth is disclosed. In *Is There Truth in Art?*, Herman Rapaport describes the work of art according to Heidegger's principle of "aletheia." He writes, "...the work of art is not something to be pragmatically adjudicated in terms of fixed principles wherein its correspondence to the world is deemed true or false..."[3] Therefore, the question turns on the (im)possibility of performing the act that Cézanne promised, on restituting the truth in painting. In order to accomplish his exploration of the problematic of restitution, Derrida orchestrates a "double session" in the form of a conference that questions this very concept, especially in its relation to issues of property and propriety.

Described in the note which opens the text, "Restitutions" is a polylogue "à n + 1 voix - féminine" (*La Vérité en peinture*, p. 292). However, in spite of Derrida's attestation as to the number and gender of the speakers, the difficulty in determining how this is configured becomes immediately evident in the text.

The first voice of "Restitutions" commences the proceedings, which seem to have already begun, "Et pourtant" (p. 293). This first speaker decides that there should be more than two participants present for there to be a conference, "Mais il faudrait atteindre d'être plus de

deux pour commencer" (*ibid.*). The second speaker agrees, "Pour appareiller plutôt, et même plus de trois," at which time the first speaker adds, "Les voilà. Je commence..." (*ibid.*).

Although this opening passage clearly indicates the participation of more than three speakers, there still remains a certain level of indeterminacy as to the exact number of participants. However, throughout *La Vérité en peinture* there is a constant emphasis on the number four. As Derrida writes in "Passe-partout," which functions as the introductory section, "J'écris ici quatre fois *autour* de la peinture" (*ibid.*, p. 14) addressing four different aspects relating to the question of truth in painting: "Parergon," "+ R (par dessus le marché)," "Cartouches" and "Restitutions." These four essays "*autour* de la peinture" frame the question of painting just as paintings themselves are framed on four sides. "Restitutions," as the fourth essay, weaves together the threads of the previous three in the form of a polylogue. The three ("n") find themselves supplemented by "1 voix, qui se trouve être de femme" (*ibid.*, p. 15). Yet, as explained in "Passe-partout" each "se divise, par greffe et contamination de toutes les autres, et vous n'en aurez jamais fini de traduire" (*ibid.*, p. 5).

This doubling and contamination functions to such an extent in "Restitutions" that it is impossible to

determine which of the voices is female. The following example chosen somewhat at random from the text fails to syntactically disclose the gender of the speaker(s) as a female: "Je suis pour le moment intéressé à la correspondance entre Meyer Schapiro et Martin Heidegger" (*ibid.*, p. 309). What we can ascertain from this example is that this particular speaker is definitely not the female voice of the group. "Je suis...intéressé" reveals that the speaker in question is male since there is no feminine ending to indicate the "je" as female. In the case cited below, one speaker addresses the others, as clearly shown in the use of the direct object pronoun "vous" and the plural agreement: "Je vous vois choqués, dans votre déférence, par la scène" (*ibid.*, p. 335). Once again, the presence of a female participant cannot be determined syntactically, since the agreement of "choqués" with "vous" indicates simply a plurality of speakers. Yet another example of this type surfaces later in the text: "Vous paraissez aussi trop sûrs de ce que vous appelez interne" (*ibid.*, p. 377). There also remains a question as to the exact number of conference participants, since there is the tardy arrival of another speaker, "J'arrive en retard. Je viens d'entendre..." (*ibid.*, p. 333). While there is a tendency to assume that "'n' + 1" voices equals four, because of the predominance of that number in *La Vérité en peinture*, there can still be no certainty as to the number

peinture, there can still be no certainty as to the number of speakers.

Even if one of the excerpts cited above did indeed disclose the gender of the speaker in question as female, an uncertainty of gender would still exist throughout the text for the very reason that the participants speak in no clearly determined order. One loses very quickly any sense of who is speaking any given time. In other words, it is impossible to track any particular speaker.

In spite of those uncertainties, what does become evident is that Derrida himself is one of the participants:

> Pour ma part, j'ai souvent traité, en tous sens, de la marche et, c'est à peu près le même mot, le même sens, de la marque et des *Marges* dont j'ai fait un titre. *Pas* même en fut un autre. Ai-je alors parlé des pieds? J'en suis pas sûr...(p. 301)

Obviously the "je" in question must be Derrida, the author/signatory of both *Marges* and *Pas*. This raises the question as to the identity of the other participants. It is quite possible given the evidence in "Restitutions" that Derrida has actually engaged in a discussion with himself or even "revenants" that have haunted his own readings of Heidegger and Schapiro. Since the text deals with the attempt to place the owner of the empty shoes of Van Gogh's paintings back into those very shoes, Derrida views the shoes as haunted by ghosts ("revenants") that persist in returning, in coming back ("revenir"). The opening passage in fact attests to this haunting, "Or nous avons bien là

une histoire de fantômes" (*ibid.*, p. 293). Just as Derrida refers to Heidegger's projection of a peasant owner into the shoes as his hallucination or fantasy, Derrida perhaps projects his other voices, including a feminine one, into the polylogue.

In any case, what is readily apparent in "Restitutions" is the fact that Derrida effects a deconstruction of the logic of restituting works of art. Having already established that "Restitutions" is a conference in which the restitution of the speakers' voices is rendered impossible, I will summarize how the topic of that discussion, that of restituting the work of art, involves a reading of "The Origin of the Work of Art," by philosopher Martin Heidegger and "Still Life as a Personal Object" by art historian Meyer Schapiro. Both of these essays address a series of paintings of shoes by Van Gogh and seem to take as their object the restitution of these painted shoes.

"Restitutions" invokes therefore a double session between the Schapiro and Heidegger texts and indeed, in so doing, establishes a *mise-en-abîme* of the text; that is, a conference of an indeterminate number of speakers set on a "dialogue" (to which Heidegger never agreed and in which he never took part) of a painting of shoes considered first as real shoes outside of the painting, then, as objects in the

painting and finally, as the painting itself, in their truth as painting.

This "effet de milieu" produced by the hymen comes into play in "Restitutions" through or as the figure of the shoes in Van Gogh's painting. Moreover, as Herman Rapaport elucidates, the hymen, while marking the difference between difference and non-difference, effaces it at the same time. Rapaport contends that the shoes function as the hymen and themselves stage a double session insofar as they are a pair, although perhaps not matching, and thus are inherently divided, split, double and so forth (*Is There Truth in Art?*, pp. 99-100).

By taking the figure of the shoes as the hymen, Derrida allows them to demonstrate how Heidegger's and Schapiro's claims about the painting fall prey to issues of indecidability, itself a function of the hymen. In fact, their essays are based, after all, on a "célèbre tableau de Van Gogh" which Heidegger never identifies and which remains unidentifiable for Schapiro, since there were a series of such paintings of peasant shoes. The fact that Heidegger did not name or identify which painting in particular is the "famous painting of Van Gogh" renders impossible the attempt to ascertain to which one he referred. Needless to say, Schapiro reproaches Heidegger for not naming and specifying it. As a result, Schapiro commences a movement to recall or to restitute the real

shoes, a movement which carries him beyond the frame of the painting of shoes:

> They are clearly pictures of the artist's own shoes, not the shoes of a peasant...Later in Arles he represented, as he wrote in a letter of August 1888 to his brother "une paire de vieux souliers," which are evidently his own...[4]

Derrida adds that Schapiro is thus "tiré hors du tableau, ce qui suppose un trou dans la toile" ("Restitutions," p. 305).

This "trou dans la toile," through which both Heidegger and Schapiro pass in their quest to re-attach the shoes of the Van Gogh painting to the "real feet" of a "real" proprietor, obviously raises questions of borders and framing as addressed in "Restitutions." Indeed, it is the parergonal structure of Derrida's text that provides the textual space for the playing out of the double session of the shoes. In *La Vérité de la peinture*, Derrida writes:

> Un parergon vient contre, à côté et en plus de *l'ergon*, du travail fait, du fait, de l'oeuvre mais il ne tombe pas à côté, il touche et coopère, depuis un certain dehors, au-dedans de l'opération. Ni simplement dehors ni simplement dedans. Comme un accessoire qu'on est obligé d'accueillir au bord, à bord. (*Ibid.*, p. 61)

As the border, as that which is presumed to delimit the interior, the text, from its exterior, from that which is not considered a part of it, the parergon is simultaneously interior and exterior to the text. Certainly, the parergon is not limited to the concept of the frame and Derrida ascertains this by citing, after Kant, the example of a

statue upon which clothing is placed such that the statue, or ergon, relates to the parergon, or clothing, by means of the idea of an accessory. In other words, one can consider the clothing as non-essential, as something at once part of the statue and not. The accessory nature of the parergon underscores its detachability from both the ergon and its "milieu."

As for the Van Gogh painting presumably in question, the parergon takes the form of both the frame and shoe(lace) and disrupts any potentially fixed demarcation between interior and exterior:

> Et l'externe ne reste jamais dehors. Il y va ici d'une décision quant au cadre, à ce qui sépare l'interne de l'externe, par une bordure elle-même double en son trait et ajointant ce qu'elle partage. Il y va de tous les intérêts engagés dans le procès de ce partage. La logique du *parergon* ici à l'oeuvre ôte à cet égard toute sécurité. D'autant plus que le *parergon* a peut-être ici la forme de ce lacet (dedans-dehors) à moitié défait *dans* le tableau, il figure aussi le rapport du tableau à son dehors. Le tableau est pris dans le lacet qu'il semble pourtant comprendre comme sa partie. (*Ibid.*, pp. 377-78)

The partially undone lace represents the "trou dans la toile," mentioned above, which allows access to the outside of the painting by leading Heidegger and Schapiro to formulate opinions as to the shoes' proprietor. Moreover, Heidegger's attribution is "not essential - thus detachable. Schapiro contends Heidegger has ignored mimesis - not real shoes in the painting," explains Rapaport (*Is There Truth in Art?*, p. 138). In fact the lace weaves in

and out of the eyelets, emerging exterior to the shoe only to disappear as it passes under the leather of the shoe, and by extension behind the canvas. For Rapaport, the shoes carry out a double session that "deconstructs the difference of interiority (what is proper or attachable to the shoes) and exteriority (what is merely outside, or detachable from the shoes)" (*ibid.*, p. 160).

The effects of the double session become even more apparent as "Restitutions" calls into question both Heidegger's and Schapiro's blind assumptions regarding the proprietorship of the shoes and their desire to name, to re-attach and restitute the shoes to a real subject, thereby returning them to their source of origin and detaching them from their painted form. Derrida discloses an elemental assumption made by both Schapiro and Heidegger which enables them to consider the rightful owner of the shoes. The fact that they have no doubt that the two shoes depicted by Van Gogh automatically form a pair is crucial to their pursuit of the shoes' proprietor and makes Derrida wonder whether "Schapiro et Heidegger ne se hâtent pas de faire la paire pour se rassurer" despite the phenomenological impossibility of discerning whether the shoes actually constitute a pair (*ibid.*, p. 302). This in turn opens the detached, empty shoes to a sort of haunting by their subject-owner and forces one to ask, "s'il s'agit

de savoir quel pas de revenant, citadin ou paysan, vient encore les hanter" (*ibid.*, p. 295).

Described in "Restitutions" as a "pathetic fantasmic" attribution of the shoes in the painting to a peasant woman, Heidegger's essay reveals this so-called "hallucinogenic" projection of a pair of peasant shoes on to a peasant woman immediately subsequent to a peculiar break in the progression of "The Origin of the Work of Art;" that of: "And yet -" (p. 163):

> From the dark of opening of the worn insides of shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth. In the stiffly rugged heaviness of shoes there is accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind. On the leather lie the dampness and richness of the soil. (*Ibid.*)

This passage expresses essentially the apparent refusal on the part of Heidegger to entertain the detachment of the shoes from their owner. His inability to accept the shoes as they are, that is, as painted objects, results in the projection of the peasant woman into the painting and into the shoes. The detachment of the shoes from their owner, as evidence in "Restitutions" demonstrates, can be considered doubled because it involves the shoes removed not only from the feet of a presumed subject-wearer, but also from reality -- they are but painted objects or a representation of shoes. Yet Heidegger appears driven to concoct and reconstitute the story behind the shoes and their alleged

owner -- a peasant woman -- an assertion for which Schapiro reproaches him.

Schapiro himself falls prey to the same trap by making his own assumptions concerning the proprietor of the shoes. Proclaiming Heidegger's belief that the shoes are a peasant woman's to be a case of error and false testimony, he moves forward with his assertion that the shoes in the painting are actually those of the artist himself. This allegation prompts Derrida to inquire, "Que fait-on quand on attribue des chaussures (réelles) au signataire présumé d'une peinture dont on présume qu'elle représente ces mêmes chaussures?" (p. 303).

Another aspect of the Heidegger-Schapiro essays brought to light during the conference and revealing a lack of decidability is the question of gender, in that both the subject-owner and the shoes are doubled as masculine and feminine. They are neither one nor the other but are figured as bisexual. This doubling of sex occurs on several levels. First, regarding the subject-owner of the shoes, in that Heidegger unwittingly designates the wearer of the real shoes outside of the painting initially as masculine, or, at the very least, he accords an indeterminate gender to the owner ("une paire de chaussures de paysan"). Second, Heidegger later transforms, without warning, the sex of the proprietor from male to female, to "la paysanne." Within his own discourse there operates a certain indeterminacy

that, as the conference participants note, Schapiro never addresses, ignoring instead this doubling of gender in "The Origin of the Work of Art." Third, there is, of course, no question for Schapiro as to the gender of the shoes' owner; he insists that they are not only the shoes of a man, but a city dweller, Van Gogh himself.

Apart from the difference of opinion over the shoes' owner, an indeterminacy of gender also emerges with respect to the notion of fetishism evoked by the shoes and is another instance of doubling of gender in the conference. Derrida indeed wonders whether they themselves can be attributed to a particular sex, whether there exists:

> une équivalence symbolique entre le prétendu 'symbole' 'chaussure' et tel ou tel organe génital ou si seule une syntaxe différentielle et idiomatique pouvait arrêter la bisexualité, lui conférer telle valeur entraînante ou dominante, etc. (p. 349)

As explained by Derrida, the form of the shoe corresponds at once to both the male and female genitalia, "allongés, solides ou fermes sur une surface, creux ou concaves de l'autre" (p. 307). This parergonal quality of the shoe's form, where sex, among other things, is doubled, promotes an indeterminacy that haunts the polylogue. Indeed, the double session staged through the figure of the shoes allows Derrida to carry out his critique of the concept of restitution. In fact, his insistence on the "n + 1 voix" formula to structure "Restitutions" plays on an indeterminacy evident in any conference. By demonstrating

the difficulty of attributing, or restituting, the voices, disembodied from their "owners," Derrida deconstructs the logic of restitution. The voices participating in this conference on the shoes of Van Gogh's paintings in the end remain disembodied, and like the shoes, unable to be restituted. The pluralization of voices used to invoke a conference opens the text to allow the dissemination of doubling. This doubling is obviously set in *abîme* since it involves pairs of shoes (owned by Van Gogh or a peasant woman) doubled by the pair formed by Heidegger and Schapiro. These pairs are pluralized (doubled again) by the already doubled (fourth) essay of "Restitutions" which pluralizes its own voices. This essay of course commences as already split or double with two initial speakers waiting for the arrival of others.

As we have seen in "Restitutions," both Heidegger and Schapiro propose to unveil truth. Yet their essays unveil the fact that the restitution or re-attachment of shoes to their owner, to their source or origin, is impossible. What Derrida reveals in this text is the, "Deconstruction of the difference between what frames and what is framed, with the result that the painting by Van Gogh becomes an abyssal mimetology...of frames upon/within frames" (*Is There Truth in Art?*, p. 23). He accomplishes this because the polylogue or conference that constitutes "Restitutions" mimics the Heidegger-Schapiro "dialogue" and places it within the

abyss it forms by framing again the painting(s) of Van Gogh.

Feu la cendre

Feu la cendre is comprised of a polylogue of an indeterminate number of voices on the right-hand pages, offset by "Animadversiones," which runs intermittently throughout the text on the facing left-hand pages. Meaning "observations" or "assessments," "Animadversiones" additionally recalls the now defunct journal *Anima* in which Derrida first published his polylogue treating the concept of ashes or cinders. In *Feu la cendre* the "Animadversiones" are indeed a gathering of citations apropos of cinders taken from other texts by Derrida such as *Glas*, *La Carte postale* and *La Dissémination*. In addition, although there is no direct reference made to it, this text alludes to *Télépathie*. *Schibboleth*, a text published in homage to Paul Celan in 1986 was not yet published when *Feu la cendre* appeared, but that text also addresses cinders, "il y a la cendre, peut-être, mais une cendre n'est pas."[5]

By placing the "Animadversiones" on the facing pages of the polylogue, Derrida demonstrates the disseminative quality of cinders as trace. For Ned Lukacher, the text's English translator, this construction of *Feu la cendre* "destabilizes the genealogical inquiry into antecedents and consequences in the very act of posing it. When did the gathering of cinders begin?" (p. 7). In other words, by

grafting these citations on the facing pages from the polylogue, Derrida underscores the impossibility of being able to determine which part preceded and gave rise to the other, the "Animadversiones" or the polylogue. Such a textual graft, where two discourses are bound side by side, establish reverberations which Jonathan Culler compares to a tympanum which both divides and acts as a sounding board creating vibrations between the two texts (*On Deconstruction*, p. 136). This construction, as Lukacher explains, belies what questions the text seems to be addressing, those concerning the origin.

A special 1987 edition of *Feu la cendre* included an audio cassette recording by Derrida and Carole Bouquet vocalizing the written text. As Derrida cautions in his prologue, the recording of one male voice and one female voice does not imply that this text is a duet. In an effort to emphasize the irreducibility of *Feu la cendre* to a one-on-one conversation, the recording ("gramaphonie") makes reference periodically to "une autre voix," itself a voice possibly present during the proceedings and quite possibly the silent voice of the other. Therefore rather than reducing the number of voices, the nuances of the recording allow a multiplicity of voices to be engendered. Yet, even allowing for the plurivocality, there is always a call for another voice.

While the recording is of a male and a female voice, the written text contains other grammar-based gender markers that remain inaudible in the recording. Such markers are writing-based so that they become imperceptible when the text is vocalized. An example is found in the sentence, "J'en suis presque sûre," where there is agreement between the subject "je" and the adjective modifying it, "sûre" (p. 35). The addition of the "e" to belie the feminine gender of the speaker does not affect pronunciation in any way, although it is visually marked. Such a strategy allows Derrida to further problematize the relationship of speech to writing. As he states in the prologue to *Feu la cendre*, the inaudibility of written gender markers "aggrave une certaine indécision entre l'écriture et la voix," an indecision which is already in place in the phrase "il y a là cendre" since "là" must be considered both with and without the legible but inaudible accent mark (p. 8).

In the text itself the citations gathered for this project attest to the long-term haunting to which Derrida has been subjected by the phrase "Il y a là cendre," upon his text focuses. For Derrida, "la cendre" provides the means for him to discuss his conception of the trace. In *Schibboleth*, for example, he even writes, "Trace ou cendre," suggesting the effectiveness of "cendre" in portraying the breadth of meanings he attributes to "trace"

(*Schibboleth*, p. 67). One must therefore be careful here to not limit a consideration of the trace to the word "cendre," for this word is by no means the only one which allows access to a conceptualization of Derrida's notion of the trace. However, it can be said that, "cendre," as disclosed in this text, best approaches an understanding of the trace.

Lukacher explains in his introduction to the English translation of *Feu la cendre*:

> Cinder is at once the best name for the absence of a truly proper name for that which holds all beings and entities in presence, and by the same token just another name that cannot begin to assess its distance or proximity to the final proper name (or names) of the truth of Being, whose very existence remains undecidable. (p. 1)

Cinders therefore offer Derrida a paradigm for the trace, which, he writes, "n'est pas, comme certains l'ont cru,...la piste de chasse, le frayage, le sillon dans le sable, le sillage dans la mer...mais la cendre" (p. 27).

If the cinder allows for an understanding of trace, then the conference Derrida employs in *Feu la cendre* plays out the nuances of the cinder as trace by problematizing questions of origin. This stems from the cinder's post-incineration status.

In fact, as that which remains after the burning, the remains of the remainder, the cinder raises numerous questions related to origin and proper name, difference, the holocaust and mourning as well as their dissemination

and citation. The cinder as trace marks absence in such a way that it is a "reste *de* ce qui n'est pas, pour ne rappeler au fond friable d'elle que non-être ou imprésence" (p. 23). This effacement, where the trace marks, erases itself only to re-inscribe itself: "... voilà une matière - visible mais lisible à peine - qui ne renvoyant qu'à elle-même ne fait plus trace, à moins qu'elle ne trace qu'en perdant la trace qu'elle reste à peine" (p. 27).

Unlike smoke which also remains after fire, after the burning, as its by-product, ultimately dissipating, the cinder is not completely dispersed. Instead, the cinder remains as a material that can be touched and frittered away. In its post-pyrification fragility, the cinder is infinitely divisible. Each cinder can fall away and thus yield to numerous other cinders and resultingly become the cinder of its cinders. This disseminative incineration serves to prevent the return to the cinder; it in fact defers any access to it. This is much the same as the conference itself, which is composed of a plurality of voices that can neither be traced throughout the conference nor restituted to their bodies, their point of origin.

Of course, the distinction must be made between the word "ash" and "cinder" in English. As the translator of *Feu la cendre*, Lukacher chooses the word "cinder" which he describes as a "very fragile entity that falls to dust; [yet], cinders also name the resilience and intractability

of what is most delicate and most vulnerable" (*Cinders*, p. 2). Cinders smolder; they can still be burning and therefore evoke Derrida's notion of "restance."

The word "cinder" is even a cinder of the cinder itself, for this common name cannot grant access to the proper name ("Cinder," the Other, the Being) hidden within it. This deferral holds implications for any attempt at gaining access to the proper name whose locus we would presume to be at the origin of language itself:

> Je comprends que la cendre n'est rien qui soit au monde, rien qui reste comme un étant. Elle est l'être, plutôt, qu'il y a - c'est un nom de l'être qu'il y a là mais qui, se donnant, n'est rien, reste au-delà de tout ce qui est, reste imprononçable pour rendre possible le dire alors qu'il n'est rien. (p. 57)

The cinder then signals the possibility of language without being able to name the conditions that allow it. According to Lukacher, it names therefore neither truth nor its impossibility. He writes:

> Because we do not know whether or not there is a final proper name of Being, we will always hear a residual, silent promise of the name. (*Cinders*, p. 7)

The smoldering cinders that are the name/trace of the proper name are always there; yet the naming of that proper name is impossible. The conference functions similarly in that the voices participating cannot be named; they remain necessarily disembodied.

In *De l'esprit: Heidegger et la question*, Derrida elucidates on that text's relation to *Feu la cendre* by

discussing the primordial beginning of language. He accomplishes this by reading Heidegger's "On the Way to Language," in which Heidegger refers to the spirit as a flame that glows and shines.[6] Additionally, Heidegger makes reference to the delicacy of the relation between language and truth. His concept of "Ereignis" is described by Lukacher as a "double movement in which language is incised by the withdrawal of the unnameable otherness of its origin and is thereby set into its own proper nature" (*Cinders*, p. 2). This anticipates Derrida's notion of the cinder as a trace that effaces itself as it makes itself present. In the polylogue, this occurs on the level of the participants in the conference. At times, a particular voice, the female voice, for example, makes itself recognizable through the gender markers of written language. Yet, the instant this voice becomes "present," it becomes lost again.

Corresponding to the undecidability of which voice is speaking when is the question of origin. Again, we find that the matters discussed in the conference are played out by the very (citational) act of the conference itself. For example, in *Feu la cendre* Derrida makes allusion to Hegel's notion of "Klang" as found in Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*. For Hegel, the "Klang" is a ringing noise at the origin of language itself. In Derrida's terms, a cinder burns at the origin between speech and Klang. Before it enters meaningfulness, "il y a là cendre" is initially a ringing

sound, similar to *glas*. This almost pre-linguistic sound reverberates like the "unnameable otherness" discussed by Heidegger and located at the origin.

The "différance" that is the "beginning" of language takes place in *Feu la cendre* by means of the word "là" as it functions in the sentence "Il y a là cendre." Throughout the text, there is an oscillation operating within this word. At times read and considered without the accent mark as the definite feminine article "la cendre," "the cinder," it suggests equally the word "there" or "là" when the "accent grave" is in place. Lukacher suggests that it inscribes the trace of something beyond itself that remains always inaccessible. As such, it is what is there and is not. It makes itself present only to withdraw again. Double and divided, "là" operates as this silent undecidability. The format of the conference functions in much the same manner and the fact that the topic of the conference focuses on the phrase "il y a là cendre" sets the entire project in *abîme* while simultaneously deconstructing the ontological concepts related to it.

The phrase "Il y a" functions in a manner similar to "Es gibt" in German since both phrases carry the meaning of the "there-ness" of the being as a type of presence. The English formulation of the phrase "il y a," "there is/are," is misleading since it has the sense of the verb "to be." This shifts the emphasis from the "there-ness" to "being"

as in the essence of the entity. In the sentence "Il y a là cendre," for example, the (non-)being of cinders remains indeterminate and indeterminable.

The question of origin resurfaces in *Feu la cendre* through the problematization of the word "s'androgynocident," which is played out in the conference with the undecidability of origin and gender. In his essay "La Pharmacie de Platon," Derrida regards the back room as the site of origin, prior to the emergence of difference and oppositions like speech and language as well as gender difference.[7] This is the place where the cinders "s'androgynocident," a neologism of Derrida's that combines the French words for androgynous and genocide and whose oral form evokes the word "cendre." This neologism emerges from the verb "s'andrent," which carries the same pronunciation as "cendres" and suggests the primordial pre-differentiation of gender. The verb "s'androgynocident" denotes as well genocide as in the Holocaust, where all burns and only cinders remain. In *Feu la cendre*, the cinders are the citations of the conference and they remain severed from their origin. Once irrecovably detached and grafted in a new context, that of *Feu la cendre*, they take on another meaning and function differently. Because they are now what remains, yet also what differs, they cannot be restituted or re-attached to their various sources.

Another way in which the conference problematizes the question of origin is through its insistence on the undecidability of the very word precipitating the conference itself: "cendre." Although the feminine "la cendre" plays an important role in *Feu la cendre*, the gender of "cendre" remains indeterminate. This stems from the conference participants' vacillation between "la" and "là." The reference to "la Cendre" as "Cendrillon" ("Cinderella") of the fairy tale recalls the passage in which Cinderella is covered in ashes and mocked by her stepsisters. Yet the instability of what is "there" or what is present at any given moment propels the movement away from "la" to "là" which effaces the gender, the "she" of "la cendre."

In addition to the conference disclosing the "cinder" as female at times and as the trace of what remains subsequent to the fire which burned at the origin, the speakers also address, or are addressed by citations, other voices, gathered in the "Animadversiones," taken from "La Pharmacie de Platon" as twice published in *Tel Quel* and *La Dissémination*. In the version of the essay from *Tel Quel*, Derrida writes, "Aussitôt que tu auras lu et relu cette lettre, brûle-la."[8] However, the version that appeared in *La Dissémination*, contains the phrase "il y a là cendre" appearing immediately after the imperative "Brûle-la." It reads as follows: "Vite, un double...graphite...carbone...

relu cette lettre...brûle-la. Il y a là cendre" (*La Dissémination*, p. 213). In terms of the letter, or "envoi," the message cannot reach its destination without being burned, without already being a trace or cinders.

Referred to as the "mission impossible" a veiled reference to the television program where an audiotape self-destructs, reduced to cinders in a puff of smoke, the following phrase stands for the cinder of "toutes nos étymologies perdues." This cinder "ne dit pas ce qu'elle est mais ce qu'elle *fut*" (p. 19). The *passé simple* verb form "fut" is quite similar to "fût" the *imparfait* form of the subjunctive of the verb "to be." The emphasis placed on the word "fut," meaning "departed" in the sense of "passed away," holds interesting implications for this particular text, in that cinders are what remain after the burning, the fire. Signifying what was once, or what is now dearly departed, "fut" suggests mourning following the holocaust:

> ...discrètement écartée, la dissémination phrase ainsi en cinq mots ce qui pour le feu se destine à la dispersion sans retour, la pyrification de qui ne reste pas et ne revient à personne. (p. 23)

The discussion on the holocaust in fact occupies the majority of the "Animadversiones." For Derrida, as Lukacher explains, the holocaust, or "brûle-tout," is "entirely other, non-present and outside the theorizable limits of ontology, leaving only the cinder traces of an absolute nonmemory" (p. 13).

What destabilizes the text as the conference on (access to) the origin of language, of holocaust, of gender difference is the insistence on the conference format itself with its indeterminate voices and its play between oral and written connotations inherent in the phrase "il y a là cendre." The conference that constitutes *Feu la cendre* explores the deconstruction of ontological questions raised by the undecidability of that phrase.

Stitching together the citations or cinders, which function themselves as voices in the conference, from *La Carte postale, La Dissémination* and *Glas* on the left-hand pages and the voices in conference on the right-hand pages, Derrida demonstrates that each cinder can always generate, or fritter away into, more cinders. Yet, in spite of the disseminative quality of cinders, the access to the origin of those cinders, in their pre-incineration state cannot be gained or achieved. Whereas "Restitutions" demonstrated through its conference the ultimate failure of the performance of presenting the truth, *Feu la cendre* similarly discloses the inability of accessing the Other, of naming the name at the origin.

Droit de regards

The third of the polylogues I will discuss is *Droit de regards*, a text found to pose questions relating to the visual in a similar manner to "Restitutions." However, instead of addressing the question of restituting

the shoes of Van Gogh's painting to their "rightful" owner, Derrida here provides the written text, in the form of a conference, to accompany a photo-essay by Belgian photographer Marie-Françoise Plissart. Her "photo-roman" is in fact a series of black and white photos capturing various episodes in the personal lives of several "characters." Plissart's text of photos leaves its story open to interpretation and waiting to be constructed, even, by those who dare to "regard" it in the same way as the photographer.

In *Droit de regards*, Derrida's conference is appended to the "roman-photo" and was released with it in the same book under the same title thereby immediately raising questions of the parergonal that are also played out within the "roman-photo." As appendix or accessory to the photos, Derrida's text problematizes the way it informs a reading of the photos. This is carried out through the effects the polylogue has on them. *Droit de regards* is less a viewing, or looking, of this photography in terms of voyeurism, than it is a reading and a questioning of the laws that determine what such a reading entails, "Au lieu du spectacle, les voilà qui instituent un lecteur ou une lectrice, et au lieu du voyeurisme l'exégèse" (p. v).

Initially what is at stake in *Droit de regards* is the question of "genre" as in the double connotation of both "genre" and "gender." In terms of genre, or rather the

attribution of the text(s) to the genre "proper" to it/them, *Droit de regards* escapes any clear cut delineation, teetering instead on the borderline between various genres. The subheading "roman-photo" indicates, for example, the impossibility of categorizing the photos, which are neither a novel nor merely photographs. Not unlike a "nouveau roman," the work lacks a progressive linear form as one would find in conventional narrative forms. Yet, because it does present a grouping of photos with recurring characters, indicative, therefore, of narrative elements, the photos must be viewed as something more than "just" photography.

For this reason, Derrida insists on the "générique" elements of the photos. Related to the word "genre," forms of which these photos exceed, "générique" refers to the written text ("credits") that is an appendix to, say, a film, but more importantly to the *generating* aspects inherent in the photo-text. In this sense, "générique" is the way in which this series of photos continually generates new and divergent narrative threads:

> Il nous a semblé qu'il n'y avait, dans cette centaine de pages, que des génériques, une *suite* de génériques dans lesquels on passe comme d'une pièce à l'autre. Les photographies génératrices, l'une incluse dans l'autre, sont à la fois plus grandes et plus petites que toute leur suite. (p. ii)

These narrative threads reveal a playing out of gender issues, in what Derrida calls "une partie de dames." For,

of the eight characters photographed, all but one are female. Yet, problems associated with (in)determinacy arise here as a translation issue, since the French word for the game piece, "une dame" is the equivalent of "King" in English. The translation of the term "dame" as "king" in English, therefore, finds the question of decidability always in suspense between itself and gender and itself and language. This play of sexual difference evidenced in Derrida's metaphorical usage of the game terms "partie de dames" and "dame" is not limited, however, to a simple question of gender difference in translation.

The indeterminacy of gender is best exemplified in the figure of the "she-male" who appears midway through the "roman-photo." Attired in black with a shaved head and angular facial features, this (wo)man is masculinized to such an extent that, from a distance, her gender is in question. It is perhaps not without coincidence that she is the character who wields the pen as a writing subject and remains detached and objective in the narrative series constituting the photos.

Since Derrida reads the photos in terms of a boardgame and the characters in those photos as "dames," this allows his consideration not only of gender but also of spacing or movement reflecting the indeterminacy and fluidity of the photo series. The issues of genre and gender are in fact indeterminate and perhaps indeterminable, because they

hinge on a certain mobility, or play, which impedes the designation of fixed meaning. Indeed, the ever-shifting positions, sexual, authorial and otherwise, serve to call into question genre, in the sense of gender as well as in the sense of literary genre.

In addition to the mobility of verbal play in the text, there is also a mobility of the images or the visual. In fact, the positions that shift usually involve the sexual positions of the female lovers photographed placed on top of one another and then lying next to one another.

The shifts evident in the ever-changing physical positioning of the photographed subjects, occur also with authorial voice which remains indeterminate both in the "roman-photo" and in Derrida's conference. Throughout the text(s) the constant re-positioning of subjectivity and voice reveals disunity as an effect of the play in Plissart's and Derrida's work. In the "roman-photo," for example, the shifts in photographic subject echo the shifts in photographer, displaying a multiple subjective perspective. At times, the various photographers are themselves folded into the series of photographs making it obvious that there is an indeterminate number of shooting subjects. In fact, several shots reveal different female characters holding cameras and shooting various other characters, placing "en abîme" Plissart's work as photographer and destabilizing her own authority as unified

subject controlling all the shots. Of course, the photographing characters are photographed simultaneously by other photographers whose identity remains undisclosed. Such a technique, or a maneuvering, on the part of Plissart gives the impression that the reader encounters the narrative from the perspective of any number of character-subjects.

Derrida, of course, employs much the same technique in his contribution. A conference, after all, is the assembly of persons for a meeting or discussion on a particular topic and necessarily entails an exchange where a multiplicity of voices comes into play. In *Droit de regards*, the number of voices participating in the discussion is never specified; indeed, the shifts from "tu" to "vous" deny any such determination, as the following passage indicates, "Vous ne saurez jamais, toi non plus, toutes les histoires, ni même en totalité l'une seulement des histoires que je me suis encore racontées" (p. iii).

Although there is an indeterminate number of participants in the conference, there is definitely at times the ability to determine the gender of some of those speakers. Syntactically, this is revealed several times during the text in phrases such as, "Je te vois pensive et aussi indécise" (p. iv) where there is agreement made with adjectives indicative of a female participant.

In spite of the designation of gender, which I was unable to determine in "Restitutions," *Droit de regards* functions in much the same way as the other texts by preventing a clear understanding of who is speaking when. It is impossible to track the order in which the conference participants speak. Occasionally, gender identification becomes possible, as in the example cited above; yet, the instant it comes into focus, it is lost again.

The above-described shifts between narrative voices and perspectives in the photo-text and in Derrida's parergonal text underscore an explicit resistance to determining "one" story; there are a plurality of stories that perpetually slip in and out of focus. This lack of univocity reinforces the notion that "il y a des récits impossibles, illisibles ou interdits...tout cela n'est pas racontable" (p. iii).

In "Deposition" David Wills reads such remarks regarding forbidden texts as a commentary on the state of reading in general at a time when certain texts and genres are taboo and off-limits:

> ...there is a profound modification in respect of reading, the politics of reading, reading as a political act...*Right of Inspection* questions the logic of a written text in apposition to a photographic text, it questions that logic in terms of the law, or institutional restraint. It seeks therefore to perform "looking" as, and to transform "looking" into, a type of reading.[9]

Carried out only through the discourse of the polylogue, this text undertakes a deconstruction of the law of

looking. As Derrida writes, "tu es libre mais il y a des règles. Il y a la loi qui assigne le droit de regard, tu dois observer ces règles qui à leur tour te surveillent" (p. ii). This law grants one the right to look; it allows a certain level of freedom, of mobility, as on the game board, but it still attempts to regulate that movement, a regulation which this text calls into question. Derrida explains:

> On ne peut que lire. Je répète, il n'y a que du regard et du droit de regard dans cette oeuvre, mais comme tout y fait la guerre en vue du droit, on n'y relève que des lignes de démarcation, des marques, des limites, des bordures, et des traces de débordement. (p. ix)

Just as the photo series itself questions the law of genre, which would regulate and clearly demarcate the status of what one reads/sees, the conference, as an accessory, parergonal to the photo series, raises similar questions. The indeterminacy informing the conference results in a plurality of perspectives that can be read with or without the photo text.

Conclusion

Derrida's polylogues, "Restitutions," *Feu la cendre* and *Droit de regards* offer an approach to the question of citationality that differs from that of both Duras and Blanchot. Previously I have used Derrida's work on citationality to read Duras and Blanchot in terms of hearsay and testimony, respectively. In this chapter I have conducted a reading of Derrida as an object of my analysis.

This maneuver folds Derrida into my practice of citationality and makes his work part of that practice and not just a means of access to it.

What I have found through my reading of Derrida's polylogues is the insistence on conference as means of problematizing issues of borders, origin and genre. As a conventionally oral mode of communication, conference, in the juridical sense, subscribes to certain regulatory codes. Derrida's texts reveal the deconstruction of these codes and boundaries with an emphasis on the undecidability of a plurality of ever-pluralizing voices.

With citationality, in general, there is always the potential to break the conventions that govern how a conference is conducted and the regulations that limit its content and function. In terms of conference, therefore, there exists a certain level of undecidability that impedes interpretation and restitution. One of the citational effects we have seen in this chapter is the *mise-en-abîme* of conference topics without any means of accessing what would be considered to be the origin.

In "Restitutions," for example, we saw the conference as a means of demonstrating the impossibility of restituting, of delivering the truth in a work of art. *Feu la cendre* with its double conference taking place on facing pages of the text problematizes the question of origin as the vacillation between the left-hand pages and

the right-hand pages underscores the inability to determine which conference precedes the other. This reflects the indeterminacy in the phrase around which the text centers, "Il y a là cendre." Finally, the "photo-roman" *Droit de regards* uses conference to play with genre in such a way as to render the gender of the characters and the genre of the text(s) itself as blurred.

Notes

1. Jacques Derrida, *La Vérité en peinture* (Paris: Flammarion, 1978), p. 6.

2. Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, edited by David Farzell Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 187.

3. Herman Rapaport, *Is There Truth in Art?* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 22.

4. Meyer Schapiro, "Still Life as Personal Object," in *The Reach of the Mind* (New York: Springer Publishing, 1968), p. 56.

5. Jacques Derrida, *Schibboleth* (Paris: Galilée, 1986), p. 5.

6. Jacques Derrida, *De l'esprit: Heidegger ou la question* (Paris: Galilée, 1987), p. 83.

7. See *La Dissémination* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972.

8. Jacques Derrida, *Tel Quel* (1968), 32-33.

9. David Wills, "Deposition" in *Art and Text*. Autumn (1989) 32, p. 14.

CHAPTER FIVE

BEARING WITNESS: CULTURAL SITES OF CITATIONALITY

Introduction

The previous chapters have focused exclusively on a discussion of the implications of citationality as found in the texts of Duras, Blanchot and Derrida. I have examined citationality as a condition of the law of iterability, according to which there exists the potential inherent in any sign to cite and to be cited, to overrun the borders which appear to contain it and to come to function in a plurality of new contexts.

This potential for a sign to break from its "present" context and to be re-cited in a new one holds particular implications for the so-called performative utterance, which is a speech act that performs the act of what is uttered. To accomplish this, the performative subscribes to certain conventions and codes which regulate its use. However, as Derrida has shown, iterability enables any utterance to be detached from its source or origin, thereby irrevocably severing it. Furthermore, Derrida has demonstrated the condition of potential failure for any performative utterance.

This principle of iterability, from which citationality stems, raises important questions, which I have addressed in the previous chapters. Among these questions are certainly those related to origin, since

citational effects are such that the origin, especially in the sense of the originary event, always already escapes accessibility. With the means of access severed, there remains the infinite dissemination of its traces, as citations, or even as cinders, as previously seen, in a movement that attempts the recuperation of the origin or originary event.

Another element called into question by the function of citationality is that of property. This relates to the signatory of an utterance, or the so-called "proprietor" of an utterance. In terms of performative speech acts, the signatory or proprietor enters into what can be considered a contractual agreement, committing him/her-self to act in good faith and fulfill the promise of the performative.

Owing to its disseminative character, citationality produces effects that result in the crossing of borders as well. In general, this involves a movement from the private sphere to the public sphere instigated by the enactment of bearing witness, of disclosing a secret.

These questions relating to origin, property and borders between private and public have been raised throughout my discussion of hearsay, testimony and conference and have been shown to problematize the texts which insist on these citational modes. These fundamental issues have become pertinent in other contexts, particularly the political and cultural realms, where there

has been, in recent times, what can be considered a "crisis" of citationality.

I attribute this crisis to changes in what constitutes the private and the public. The status of the private has been altered by the advent of the internet and the proliferation of media. Related to the blurring of boundaries between private and public spheres is the increased secularization of "confession." This traditionally religious act of bearing witness is no longer confined to the private disclosure of a testimony to a priest. Instead, confessional acts have moved out of the church and into the secular, public domain as evidenced by certain television programs. Another possible explanation of the citation crisis involves the altered status of the printed text. This change stems directly from rapid advances in technology, particularly in video and telecommunications. These examples are but a few of the possible explanations contributing to what I view as a general crisis in citation. These changes, in the private and public spheres, confession and the printed text, raise the very questions about citationality that I have already addressed in this project. Therefore, the relevance of questions stemming from citational practices such as hearsay, testimony and conference and the increasing crisis related to the status of citation in other textual forms explicates the shift this chapter makes to discuss

citationality in the broader context of cultural studies. This shift allows the exploration of politically and sociologically pertinent "texts" in terms of my project.

Textual forms I will discuss in this chapter include Latin American *testimonio*, Holocaust survivors' testimonies, President Clinton's impeachment and television talk shows. To begin, I will consider the Latin American tradition of *testimonio*. Since it quotes the idea of testimony but its function and purposes differ in important respects from the work of Maurice Blanchot, I feel compelled to devote some attention to this "genre" considered unique to Latin American studies. I will also address the highly politicized debate this genre has provoked in the United States over multicultural studies. After discussing *testimonio*, I will explore the rise in interest in another manifestation of testimony, that of Holocaust survivors. The rise in interest in documenting survivors' testimonies has been enabled by technological advances which have engendered such projects as Yale University's Video Archives for Holocaust Survivors and paradoxically, have allowed what I consider a personalization of testimonies, in that the videotape attributes a face to the testimony.

Next, I will turn to the Clinton and Lewinsky scandal. The investigation and impeachment trial elicited a double confession from Clinton, in addition to the differing

testimonies, and thus "truths," by him and Lewinsky. Independent counsel Kenneth Starr's investigation raised questions of truth and perjury indispensable in any consideration of acts of bearing witness. This allows us to investigate citationality as a political and legal practice.

After discussing the Clinton matter, I will turn to talk shows, a phenomenon that has exploded in popularity and interest over the last decade. Questions of bearing witness are particularly evident in this context since what is at stake with regard to television talk shows is not only citational effects such as border-crossing between the public and private, but also the doubling of witness and event. As I will discuss, talk shows operate, in effect, as explicit citations of juridical proceedings, granting authenticity and credibility to the show. Yet, implied claims of credibility are called into question with allegations of collective perjury on the part of these shows and their producers.

Before proceeding to the examination of these cultural and political instances involving acts of bearing witness, I will review the principles associated with the performative utterance since they bear heavily on questions of iterability and citationality. In what David Wills describes as the signatory utterance, the performative utterance deals with the universal human acts of

witnessing, promising and relating experiences of faith.[1] The performative's relation to witnessing stems from its definition as an utterance which produces meaning through the carrying out, or enactment, of what it states. It is according to Judith Butler a "coincidence of signifying and enacting" ("Burning Acts: Injurious Speech," p. 150). The utterance gains meaning, in other words, when it coincides with the performance of a ritualized act, such as the words "I do" spoken during a wedding ceremony or "I hereby declare..." to officially launch a ship while smashing a bottle of champagne over it.

Austin, of course, was either unable to or unsure of how to treat cases which did not conform to his model and therefore sought to exclude such cases with the aim of "temporarily" eliminating potential problems. Admittedly, he did qualify this exclusion as provisional or temporary, but that does not however compensate for this maneuver. Furthermore, Austin's description of these cases as "parasitical" and "etoliations" of the normal or standard use of language is equally problematic.

In my first chapter, I traced Derrida's line of argument as seen primarily in "Signature Evénement Contexte" and "Limited Inc a b c..." where he refutes Austin's and Searle's claims of the "deviant" nature of the examples of performative utterance and the necessity of eliminating them from discussion.

To briefly summarize, Derrida reads such cases of parasitical discourse not as exceptions to the rule of performative but rather as necessary possibilities that hold true for any and all performatives, as possibilities that constitute the rule. If such a plethora of "non-serious" and "parasitical" utterances is possible, then these cases should not, and moreover, cannot be dismissed as aberrations delimited from so-called serious uses of language. As Derrida contends, (the) failure, parasiting and non-serious are but instances of what is possible for any utterance and mark. In fact, he insists that this condition of possibility is inscribed in each and every mark and is the condition of iterability or citationality of language in general.

This law of iterability informs the performative in ways other than the exclusion of certain types of utterance. Indeed, one of the reasons adduced by Austin in delimiting the category of the non-serious is the misuse or misfire of otherwise "legitimate" performatives, meaning the carrying out of the performative in bad faith, with poor or questionable intentions. As discussed earlier, Austin's requirement that both speaker and receiver impart purely good intentions in the enactment of the performative presupposes a determinacy as well as the ability of interlocutors to be fully present throughout the performance of the performative. Additionally, these

stipulations institute a set of boundaries that seek to limit each performative in such a way as to prohibit its citation. Yet, interestingly enough, each case of a performative is already the citation of another, because its obeys pre-established conventions that regulate its enactment. Therefore, the putative singularity of the occurrence of the performative is actually but the citation of another performative, itself a citation. The iterable structure of performatives must be recognized. Just as each instance of a performative is the citation of a preceding one, each performative, in fact, every sign, is subject to being iterated or cited. As stated previously, any mark can be subjected to a disseminative process, whereby it can be lifted, or stolen, and carried into a different context to function in a different manner. Once grafted into a new context, the mark has been repeated and altered. This condition of possibility enables the breaching and broaching of borders supposed to separate contexts. Whereas Austin's conception of the performative maintains a delineation between felicitous and non-felicitous utterances based in part on the fully present and involved interlocutors acting in good faith, iterability or citationality recognizes the possibility of dissemination and graft that resists closure by borders. If we accept these principles of citationality, we can then view various cases of performative, such as witnessing and promising, in

those terms. This in turn provides the space for my addressing questions related to the boundaries between the public and private and truth and falsehood. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, these questions have become increasingly important in recent times, as evidenced by the proliferation of cases of bearing witness and testimony.

Generally, acts of witnessing involve the attempt to gain access to the truth, to the originary event. The fact that witnesses in the American courtroom must swear on the *Bible* to "tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth" shows quite clearly that the desire for the revelation of the truth serves as the impetus for bearing witness. In the chapter on Maurice Blanchot, I have explained that the law requires that the witness be present in the courtroom to testify. Bearing witness is normally conducted live, in the first-person, as if the "presence" of the witness to the truth ensures its veracity, an idea that can be traced back to Aristotle's privileging of speech for its proximity to the soul and, therefore, to the "word," or logos, the "truth" in its purest possible state.

Since the witness is present during the proceedings and delivers testimony live and in his/her own voice, witnessing is generally considered a moment of truth that is pure and unmediated. Such an act presumably offers the most direct access to the truth that is conceivable without external influence or technological intervention.

Taking this desire for a lack of technological influence in conventional matters of testimony into consideration, it is all the more pertinent that the increased contemporary interest in acts of bearing witness is occurring in a highly mediated context.

Although the reasons for the proliferation of acts of bearing witness are not necessarily clear or distinguishable, one possibility is the incredibly rapid technologization of society in recent years. Obviously, the result of these advances in technology is an increased reliance on automation which produces a reduction in the amount of contact and interaction with other human beings. One example is found in the evolution in banking procedures in the last decade that have placed an increased reliance on technology coinciding with the reduction in direct contact with bank employees. Other examples include the automation of telecommunications and the explosion of on-line markets. Although these technological advances facilitate business operations, they minimize interaction with others.

In addition to reducing human contact, technological advances also serve to produce a general sense of anxiety or mistrust for what is received or accomplished electronically. For example, there exists a general suspicion about the use of automatic teller machines for making deposits.

I view this minimized contact, produced by a greater reliance on automation and technology and the accompanying general anxiety regarding that reliance as an enabling condition for our renewed interest in pure moments of bearing witness, where we presume to have access to the truth devoid of mediation. Yet, paradoxically, this interest in "pre-technological" moments that characterize acts of witnessing is actualized, or fulfilled, precisely because of technology. This in turn generates even more interest in such testimonies since its mediatisation grants greater and seemingly more direct access to them. President Clinton's depositions and impeachment trial, for example, were aired live on national television. Talk shows, obviously, enable the presentation of nearly daily acts of witnessing through the use of technology that broadcasts these moments nationwide. Holocaust survivors' testimonies are recorded on videocassette in an effort to document their stories before no survivors remain. The indigenous Latin Americans who supply their *testimonio* through a journalist or anthropologist benefit from the technology that enables their work's dissemination to the policy makers in the United States, in particular, where pressure can be applied to effect change in their native countries.

Latin American *Testimonio*

Testimonio emerged as a recognizable literary form in the sixties, a period defined by movements of national

liberation and armed struggles against oppression in Latin America. In general terms, the *testimonio* is a bearing witness, a first-person narrative differing from autobiography and other citational forms owing to its explicit politicization. As representative of a particular group or class with certain political or ideological concerns to be advanced, the witness stands as one of many, a singular instance of a plural. Singular in that any one witness, as we have explored in the chapter on Maurice Blanchot, is irreplaceable and not interchangeable; no one else can occupy the place of any particular witness except the witness in question. Plural, or universal, in the sense that, as far as *testimonio* is concerned, the witness becomes the voice of the numerous oppressed and disenfranchised of the witness's community who have been denied a voice, who do not and cannot speak. Paradoxically, however, once the witness is empowered with speech s/he in a sense loses status as the subaltern or other, which necessitated the urgent struggle to find a voice, and enters the sphere of the privileged. In *In Other Worlds*, Gayatri Spivak has argued that the subaltern cannot speak.[2] For illustrative purposes, let us take the case of Richard Rodriguez whose well-received autobiography *Hunger of Memory*, recounts the education and assimilation of a Mexican-American born into the working-class immigrant section of Sacramento. His ascent to the middle class

involves the mastery of English and the anglicization of his name from Ricardo Rodriguez. In Spivak's conceptualization of the term subaltern, Rodriguez is no longer to be considered as such. His transformation, his anglicization, enables him to speak but not from the place of the other.

Yet, *testimonio* does enable a vocalization of the plight of the oppressed in Latin America. Textual production of such acts of witnessing involves a movement into the "literary." In fact, the Cuban publishing house, Casa de las Americas, accorded formal status to the *testimonio* as a bona fide literary genre with its award, beginning in 1970, of an annual prize in this category. Obviously, *testimonio* is not directed to members of the group to which the witness belongs, since these people, as impoverished and marginalized, constitute the greatest percentage of illiterates in Latin America. According to John Beverley in *Against Literature*, the literary, as understood in terms of high culture, epitomizes the European and colonial ideologies and remains inaccessible to the majority of indigenous people.[3]

Testimonio like other citational forms of narrative, is by no means a genre born out of a vacuum. Beverley reveals that *testimonio* grew out of a rich tradition of first-person and documentary type writings. He cites, for example, colonial era "cronicas," war diaries, nationalist

essays, etc., as testimonial-type texts that provided the ground work for the emergence of *testimonio*. Indeed, Beverley claims that all Latin American writing occurring post-Conquest is testimonial (*Against Literature*, p. 19).

For him, the legal connotation carried in the word *testimonio* is essential so that it maintains a distinction from oral history (*ibid.*). *Testimonio* implies, therefore, a certain veracity given to the account as if the witness narrator were under oath to divulge the truth as in the courtroom or in the sense of religious acts of confession, or bearing witness. Because it lacks this connotation, oral history allows for a less rigorous insistence on accuracy, truth and authenticity.

With the recognition of *testimonio* as a literary genre, and its resulting dissemination beyond regional and international borders, it is obvious that *testimonio*, an act of bearing witness to the suffering of the misaligned group, serves to advance their socio-political cause. Through this dissemination emerging out of technological advances in communication, *testimonio* is received in the First World countries where its readers are in a position to apply pressure on their leaders and various humanitarian organizations to effectuate foreign policy changes that would ameliorate the oppressed's situation.

Such is the case of the most well-known *testimonio* of Rigoberta Menchu, first published in 1977 and subsequently

translated and released in English as *I, Rigoberta Menchu*. Menchu bears witness to the atrocities inflicted upon her and her community in Guatemala. As a Mayan Indian of the western Quiché highlands of Guatemala, Menchu is a member of the indigenous population that remains cut off ethnically, culturally and linguistically from the so-called "ladinos," or fair-skinned, Spanish speaking Latin Americans of European descent who maintain political and economic power in the region.

Menchu's *testimonio* was told to Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, an anthropologist who invited Menchu to meet with her in Paris so she could record her story. Burgos' introduction to the text stands as her testimony to the testimony she received from Menchu. In this introduction, Burgos bears witness, in effect, to her work with Menchu and to the bond forged between them during the week Menchu spent with her. She also discusses her role as editor of the transcript. This job involved grouping various segments of the interviews by theme and then placing them in individual chapters. During this project, Burgos decided to delete her questions and comments so that the *testimonio* would read as a monologue, giving the illusion of no outside interference or mediation in Menchu's story. In addition, Burgos acknowledged making corrections to Menchu's speech since Menchu still had not acquired an advanced level of proficiency in Spanish, the language in

which they worked. She writes that it "would have been artificial to leave them uncorrected and it would have made Rigoberta look 'picturesque'..."[4]

It is precisely Burgos' role as editor that problematizes the question of *testimonio* in general. Indeed, according to Craft in *Novels of Testimony and Resistance from Central America*, the level of intervention on the part of the editor becomes a serious concern as the potential exists for "overcorrection" of the testimony, which would result in the overpowering mark of the interlocutor on the project.[5] The fact that the witness, as a marginalized and often illiterate party, must rely on a journalist or anthropologist, a member of the educated elite, as an interlocutor poses certain problems. Critics such as Elzbieta Sklodowska have called into question the mediation that enables testimony to take place. In the case of Burgos and Menchu, for example, the editing undertaken by Burgos to make the testimony publishable threatens the integrity of the text and raises the question of exactly how much of the text is really Menchu and how much is Burgos.[6] Doris Sommer, however, views the mediation in terms of a solidarity and complicity between recorder and witness. According to Sommer, the mediation results in a destabilization of the roles of oppressor, as recorder, and witness, as oppressed, rather than a reaffirmation of the boundaries between the two.[7]

It is my contention that such boundaries are called into question through the recording of *testimonio* by another party. The author-ity of the witness is destabilized, especially in the case of Menchu because of the extensive editing on the part of Burgos. What is at stake in this case is the issue of property and proprietorship, one of the effects produced by such a practice of citation, a structural issue that obtains in any utterance, but that comes into explicit focus in the case of *testimonio*.

While there are questions as to the intervention of the editor-recorder and its potential to alter the witness's *testimonio*, questions have also arisen regarding the truthfulness and accuracy of the witness's story. As we will see, these concerns have played out in the United States as a conservative attack on multicultural studies where Rigoberta Menchu's text seems to have sparked the debate.

In *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, Dori Laub relates her experience as one of several interviewers for the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimony at Yale. She recalls a session with a woman bearing witness to her incarceration in Auschwitz. During the interview, the woman recalled her work at the camp as well as the Auschwitz uprising. Subsequent to her testimony, a fellow interviewer, a

historian, called into question her account of the uprising because of the incompleteness of her knowledge of the event. The historian saw these limitations as inaccuracies, as perhaps an indication of a lack of veracity of her alleged experiences at Auschwitz. For Laub, however, these limits simply demonstrate that an eyewitness, any witness, cannot have a totalizing experience and certainly not achieve a totalizing testimony to that event.[8] Instead of questioning the witness's authenticity, Laub respects the limits of knowledge, stating that they do not detract from the importance or significance of what the witness is saying.

A similar question of validity has arisen in the case of Rigoberta Menchu. David Stoll, an anthropologist at Middlebury College, has released the findings of his research in and around the Quiché Highlands where Menchu has spent much of her life. According to Stoll, Menchu's life-testimony is replete with historical inaccuracies and grave exaggerations of the hardships and tragedies she and her family were said to have suffered at the hands of the "ladinos" and the Guatemalan Army.[9] Menchu's account, for example, of the torture and burning death of her brother along with other prisoners in the town square of Chajul may not be historically accurate. Stoll claims to have interviewed inhabitants of that town who say that was never any such public torture death there. Stoll also disputes

Menchu's descriptions of her childhood working on the "finku," or plantations. His research indicates that Menchu was perhaps a bit more privileged than others and actually spent her childhood at a Catholic boarding school, receiving thereby an 8th grade education and never setting foot on a "finku" (*ibid.*).

Stoll apparently has quite a few critics who see his work as a right-wing attempt to discredit Menchu and thus silence her and her supporters working to gain justice from the Guatemalan Army and the "ladinos." In addition to discrediting Menchu, Stoll and his supporters are placing multicultural studies in jeopardy, since their claims of perjury in her case result in a movement against the use of such "political" texts in the classroom. Menchu's accounts of army atrocities against the impoverished and indigenous people of Guatemala are seen as indispensable to the movement seeking to rid Guatemala of such abuses of power and human rights violations.

David Levine, a political science professor at the University of Michigan finds it alarming that scholars are willing to overlook untruths and inaccuracies when it comes to a figure like Rigoberta Menchu. His concern is in response to Stoll's critics who claim that regardless of his research findings, regardless of alleged problems with her testimony, they will continue to vaunt the importance of her work and they will persist in using it in the

classroom where it has gained the status as the epitome of its genre as *testimonio* (*ibid.*, p. A16).

This situation echoes that mentioned earlier involving the Auschwitz survivor whose lack of complete story and details led one interviewer to call into question her entire testimony. In the case of Menchu, the discrepancies between historical fact and her account of these events have also jeopardized her presumed authority as witness and have led some, notably Stoll, to discredit the entirety of her work. Others, like Allen Carey-Webb, of Western Michigan University, remind Menchu's critics of the importance of realizing that even if there are discrepancies, even if the murder of her brother did not occur as she claims, the indisputable fact is that the Guatemalan Army did murder people like her brother and the indigenes have been oppressed (*ibid.*). Being able to speak, to bear witness to these hardships is crucial in provoking change and the importance of granting the marginalized a voice cannot be disputed, so rarely are they able to speak. What has become clear from the polemic based on questions regarding the veracity of Menchu's testimony is that those of the opposing positions inhabit the same space of testimony which is at once truth and fiction.

To conclude, I will state that advances in telecommunications have opened a political discourse on *testimonio* by allowing such texts to be disseminated beyond

the borders of Latin America into industrialized first-world countries. This dissemination, generated by technological advances, stimulated by a general desire for pre-technological, non-mediated instances of bearing witness. Yet, in the case of Latin American testimonials, the witnesses act of bearing witness is highly mediated. The fact that these indigenous, oppressed people testify to the intellectual elite of first-world countries raises questions regarding the author-ity and proper-ty of these *testimonios*.

These issues notwithstanding, the citation of testimonio in this country has sparked a highly politicized debate on the status of multicultural studies. Although the ramifications of conservative movements to discredit the *testimonios* of indigenous Americans such as Menchu have not yet been determined, it can be said that the practice of *testimonio* and its citation in the United States has allowed the voice of these people to finally be heard.

Holocaust Survivors' Testimonies

As we have already seen in the previous section, the increased demand for pure acts of bearing witness is in partial response to the increasingly mediatised age in which we live. The paradox, of course, is that this interest in accessing acts of bearing witness thrives because of that same increased mediatisation which allows for a rapid dissemination of testimonies while collapsing

borders between the private and public spheres. One of the functions of bearing witness is to make sense out of a traumatic event suffered by the witness. The Holocaust stands as the traumatic event that defies its eventhood, an event, in the words of Dori Laub, without witnesses.

In "Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Laub calls the Holocaust the event that produced no witnesses for a couple of reasons. First, the extermination of its victims left literally few witnesses. The Holocaust sought to eliminate any potential witnesses through the execution of Hitler's plan. Those who did manage to survive in the concentration camps had undergone such dehumanizing psychological trauma that their capacity to bear witness to what they had lived through and experienced was severely reduced. Witnesses, however, do exist among the survivors of the Holocaust. Some critics even consider those who did not survive the concentration camps as witnesses too. Indeed, the testimonies they left in the form of concentration camp diaries, poetry and art attest to their desire to bear witness by leaving a record of what they were experiencing even as they were dying.[10]

That experience, that event, is presumably tidily summarized in the word "holocaust." Yet, even the use of the Greek word "holocaust," meaning "burnt ashes," seems quite inadequate to express the horrors it constituted.

Decades later, we are still struggling in our attempt both to come to terms with what transpired and to represent it. This has led to a movement, especially in recent years, of bearing witness, of testifying to the horrors of the Holocaust in an effort to speak that which remains unspeakable and which can never be fully represented.

The purposes served by bearing witness to various aspects of the Holocaust are multiple. First, the catharsis stimulated by witnessing carries with it a distinct therapeutic value. Dori Laub writes that it offers a way for the witness to begin healing, since most survivors were initially left unable to speak, still reeling from the trauma they underwent at the hands of the Nazis (*Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, p. 131).

The psychological scars were so severe that many survivors repressed memories of the Holocaust and did not even speak to their families of their experiences for years following the end of World War II. Instead, they began to strive for some semblance of normalcy and acted as if none of those horrors had ever taken place. Dori Laub recounts her work with one survivor in particular whose family had never heard him speak at all about that period of his life.

Once a survivor regains access to these experiences, bearing witness commences and for some it never ceases. Primo Levi, for example, whose *Survival at Auschwitz* is one

of the best known testimonies of the Holocaust, devoted the rest of his life to testifying about his experience as a Holocaust survivor.[11] His writings, both fictional and non-fictional, treat various aspects of the Holocaust and as such allowed Levi the opportunity to work out on paper a sort of survivor's therapy. In a therapeutic sense, therefore, testifying enables the survivor to attempt to come to terms with the significance of the experience.

Because the Holocaust is unfathomable, bearing witness also serves to reaffirm what was experienced. It renders the Holocaust, which seems so unimaginable and so far removed from reality, real. Testifying concretizes the lived experience of the survivors, which in numerous cases had been repressed. As Dori Laub has remarked, one of the greatest fears of survivors is that nobody will believe them and their testimony, that history will not accept their claims and allegations of their trauma. As one survivor stated, she felt the need to survive, to live one day more than Hitler so she could tell her story ("Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, p. 67). Just as surviving enables one to testify, so too does testifying enable one to survive.

The very real fear common to all of the victims was that there would be no survivors and that, if there were survivors, they would not be heard or listened to. This can

be seen as a result of the dehumanization to which the Jews were subjected. As we have seen in the previous section on the Latin American *testimonio*, bearing witness is an act of empowerment since it grants a voice to witnesses who, as members of a defined community, have been marginalized and oppressed, to the point of genocide in the case of Jews, at the hands of those maintaining a position of power over them. The methodical extermination program instituted by the Third Reich commenced with the dehumanization of those marked as members of inferior communities. This was accomplished first by cutting off contact and communication with those on the outside, thereby eliminating the necessary interlocutors required for witnessing to take place.

So silenced, the victims of the Holocaust became dehumanized; having lost their voice and, having been denied the right to speak, the survivors emerged from the concentration camps believing they have no right to possess a voice. They felt they were not worthy to speak or to be listened to. The incomprehensible structure of the event that silenced its victims through genocide and through the removal of their voices produced, in this sense, no witnesses, as Laub has stated (*Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History.*). The Holocaust extinguished the possibility of address, of communication. The reduction to silence persisted following

the liberation of the camps for the previously mentioned reasons.

Laub's research has revealed that survivors feel they belong to a secret community, membership of which hinges on possession of a secret that can never be divulged. They feel they are sworn to silence. The reasons for this feeling can be attributed first to the magnitude of the trauma inflicted upon the survivors on whom the earlier mentioned sense of unworthiness to speak bears heavily. Along with this is the additional feeling that those outside of the event would not believe them. Furthermore, even if the so-called outsiders were to believe and to accept their stories, survivors feel no one could ever know the "real" truth. Because the scope of the Holocaust is so far-reaching, so incredibly traumatic, no one individual account could ever fully explain what really happened. For this reason, the Holocaust defies its eventhood and escapes reality.

There can never be, therefore, any totalizing testimony which could subsume the event. Although documents and other historical records exist, the knowing, as Laub describes it, is born during witnessing (*ibid.*). Yet, this knowing can never be totalizing. It is constituted only by the accumulation of singular instances provided by each survivor-witness. In fact, the survivor testimonies comprise the main record of what took place at the hand of

the Nazis. These testimonies, made possible when the survivor regains access to his/her voice, allow the repossession of the act of witnessing through which the event crystallizes and comes into existence. The re-presentation of the event by the witness brings the event to the real, according reality to it not only for the outsiders but also for the survivors themselves, as Dori Laub asserts in her work with such survivors (*ibid.*).

This function of bearing witness belongs to what can be considered the more "affirmative" side of iterability. Because of iterability, in fact, witnessing is able to keep the past alive, by bringing it into the reality of the present. Testimony, as previously discussed, involves the attempt to re-present the event or lived experience, an act which makes it much more than just restituting the past. If it were simply a matter of reminiscing or restituting, the event-experience would remain anchored in the past with the potential to be forgotten. Through iterability, the previously present moment of the witness (in the past) is re-presented and ensures that it will always be remembered and that the survivors will always live on. While keeping the past alive, witnessing as a function of citationality also allows the witnesses to reconcile themselves to their trauma, which is therapeutically significant.

In fact, the therapeutic significance of witnessing for these survivors is indisputable. Their repossession of

voice and the act of witnessing itself has been made possible by the growing movement to document their testimonies. As stated earlier, I attribute this increasing interest in recording these acts of testimony by Holocaust survivors to an impossible attempt and a collective need, to process and fully represent this event defying its eventhood. The extreme privacy that is the singularity of each witness' experience moves into the public sphere with the enactment of testimony. In the case of the Yale Video Archive for Holocaust survivors, this border crossing from the private to the public is highly mediatised. The witnesses testify on camera before a panel of interviewers, including historians, psychologists and anthropologists. The videotaping, a public, mediatised disclosure of testimony, paradoxically marks what I view as a movement to the personal. I have explained how technological advances have provoked a change in the status of the printed text, allowing its more rapid circulation, but perhaps more importantly, allowing other media, such as videotaping, to supersede its usage. This is precisely the case with the Yale project. It is my contention that the preference for video documentation of the testimonies underscores the interest in the return to the "purely" personal non-mediated act of bearing witness. Unlike the printed text in which the testimony is detached in numerous ways from the witness, the video text reinstates the connection between

story and witness, thereby providing the illusion of a truly personal testimony. The video assigns a face to the witnessing which serves to (re-)personalize the already intensely personal testimony. The Video Archive brings into focus again the paradox of every testimony which stems from its iterable function. Once uttered, testimony becomes technologized; this is because iterability, or repeatability, involves a certain automation which allows for the repetition or citation of the utterance. Yet, with the increased movement to a pre-technological, pure moment of personal testimony, there is a multiplication of the effects of technology, as in the case of the Yale project.

Clinton and Lewinsky: Truth and Testimony

The technological advances that have facilitated the Yale project have played an important role in other contexts, most notably that of the Clinton impeachment. The case of President Clinton's trial raised the very questions that my project has addressed in the preceding chapters on Duras and Blanchot in particular. In fact, the reliance on hearsay and testimony as functions of citationality in the narratives of those writers has been played out in the contemporary political and public spheres related to the Clinton and Lewinsky scandal.

If we recall, the hearsay and testimony that inform the Duras and Blanchot fictions emerge out of an overwhelming movement in favor of accessing the truth. In

Duras' Lol V. Stein cycle, for example, the attempt to re-present the event which generates the texts remains just that: an attempt to access the origin, the truth of Lol's ravishing. The impossibility of achieving access results, as we have seen, in the propagation of hearsay which circulates beyond the limits of *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, engendering a plurality of other texts.

The Blanchot *récits* focus on the attempt to achieve testimony, or first-person disclosure of the event witnessed. Like the Duras cycle of texts, the *récits* purport to re-present the event, by doubling the presence of the witness. However, the originary event, or moment of the witness, cannot be re-presented. With the two moments, event and testimony, severed from one another, the *récits* become the events themselves. Obviously, the Duras and Blanchot texts demonstrate the problematization of bearing witness, of telling or re-presenting the whole truth thought to lie "beyond performance," beyond the act of bearing witness.

These problematic realities of bearing witness -- doubling of presence, collapse of boundaries between private and public, etc. -- have been staged in the very public and political context of the Clinton trial. As stated previously, this case functions not unlike the cases of Duras and Blanchot which are marked by the movement to access the originary event, or the truth, deemed to lie

beyond the "present" act of witnessing. In the Clinton case, of course, the plurality of overwhelmingly mediatized citational acts, or re-tellings, attempting to access the originary event are problematized by that very event thought to be at the origin. The problematic of the origin or source of the Clinton affair stems from questions of the private sphere as well as questions of what constitutes sexual relations. The event at the heart of the trial -- sexual contact between Clinton and Monica Lewinsky, normally a private activity with relatively insignificant implications beyond the closed doors which presumably contain it -- fails to correspond accordingly to the degree and level of public and political attention it generated.

With the relative insignificance of their private and personal activities inaccessible, the array of its mediations -- congressional hearings, depositions, testimonies and the impeachment trial -- became the event itself, as in Blanchot's *récits*. Since iterability involves a technologization, it is, in effect, an automated repetition functioning beyond the control of the law and exceeding boundaries, especially those between the public and private.

In the Clinton case, the private became the public to such a degree that Clinton even opted to offer a national confession to the American people in which he proceeded to apologize and ask for forgiveness, despite the fact that

confessions normally are carried out in secret and are thought to be pure, pre-mediatized moments of witnessing. As explained previously, there is recently an increased movement in favor of such pre-technological moments of bearing witness with the paradox being that such moments are already technological and mediatized. Morevover, Clinton's confession was purely "mediatic," aired directly on national television.

Although any act of witnessing involves a transgression from the private to the public and a certain degree of mediatization, the borders that would normally delineate the two spheres is overrun; and, once the borderline is overrun, control or containment of the information becomes impossible. Here, in the case of a public figure such as President Clinton, the movement from private to public becomes extreme and the debate over the private lives of public officials renewed. Interestingly, Clinton's aides conducted polls of Americans in order to determine how politically threatening the scandal would be for Clinton. Repeatedly, these polls revealed that the public is much more willing to forgive adultery than perjury. This can be attributed in part to the fact that adultery is a private act whereas perjury is by nature a public commission, having already been situated in the public sphere of the courtroom.

Another aspect related to the question of public and private that surfaced during the Clinton impeachment was the level of public access to the legal proceedings. Not only did the testimony become public within the courtroom, the traditional setting for such acts of witnessing, but it also took place live on national television, overrunning even the presumed boundaries of the courtroom. The increasing mediatization of society, considered with the general blurring of boundaries between the private and public (especially public figures) results not only in a greater interest in acts of bearing witness, but also in the increased access to such events. As seen in the example of Clinton's confession, such acts rely on technology and always involve a certain mediatization, even when they are thought to be devoid of media.

In addition to calling into question the boundaries delineating the private and public spheres, the problematic of the original event in the Clinton case involves the definition of "sexual relations." The indeterminacy of this definition obfuscated an understanding of what it was exactly that occurred between Clinton and Lewinsky.

In fact, much deliberation ensued during Clinton's 1998 deposition in the Paula Jones sexual harassment case over an acceptable definition of the phrase "sexual relations." The judge in the case ultimately ruled that "sexual relations" signified that the person deposed

engages in or causes sexual contact with another, with the intent to arouse or gratify sexual desire. According to the judge's definition, this contact excludes sexual intercourse. The attempt to access and re-present the originary event of the entire impeachment proceedings resulted in multiple and differing re-tellings. All of these citations failed to perform successfully what they purported to do: to present the truth by re-presenting the event generating those re-tellings.

An early mediation of the originary event occurred during the deposition in the Paula Jones case when Clinton denied having had sex with Monica Lewinsky. When questioned days later during a conference at the White House, Clinton again asserted that he had not had "sexual relations with that woman...These allegations are false."

On August 17th, Clinton appeared again before a grand jury, this time to give testimony in reference to the Monica Lewinsky issue for which prosecutors were investigating the possibility of charging him with perjury and obstruction of justice in light of Lewinsky's testimony of August 6th. During the proceedings of Clinton's testimony, the prosecutors for the Office of the Independent Counsel emphasized repeatedly that the law stipulates that the witness's appearance for a deposition or testimony entails taking a sworn oath to officially and legally commence the proceedings. This oath is, of course,

a promise on the part of the witness to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth. As one who is unique and irreplaceable, who possesses knowledge from a perspective that no one else can have, and who has taken an oath to be completely and utterly truthful, a witness enjoys a certain level of authority and credibility. Yet, as we have seen in the Blanchot chapter on testimony, there is always a certain "embroidery" of truth and fiction that the witness stitches together.

By stating one's name at the opening of the testimony proceedings, the witness, in effect, offers an oral signature to his/her testimony and, coupled with the oath, is held accountable and responsible for what takes place as a performative. According to Austin's definition of performative, this would suggest good intentions on the part of the speaker to fulfill his/her promise to be fully truthful. The witness is assumed to act in good faith in order to uphold the oath to which s/he swore.

During the course of his four hour-long testimony, Clinton was repeatedly questioned about the previous statements he had made under oath "to tell the whole truth" for his deposition. Sections regarding the definition of "sexual relations" were cited as well as conversations he had had prior to the deposition which he re-presented during the deposition and which Lewinsky also re-presented during her

testimony and which Clinton then re-cited again during his testimony.

In advance of his testimony, Clinton entered into the record a signed statement in which he admitted having conducted himself inappropriately with Lewinsky yet denied having had sexual intercourse with her. In fact, he denied having had "sexual relations" with her in the strict sense of the phrases used during the deposition. His argument was that he did not cause, in the sense of forcing, contact with Lewinsky; therefore, this definition did not apply to his encounters with her. To avoid answering directly "yes" or "no" to the more explicit questions relating directly to those encounters, Clinton reverted to this statement in an attempt to protect himself from self-incrimination. This maneuver, in effect, helped to impede access to the origin, since it maintained an indeterminacy about the nature of the activity engaged in by Clinton and Lewinsky.

Another point re-cited from the deposition was the statement made by Clinton's lawyer, Robert Bennett, who said that there was no sexual relationship between Clinton and Lewinsky. This statement obviously contradicted the new truth emerging subsequent to Lewinsky's testimony. At this point in the proceedings, Clinton's testimony collapsed into a game of semantics in that the prosecutors disputed the truthfulness of Bennett's statement with Clinton. Clinton testified that, if taken literally, at the present

and in that moment, when Bennett uttered those words, then he spoke accurately and truthfully. Because at that instant and for some time prior to that moment, there were indeed no sexual encounters with Lewinsky. Such contact had been terminated by Clinton some time before the deposition. The veracity of the statement therefore hinged on the interpretation of the word "is." Understood in the present tense, the use of "is" speaks of the then-present moment of the deposition without making any reference to any past moments, thereby rendering the statement true.

The matter of Lewinsky's affidavit in regard to the Jones case arose as well during the testimony. It was in this legally binding paper validated by Lewinsky's own signature that she denied having had an affair with Clinton. In response to questions concerning the truthfulness of her statement, Clinton explained that the phrase "sexual relationship" or "affair" as used by Lewinsky and as most likely understood by the majority of Americans would imply "sexual intercourse." This affidavit is therefore truthful in that Lewinsky was not bound to the context of a deposition in which Clinton had been placed, which in turn forced him to adhere to a strict definition as issued by the judge.

The question of context reveals the iterability of any sign. This is to say, of course, that any sign has the capacity to be brought to function and have meaning in a

plurality of different contexts. Therefore, for Lewinsky, and in her affidavit, the definition of "sexual relationship" would operate differently -- although presumably still truthfully -- from the definition to which Clinton was bound by the judge in the deposition and which was still being called to function in the different context of his testimony.

Yet another aspect of the Clinton affair relates to the status of truth and perjury. In fact, Kenneth Starr's investigation into Clinton's alleged illegal activities raised questions of what constitutes truth and perjury in the context of Clinton's statements taken under oath before a grand jury. This again involves the problematization of borders. In terms of truth and fiction, these borders become indistinguishable, leaving it impossible to decide where truth ends and fiction begins.

Clinton's responses to questions referring to statements and testimonies by others at times contradicted others' versions. Yet, testimony is itself the presentation of first-hand knowledge and experiences by the witness who occupies a place that no other can possibly take. It seems to become a question of perspective then, as Clinton himself alluded to in his testimony, when he stated that the truth for one person might differ from another's understanding or experience of the "same event." In other words, no two people see the same thing nor define it in

the same way; but, according to Clinton, that should not suggest that one person is necessarily committing an act of perjury.

Yet, the "truth" that emerged during Clinton's testimony seemed to contradict the "truth" he propagated for months prior to this moment. The argument can certainly be made that Clinton's statements to his friends, family and staff in which he denied a sexual relationship with Lewinsky were not necessarily lies -- indeed, if we adhere to the definition that Clinton feels most Americans would intend by that phrase, then he did not lie when he said there was no sexual intercourse with Lewinsky. Yet, he was not entirely truthful either. For his denial of a sexual relationship denies the non-intercourse aspects of his "inappropriate relationship" with her. Therefore, what is at stake here is the question of truth and perjury. If Clinton was not completely truthful does that mean he perjured himself? Does not disclosing the "full truth" render one a liar? How can the truth be determined when one is treading the border we think firmly exists to utterly demarcate truth and lies?

Although the answers to these questions are not clearly evident, they demonstrate the problematic inherent in the act of testimony and in the practice of taking a witness at his/her word because of the oath sworn which commences the testimony. The performative status of bearing

witness, of swearing to tell the truth, is called into question if we recall that the access to the moment of the event, to the truth that lies beyond the performance constituting the moment of testimony, is impossible. Of course, the question of a totalizing truth arises as well.

The truth unveiled during Clinton's four hours of testimony contradicted, as mentioned earlier, the "truth" Clinton presented to those nearest to him for the months preceding this event. His family, friends and aides had supported him during this time, accepting him at his word and granting him an almost privileged status of authority due in part to his position as president and as political leader of the United States, a position for which he had taken an oath, according to which he would honor and uphold the laws and duties of that office.

Only when Lewinsky's lawyers had worked out an immunity deal with Starr, did Clinton issue a "truth" different from that of "I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Monica Lewinsky" amounting to an admission of an inappropriate relationship with her.

Another function of witnessing as a technological, mediatized iteration is that it has the potential to be cited and re-cited in such a way that it exceeds its boundaries. In a similar manner to the citationality at work in the Duras and Blanchot texts, the Clinton affair resulted in a plurality of iterations so that much of the

testimony, in fact, re-cited previously cited statements, thereby placing it *en abîme*. The testimony within which the deposition was framed also framed Lewinsky's affidavit as well as pre-deposition conversations, encounters and contact with not only Lewinsky but other friends, staff and aides.

The testimony, as is usual, is a citation, a repetition of witness and event testified to, a double presence of witness during event and subsequent testimony. In the Clinton case this became complicated by the "presence" of Clinton during the alleged events, during deposition and during the testimony, all of which was re-cited further during the testimony.

We have seen in this section how the case of the Clinton's impeachment has played out questions of truth and origin through the multiple testimonies it generated. The mediatization of these acts of witnessing problematized the borders delineating public and private as well as veracity and fiction.

Bearing Witness on Television Talk Shows

In the preceding section on the Clinton-Lewinsky affair, I discussed how the truthfulness of Clinton's testimony was called into question by a multiplicity of highly mediatized re-tellings, or acts of witnessing. In this final example, I have chosen to discuss a purely "mediatic" event that parodies the staging of questions of

truth and testimony: the immensely popular television talk shows. These shows run the gamut from *Oprah Winfrey*, with its recent interest in reawakening the spiritual self in all of its viewers to the notorious *Jerry Springer Show*, with its bellicose guests and bloodthirsty audience incited by topics about secret adulterous affairs where the guilty parties confront each other.

Despite the incredible range of talk show styles and themes, the common thread that stitches them together is that of witnessing. All of these programs entice their spectators with specially selected guests to bear witness to the particular topic for that show. In fact, the proliferation of talk shows has engendered a plethora of guests making appearances to divulge various secrets about their personal lives, which has directly resulted in a renewed interest in the "memoir" or "confessional text." Such a crossing of boundaries, whereby regular Americans relate on national television the deepest and darkest secrets of their private lives pertains directly to the function of citationality which calls into question conventional limits and boundaries that attempt to control the dissemination of information by keeping it in its proper place. Talk shows by their very nature -- on national television where an entire country has access to them -- exceed these limitations.

In what I view, therefore, as a citation of the courtroom, talk shows appear to mimic this structure and the legal proceedings implicated in testimony and bearing witness. First, the guests appear as witnesses to divulge, in a truthful manner, their secrets before a live audience just as the courtroom witness does. Recent topics have involved questions of paternity, out-of-control teens and their mothers, secret affairs and crushes. Guest-witnesses supposedly reveal all, bearing witness from their very unique places, testimony that at times conflicts with that of the potential father in question or the teenage daughter who appears with the initial guest-witness.

Resolution is sometimes sought on these shows between the guests. The *Montel Williams* and *Maury Povich* shows, in particular, appear especially serious about finding an acceptable solution for their guests in conflict and quite often arrange for an "expert witness" to appear. In general, these experts are counselors and psychologists, even nutritionists for shows on obese teens. They first address in general the theme of the show before turning to deal specifically with the guests sharing the stage with them. Interestingly, when the services of the professionals are offered to certain guests, there is a reversion to the private sphere as guests and experts go backstage to discuss in an intimate setting the issues in question.

The guest-witnesses and expert witnesses appearing on stage face the audience and remain separated physically from them just as in a courtroom. The audience in the talk show studio, however, fulfills, in a sense, the role of jury. That the audience members behave similarly to a jury becomes quite clear when we consider that the applause and jeers directed at various guests indicate a sort of verdict the audience has made regarding those guests. Occasionally, shows such as *Ricki Lake* actually allow the audience to hand down a verdict to its guests. The topics of these shows appear to deal with relationship issues, such as "To Dump, Or Not To Dump?" At times, rather than taking a mass vote from the spectators, a panel, or jury, is selected from the studio audience. After hearing the testimonies of the witnesses, they present their verdict to the guests who are presumably supposed to abide by it.

If the audience functions as jury, then, the talk show host, by extension, carries out the role of judge, or even, prosecutor, to keep the audience and guests under control and to direct questions to them. Yet, maintaining a certain decorum is not always of primary concern. Since these programs depend on the nature of their topics and the personality of their guests to captivate audiences, some talk shows have resorted to such levels of outrageousness that violent outbursts amongst the guests occur regularly, with the added incitement of the spectators.

As mentioned earlier, the talk show presents its guests as witnesses who, as such, are granted a special credibility by the spectators. The talk show, after all, creates this air of authenticity by publicizing, periodically, the steps and background checks to which potential guests must submit in order to be considered for an appearance on television. With control measures in place, the show's producers weed through the pool of applicants to select the best ones for the program. The fact that these shows air on national network television with a live studio audience affords an additional legitimacy to the shows and plays off the viewers' willingness to suspend disbelief.

The guests themselves represent a cross-section of ordinary Americans who could easily be our neighbors, or even ourselves. The facility with which viewers are able to identify with the guests for their ordinariness makes it easier to accept the word of the guests as true. After all, what would be served by an average person making an appearance on the *Maury Povich Show* in order to concoct a story that is untruthful? Furthermore, with the pre-show interview and selection process it seems that producers would have eliminated any such "false" guest.

Of course, the allure of talk shows lies exactly in the transformation of the seemingly ordinary into the extraordinary. The appearance of an anonymous, regular

American, who would normally never be on network television, entices and fascinates the viewer. This can be attributed to the simple reason that the guest's testimony is so outrageous or shocking, that the viewer takes pleasure in realizing that s/he would never do any such thing.

With its inherent legitimacy -- live audience, major network airing, expert witnesses, ordinary and authentic guests -- the "realness" of the talk show has been accepted as a given. However, it is this very anonymity of guests taken from Anywhere, U.S.A. that provides for the deception of viewers who are so willing to accept as true the guests and their statements. Allegations have in fact surfaced recently that some of these unscrupulous talk shows have resorted to hiring actors to play the role of guests. The shows' producers provide these actors scripts based on the chosen topic for the show and allot the actors time to rehearse their lines prior to taping. These reports of paid guest-actors and carefully scripted and rehearsed shows surfaced when some of these actors came forward to bear witness to their experiences and to confess to what they had done for these shows. This testimony about the "testimony" they willingly and falsely presented on the talk shows, citations themselves of the courtroom, offers an excellent example of the function of citationality.

As parodies of traditional modes of testimony or legal proceedings, talk shows inhabit the space of the event that carries the potential of iterability with it. Every event, or utterance, from the simplest to the most outrageous, gives rise in its wake to that possibility. Once the space of iterability is opened, citations, parody, mimicry and recontextualizations, all of which are already mediatizations, multiply beyond control. The "out of control" nature of talk shows is structurally the same as Duras' Lol V. Stein cycle and Blanchot's *récits* where hearsay and testimony, as citational modes, function beyond attempts to limit them and allow the citational and dissemination of events and utterances *ad infinitum*.

The phenomenon is set further *en abîme* when the guests appear in order to tout recently published books that stand as their memoirs or life-testimonies. For instance, on a recently aired talk show, a woman promoted her book as a sort of confessional text, or tell-all, that publicly disclosed her incestuous relationship with her father. On *Regis and Cathy Lee*, a veterinary psychologist, who makes periodic appearances on the show in the capacity of an animal care specialist, appeared on this occasion for the sole purpose of promoting his newly published book entitled *Memoirs of a Pet Therapist*.

In a final twist, as the *Jenny Jones Show* tragedy has demonstrated, another "originally real" event occurs,

thereby returning the show to the courtroom on which it was modeled. In fact, the talk show industry is, of course, still reeling from the involvement of this show in a very real tragedy. As pressure mounts to supply the national viewing audience with ever more guests who share tales ever more outrageous, some shows have come under fire with allegations of setting up guests with the "ambush," as it is known in the industry. The *Jenny Jones Show*, in particular, has borne the brunt of such criticism since the taping of an episode in 1995 that resulted in the murder of one guest by another. The topic of that particular program was "Surprise Crushes." The show was set up in such a way that guests, who had a secret crush on someone they knew, were invited to reveal their interest publicly, which would, of course, be certain to provoke intense reactions from the studio audience while bolstering ratings on the network televising the show. This type of program functions by misleading the other guest, on whom the initial guest has the secret crush, into appearing on the show, by convincing him/her of a false and innocuous topic. Duped in such a way, this person is totally unaware of what is going to transpire, which adds to the outrageously scandalous nature of making a private crush public on national television in front of a live audience. To further create a scandal, these ambushes involve at times a homosexual guest, a practice which raises its own questions about the

homophobia some of these shows exploit and which I unfortunately will not be able to address here.

On the now-infamous ambush episode of the *Jenny Jones Show*, Scott Amedure appeared to reveal his crush on his friend Jonathan Schmitz. Apparently, Schmitz had a history of mental illness and the humiliation of being implicated in a gay crush proved too much for him to handle. Three days following the taping of the show, Schmitz murdered Amedure. As a result, Amedure's family sued the show and in May 1999 they were awarded a $25 million settlement by a jury. Although for some it seems unthinkable that a show be held responsible for a criminal act committed by a guest following a show, the Amedure family lawyers successfully showed that the producers did not sufficiently check Schmitz's history to determine if he would be emotionally fit to withstand such a public disclosure of a crush, particularly a gay one.

While we can directly attribute these developments of paid actors and off-the-air tragedies to the increased competition these shows face, which forces them to have wilder and wilder topics and guests, it calls into question the authenticity to which these shows lay claim as models of the courtroom and testimony. Unfortunately, in the case of *Jenny Jones*, the secret crush ambush on national television has led the show's producers and host straight

into the very real courtroom in Michigan where the jury decided the show was liable.

Conclusion

The preceding sections of this chapter have revealed the significant effects of bearing witness and testimony as a mode of citationality in various cultural contexts. What is at stake in all of these instances are questions of borders, origins and property. In terms of citationality, the movement from the private to the public and from the voiceless to the voiced is necessary in order to achieve the act of witnessing and therefore demonstrates the impossibility of maintaining the boundaries that presumably limit and control the dissemination of information. Additionally, bearing witness problematizes the conceptualization of presence through its doubling of the presence of witness during the event and during the testimony.

To conclude, these instances of bearing witness demonstrate what was previously seen in the Blanchot and Duras chapters where reality and its mediation as testimony are placed in *abîme*. The logic of iterability reveals a complicity between truth and fiction, between reality and media. The crisis of citationality seen in the public and "mediatic" domain underscores the problematic of the questions that citationality raises. In my study I have addressed these questions first in the fictional texts of

Duras and Blanchot and subsequently in several philosophical polylogues by Jacques Derrida. In this chapter, I address these questions as a problematic of this turn of the twentieth century, as the culture is undergoing a technological and media revolution.

Notes

1. David Wills, "Lemming," in *The Cambridge Companion to Derrida* (New York: CUP, forthcoming).

2. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

3. John Beverley, *Against Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 27.

4. Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, intro. and ed. *I, Rigoberta Menchu* (London and New York: Versol, 1984), p. xvi.

5. Linda Craft, *Novels of Testimony and Resistance from Central America* (Gainsville: University Press of Florida, 1997), p. 44.

6. Elizbieta Skldowska, *Hispanic American Testimony: History, Theory, Poetics* (Gainsville: University Press of Florida, 1993), p. 22.

7. Doris Sommer, "Not Just a Personal Story. Women's *Testimonios* and the Plural Self," in *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 116.

8. Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

9. David Stoll, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 15 January 1999, p. A15.

10. Dori Laub, "Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 61-75.

11. Primo Levi, *Survival at Auschwitz* (New York: Summit Books, 1986).

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have discussed the implications of various modes of citationality. I began this discussion by tracing the relevant theoretical approaches indispensable to the development of my analysis of the practice of citationality. I established the theoretical framework for this project, therefore, through my reading of Jacques Derrida's work on the concepts of iterability and citationality. It is from this perspective that I examined what I consider to be the citational modes of hearsay, testimony and conference. The juridical connotations of these terms raise pertinent questions relating to the status of the performative utterance especially in terms of presence, origin and property.

In the Duras chapter, I analyzed the Lol V. Stein cycle of texts which I found to function through a reliance on hearsay which emerges in the seminal text of the cycle, *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*. From this narrative and its insistence on hearsay, the generation of other texts commences. Each of these texts persists, in its turn, in the propagation of hearsay not only as a means of attempting to recover the originary, "true" event, but also as a response to the impossibility of obtaining access to it. What I contend is that the cycle is marked by the progressive radicalization of hearsay. While much of what constitutes the hearsay in the early texts of the cycle is

eventually filtered out of circulation, the scream or cry remains in a state of dissemination. In my opinion, the scream in the cycle functions as the (in)articulation of the "mot-trou," an impossible word which, if it existed, would be able to name the unnameable that lies at the origin. Since this word remains an impossible possibility, the scream comes to reverberate as its trace. With the last text of the cycle, *Son Nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert*, the scream is all that is still heard where nothing is said anymore.

Chapter three focused on the use and function of testimony in three *récits* by Maurice Blanchot. In a similar manner to the radicalization of hearsay in the Duras texts, the Blanchot narratives problematize testimony as a performance purporting to gain access to the truth, to the moment of the event. Since testimony requires the impossible re-presentation of this event, I show the impact of these attempts to testify on fiction.

The polylogues of Jacques Derrida function slightly differently than the narratives of Duras and Blanchot. Derrida's reliance on what I view as conference enables the deconstruction of the logic of restitution, of origin and presence and of genre. The conferences that constitute these polylogues operate in such a way as to play with the limits of genre imposed on texts.

Since the citational modes operating in the chapters on Duras, Blanchot and Derrida raise questions contemporarily relevant to other textual forms, I expanded my topic. The decision to address the political and sociological implications of these questions stemming from the attempt to achieve access to a truth, or originary event allows me to situate acts of bearing witness in other pertinent contexts and thereby leaves my analysis of a practice of citationality open for further discussion.

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VITA

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DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: Mary Carla Criner

Major Field: French

Title of Dissertation: Hearsay, Testimony and Conference: Citationality in the Works of Marguerite Duras, Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida

Approved:

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Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

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Date of Examination:

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