

**Resistant Spaces in Kristeva and Foucault,
and their Literary Formation in Barnes and Lorde**

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by

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Abstract

This thesis examines, in the light of Julia Kristeva's and Michel Foucault's recent theorisations of the productions of meaning, the work of two authors, Djuna Barnes and Audre Lorde, whose writing, it argues, sets up virtual spaces which can become places of resistance to the normative functioning of a given culture.

Having sketched a philosophical background to notions of extra-linguistic space through reference to Plato, Kant, Hegel and Lacan, the first chapter considers what is distinctive in the theories of space provided by Kristeva, who (in *Revolution in Poetic Language*) develops Plato's notion of the *chora* functioning at times as a synonym for "semiotic articulation". The semiotic (*le sémiotique*) is employed by Kristeva in a very precise way. It represents a convolution of expressions: operating as a drive system within the body that affects the structure of language (understood by her as the symbolic), as a "network of marks" that breaches the established sign systems, and as a revolutionary process that is responsible for the transgression and articulation of new meanings. Because both the semiotic and the symbolic are an inseparable part of the signifying processes of language, they together act as pathways of production. Of all these various processes and relations, the most remarkable one is that these two modalities are genderised: the semiotic *chora* is "enigmatic and feminine, th[e] space underlying the written"; while the symbolic is a "phallic function". That being so, one of the main features of this thesis is to articulate a feminist argument in relation to Kristeva, expounding on the notion of the spatial concept of the semiotic *chora* as a "resistance" to phallogentrism.

The second chapter sets out to explore Foucault's spatial reasoning. My argument is that space is central to Foucault's concerns. This is demonstrated in several ways. First I suggest that Foucault's interpretation of a social construction of space is such that the subject is connected to its own fashioning processes. Second, by introducing space into his documentation of history, Foucault sets in motion a dispersion of society's master narratives. In respect of this, I argue that a methodology can be formed from Foucault's spatial term "heterotopia", where contingent sites, rather than causes, shape new discourses and open up possibilities of resistance against the techniques and tactics of domination. Because (as Foucault writes in *The Order of Things*) the heterotopia serves to "desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source", it not only produces discourse, it challenges all boundaries and remains essentially fluid, escaping the matrix of historical category.

The next three chapters consider the implications of Kristeva's definition of the semiotic *chora* which, as briefly mentioned above, is constituted by psychosomatic drives. Hence, mood plays a central role in the semiotic *chora*. I construct a reading of *Nightwood* the main tenet of which is to examine the textual variations of Kristeva's resistant and abject 'language'. Located in melancholy, incest, and discontentedness each trope forms individual chapters exploring ways in which the limits of language are transgressed. Taken as a whole, the theme running through the three chapters on *Nightwood* is that new literary formations arise when the abject as mood becomes structured and made meaningful by the symbolic.

The last two chapters examine Foucault's position in relation to Kristeva's, and argue that Kristeva's and Foucault's spatial thinking questions the appearance of finality and completeness in language. These chapters also provide a practical application of Foucault's heterotopia, in which spaces between contingent sites are shaped by Lorde. It is argued that opportunities of resistance are provided by Lorde who, naming her disparate position against the master narratives that fail to recognise her, locates her difference from them.

In conclusion, a feminist reading of Kristeva's *chora* and Foucault's heterotopia reveals an opening to resistant spaces and new paths of production of meaning. *Chora* and heterotopia, then, are not merely abstract philosophical concepts, but powerful tools of reading, as is shown by their application in the interpretation of the works of Barnes and Lorde.

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Introduction

The Literary Formation of Resistant Spaces in Barnes and Lorde

1. Transgressing the boundaries of language

The concept of language has undergone many significant changes since the nineteenth century.¹ How we view language now depends upon the position we occupy, but the deeper significance of these changes is that numerous approaches can now be taken as the formations of analyses grow. Language itself is a structure that has manifold theories attached to it. One of the most protracted and sustained characteristics of this multiple and profound structure (if indeed it can be so called) lies in its process of renewal and change. Overall, then, a significant feature of this thesis is to explore a theme of embodiment and invention in the advent of writing.

My inquiry, in part, is to examine theoretically how and why certain discourses come into being and the structure of their resistance in response to the dominant narratives in operation. More specifically, I wish to explore the way discourse is manoeuvred in such a way that it transgresses the boundaries of language as a complete system of form. This I would call “resistance to the fixity of language”. Cast in this way, the phrase requests that we view language as a two-pronged supposition wherein a stable and coherent form is one part of a destabilising other.

From a theoretical perspective, if we consider the history of changing language and communication, linguistic convention offers a comprehensive account of the distinctive logical or

¹ The new rigour and scientific endeavour with which language became studied after the eighteenth century is noted by Foucault: “From the nineteenth century language began to fold in upon itself, to acquire its own particular density, to deploy a history, an objectivity, and laws of its own. It becomes one object of study among others.” *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, ed. D. F. Bouchard, trans. A. Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1970) 296. See also *The Social Change of Language*, eds. P. Burke and R. Porter (Cambridge: CUP, 1987).

formal structures of the laws of language contrasted with a language viewed as the act of speaking.² I want to focus on the work of Julia Kristeva and Michel Foucault, who do not so much explore the ‘act of speaking’ as much as ‘the act of resistance’ – the converse side of language as a system of order and laws. There are salient reasons why I utilise a Kristevan and Foucauldian approach: both theorists rigorously delimit the directions in research offset by earlier theorists who form a division between what is seen as systematic language (the formal relations between units in a system) and its relationship to culture, ethnography, institutions and subjectivity. It is true that the sort of questions I explore have been largely covered through the huge impact Saussure has had upon the evaluation of language. However, what has chiefly been ignored is the moment where language breaks up into a spatial dispersion, and consequently the possibility of analysing the spaces underlying the written. Kristeva and Foucault stand out against the prevailing trend of creating strict boundaries between the metaphysical and the material. Instead, they attempt to formulate distinctive theories of language (Foucault replaces ‘language’ with ‘discourse’) which break down the distinguishing suppositional boundaries that earlier linguistic theories had constructed. By bringing together the formal rules of discursive formation with what lies beyond discourse, Kristeva and Foucault disorganise its boundaries and introduce a spatial hypothesis into their theories: Kristeva “points towards space [and] the preconditions of symbolicity”;³ while Foucault indicates “configurations within the *space* of knowledge which have given rise to the diverse forms of empirical science”.⁴

Essentially, both thinkers compose an argument whereby the boundaries of language are transgressed, formulating the supposition that what exists outside the text is the space beyond. Of course the spatially determined concept of beyond language has to be complemented with theory; as such Kristeva and Foucault co-ordinate inquiries whereby a spatial hypothesis can be formulated: in

² Such as, for example, Saussure’s distinction between *langue* and *parole*, or Chomsky’s between *competence* and *performance*.

³ J. Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. L. S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1984) 117.

⁴ M. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, trans. A. Sheridan, ed. R. D. Laing (London: Tavistock, 1970) xxii.

her account of language, Kristeva develops a stable and yet abstract entanglement where two separate strands termed the “symbolic” and the “semiotic”⁵ interweave. A divisional language is preserved, but not without effecting a whole new theoretical perspective projecting beyond the interface of an implicit polaric and self-contained structure. Instead, Kristeva constructs a locus for potentiality and formation where the resistant aspect of discourse emerges apart from the formal limits of grammar.

Foucault’s force is not unlike Kristeva’s. He explores the conditions for the possibility of new formations developing within discourse by way of examining institutional spaces. Foucault focuses on the composite sites that hold together or destroy systems of thought and argues that within the connective boundaries of history there are contingent spaces he calls “heterotopias”.⁶ Heterotopic space has a complex and somewhat contradictory design inasmuch as it connotes historical and palpable space along with being an imaginary space challenging and compensating for an unsatisfactory reality.

2. Literature and spatial reasoning

Kristeva’s and Foucault’s spatial reasoning offer significant means towards examining resistant spaces in language. I say this because each formulates an argument which aims to transgress and disrupt prevailing systematic and dominant discourses that profile and define, amongst other things, ideas and subjectivity. Their views, accordingly, lend themselves to a methodology of reading which encounters the literary formation of resistant spaces in literature. It is necessary, therefore, to effect a reading practice that includes the essential arguments of both Kristeva and Foucault while also demonstrating a new way of interpreting the text. Hence, a spatial hypothesis is a way of attempting to point to the representation of the space beyond (Kristeva) and between (Foucault) discourse. It is

⁵ For a fuller account of Kristeva’s terms see the chapter “The Semiotic and the Symbolic”, in *Revolution in Poetic Language* 19-106.

⁶ M. Foucault, “Of Other Spaces”, *Diacritics* 16 (1996), trans. J. Miscowiec: 22-27. “Of Other Spaces” is the basis of a lecture given by Foucault in 1967. The manuscript was published shortly before his death in 1984, and stands as the bedrock for a systematic definition of space.

my primary aim, then, to convert Kristeva and Foucault's spatial reasoning into a methodology for reading Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*, and Audre Lorde's essays and poems.

Engineering a reading methodology defined and modified by a spatial hypothesis will hopefully provide new terms of expression and understanding. Perhaps some of the incentive for thinking with space is that it enables one to work outside received and inherited practices. Thus, as Foucault remarks, any heterotopic infringement loosens the connections that hold ideas in place, hence enabling "the emergence of different interpretations."⁷ Resistance is thus based upon the interpretative tactics of displacement in literature. What this suggests is that interpretation is central to the notion of displacement; that being so, I will apply two interpretative reading strategies from a Kristevan and Foucauldian perspective. Although the two theoretical approaches will be seen to vary considerably, both Kristeva and Foucault, as has only so far been briefly described, make marked attempts to form conjectures on that which is supposed anterior to the limits of language. Inevitably, both provide highly charged conceptual analyses, particularly Kristeva, and therefore approaching resistant space from a *Sèmèotikè*⁸ and a cultural historical perspective will, I hope, offer the means in which to understand a hypothesis that does not have an already given (beyond the fact perhaps that space is invisible). Moreover, as interpretation is itself involved in the construction of resistance, I feel that more than one theoretical view is fundamental to the construction and radicalisation of resistant spaces. Therefore, I will apply a Kristevan reading to Barnes' novel *Nightwood* and will read Lorde's texts using a Foucauldian approach. Barnes as an experimental and interiorising writer is more commensurate with Kristeva's semiotic appeal, while Lorde, as a contemporary and political figure is more culturally rooted, thus correspondent to Foucault's immutable joinings of subjectivity and power.

⁷ M. Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. P. Rabinow (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987) 76-100.

⁸ Kristeva assumes her marginal position through the semiotic which she describes as "To work on language, to labour in the *materiality* of that which society regards as a means of contact and understanding, isn't that at one stroke to declare oneself a stranger (*étranger*) to language?". Cited in Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (London: Routledge, 1985) 151.

3. An outline of the thesis

The first Chapter is concerned with Kristeva's description of the semiotic and symbolic motilities in language, which "designate two modalities [but] are part of the same signifying process" (*Revolution* 23-24). I read *Revolution in Poetic Language* as Kristeva's attempt to describe the processes in language that transgress the limits of fixity. She describes the activity as a revolutionary practice that distorts the signifying chain and the structure of signification. The first Chapter can also be read as a summation of the semiotic *chora*, which Kristeva formulates from Plato's *chora* in the *Timaeus*. Against this complex background, I will examine the other influences that operate in Kristeva's work. The most important feature of this Chapter, however, will be to argue that Kristeva provides the means by which to formulate a feminist perspective. I will argue that there is such a thing as a feminine space, which we encounter as a resistant force against patriarchy. Although this is somewhat reading Kristeva against herself (she never defines herself theoretically as a feminist), I hope to validate my position by interpreting Kristeva's real contribution to feminism and showing that her "challenge to the closure of meaning"⁹ can be read as a resistance to the master discourses held in place by an established language structure.

The second Chapter adds a further dimension to the exploration of the rules of discursive formation. In the context of how things come to be, I hope to illustrate through the work of Lorde examples of ways in which Foucault envisages the "conditions of possibility" (*Order* xxii) via the speculative dimensions of heterotopic space. Foucault is concerned with networks of systems combining and splitting to position new verbal structures – although he always maintains a view that discourses, whatever their status, inform and evaluate – and he argues that literature provides the basis for resistance in a way that other discourses do not.¹⁰ This is because literature is the most intransitive and radical form in the processes of change and 'becoming'. I will make a case for this

⁹ J. Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. L. S. Roudiez, trans. T. Gora, A. Jardine and L. S. Roudiez (London: Blackwell, 1980) 281.

¹⁰ See Foucault's "What Is an Author", in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. P. Rabinow (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987) 101–121. Literature is central to Foucault's reasoning, as it is the author who is inserted into an already formulated and established system of discourse whose aim is either one of transgression or corroboration.

and argue that literature forms part of the relational and contingent strands in any heterotopic change. Moreover, because heterotopias are a combination of real and utopian space, one of the main features of my discussion will be to illustrate the close relation between the social and the textual. Again, I will continue the exploration of feminism and will consider how heterotopic space can be used as an effective tool for reading the feminist works of Lorde and for recognising transgressive relations among sites.

The next three Chapters look at further aspects of the rhetoric of verbal construction and sustained resistance to the closure of meaning. A Chapter on melancholy and Kristeva's understanding of it examines the *appearance* of melancholia as a specific example of the enunciative processes of that which forms the "pre-sign"¹¹. As a psychoanalyst, understanding the melancholic mood is an important aspect of Kristeva's work, and she also makes a case for it in relation to language, claiming that the melancholic's utterance (as inflection, longing, and loss) is beyond the constraints of a master narrative. It is with this idea in mind that I read *Nightwood*. The quality of the novel is such that it reaches immense melancholic proportions, with as many obstacles to interpreting it, and thus displays the preconditions of symbolicity. However, what I hope will emerge is a reading of a semiotic text and its construction.

The following Chapter develops the Kristevan feminist debate. It is outlined briefly above that Kristeva's divisional language model blurs its own structural boundaries; however, it also means that Kristeva subsequently obscures a solid feminist definition as she, broadly speaking, forges a close alliance between the symbolic and the father, and the semiotic and the mother. In defence of Kristeva, I argue that a dialogue can be set up between the semiotic/symbolic motilities which does not conceal a female presence behind a master discourse, but names the semiotic as the determinate in resistant narrative formation. This idea is addressed in *Nightwood* through the textual analysis of incest as a trope, where the boundaries of identity, position, and desire are employed as figurative contrivances against the law of the father (language).

¹¹ J. Kristeva, "On the melancholic imaginary," *Discourse in Psychoanalysis and Literature*, trans. L. Burchill (London: Methuen, 1987) 107.

Many features, it would seem, that are characteristic of the composite category of resistant spaces which emerge in this thesis are a development of the displacement and transgression of language. Chapter Five, then, discusses at some length the possibility of disrupting the law of the father and, indeed, the consequences that follow. The Chapter can also be seen as a summary of the preceding three Kristevan Chapters where it is argued that melancholia and incest are figurative tropes which substantially reinvent novelistic practice. Of course, this means thinking more flexibly with language; hence, the aim of the Chapter is to explore the content of the novel's disruptive processes in order successfully to trace the literary formation of resistant spaces. It is here that I interpret *Nightwood* as a novel of discontent. The integration of mood (as crisis and abjection) with the novel's form can be seen to be a semiotic/symbolic practice in which the former's activity plays with and against the chain of signification. As a summing-up Chapter, its additional task is to question the validity and the practicality of the semiotic *chora* as a methodology of reading.

It is with this in mind that I employ a Foucauldian reading in the final two Chapters. Here I move on, or back, to the connection Barnes has with Lorde and their function as feminist authors. These Chapters will continue debates on estrangement, position, and desire and will claim that the contingent boundaries linking the two authors are not as equivocal as they may first appear: both Barnes and Lorde critique through their work the literary tradition and their connection to it; both writers resist any neat categorisation; they both write in response to the spaces they confine; and, importantly, each in their own way installs theories of the construction of identity. So it is with these and other issues in mind that I analyse how the formation of resistant literature comes about.

In terms of approaching a spatial hypothesis, the two Foucauldian Chapters exploring the work of Lorde serve to demonstrate the considerable variation in the construction of a space anterior to language. The last two Chapters follow on from the second Chapter in which I outline Foucault's theoretical position as a spatial thinker. It is hoped that the broad development of a spatial resistance and the forms that outline each Chapter will be more acutely obvious in terms of limitation and possibility as the Kristevan and Foucauldian theoretical perspectives enter upon promoting comment

and exposition of each other. Nevertheless, whatever spatial gap exists between Kristeva and Foucault, it will never be a neutral one, for it is here where resistance to divisional boundaries begins. With issues such as these in mind, the sixth Chapter also examines Lorde's function as an author across the disparate boundaries of Africa and America and the "transdiscursivity"¹² she forges between real and utopian space.

The final Chapter continues to examine such issues. More specifically, it argues that both Barnes and Lorde successfully challenge extrigent sources and write beyond the categories of their experiential and discursive boundaries, enabling new literary formations to take shape. I will demonstrate this by implementing a Foucauldian methodology in which the "form of relations among sites" ("Spaces" 23) will allow me to locate the relational strategies of heterotopic space in their texts. The Chapter is mainly concerned with the way in which Lorde utilises her own body as a personal and political response to ways in which master narratives, including that of the medical profession, position and construct an identity for her that she courageously sought to reject. Given the connection between subjectivity and language, the Chapter also aims to show how Lorde's theorisation of a constructed identity generates a political response to narratives of closure.

So, then, the works of Djuna Barnes and Audre Lorde reveal themselves to be constructed through the production of resistant spaces: Kristeva's *chora* and Foucault's heterotopia are the means by which these spaces can be understood as constituting a revolutionary kind of feminist writing, but

¹² Foucault offers an interpretation of "transdiscursiveness" and the need for such a term:

I have discussed the author only in the limited sense of a person to whom the production of a text, a book, or a work can be legitimately attributed. It is easy to see that in the sphere of discourse one can be the author of much more than a book – one can be the author of a theory, tradition, or discipline in which other books and authors will in their turn find a place. These authors are in a position which we shall call 'transdiscursive' ("What Is an Author" 113).

conversely such an understanding is only possible through the recognition of the inherent worth of Kristeva's and Foucault's concepts to feminist literary theory.

Chapter One

Beyond the Limits of Language

1. Introduction

“I wanted to examine,” said Kristeva in an interview, “the states at the limits of language; the moments where language breaks up in psychosis”.¹ Kristeva as a psychoanalyst takes the analysand as her focus of attention and examines his or her verbal communication as a way of positioning the point at which speech becomes a struggle. It is here, she argues, ~~that~~ subjects will disclose instability and where “the pre-linguistic states of language” (“A Question of Subjectivity” 128) become manifest. This is what Kristeva terms the *semiotic*, and she employs it to build her central argument based on the premise that what lies beyond the structure, grammar and stability of common everyday language use is “the possibility of creation” (131).² Kristeva raises many difficult problems here; of source and genealogy, of identity and psychoanalytic positioning, of what lies beyond the text, and so of interpretative dimensions and the borders of language. Kristeva maintains, however, that she is not referring to primacy, but to the “*advent of language*” (*Powers of Horror* 61).³

¹ J. Kristeva, “A Question of Subjectivity – an Interview,” in *Modern Critical Theory: A Reader*, ed. P. Rice and P. Waugh (Arnold: 1992) 128.

² In the interview given to Susan Sellers, in response to this assertion, she asks: “What are the implications of this for literary creation?” Kristeva answers: “What is obvious is that this experience of the semiotic *chora* in language produces poetry. It can be considered as the source of all stylistic effort, the modifying of banal, logical order by linguistic distortions such as metaphor, metonymy, musicality” (131).

³ In her description of the *chora* and the advent of language, Kristeva contends:

Let us therefore not speak of primacy but of the instability of the symbolic function in its most significant aspect – the prohibition placed on the maternal body (as a defence against autoeroticism and incest taboo). Here, drives hold sway and constitute a strange space that I shall name, after Plato (*Timaeus*, 48-53), a *chora*, a receptacle. (In J. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, trans. L. Roudiez (New York: Columbia, 1982) 14).

This chapter will go some way in trying to tie up some of those issues relating to literary creation and the propositional ground from where we speak. It will focus primarily on the semiotic and its relationship to the *chora*. I will also examine Kristeva's most misunderstood suggestion and that is the feminine allusion to the *chora* and the potential connection that women have with the semiotic. I set out to argue that by finding a way to express what lies beyond the limits of language, Kristeva provides a way for us to view the literary formation of resistant narratives.

1.2 Kristevan space

Kristeva's seminal work *Revolution in Poetic Language* is the benchmark for the analysis of the semiotic and its relation to the *chora*. She employs Plato's *chora*, necessarily, to destabilise the limits of the semiotic as it is understood in linguistics as the science of signs. Her added definition and use of the term further serves to destabilise any signifying position generally by claiming that trajectories of the *chora* underlie figuration, yet because it is a positionless rhythm it cannot be represented. In this way, Kristeva cleverly gains access to space (and further disengages with the semiotic as we formally know it) by developing from Plato the "semiotic *chora*" as a "rhythmic space" (*Revolution* 26) while using it to 'articulate' the "*distinctiveness*" (24) of a "space underlying the written" (29). She goes further and forges her own linguistic meaning of the semiotic by claiming that the semiotic *chora* prevents the foreclosure of language, and in this sense, reveals "that a *semiotic network* – the *chora* – has been established" (152).⁴ Its configuration, however, remains extraordinarily vague:

The *chora* is not yet a position that represents something for someone (i.e. it is not a sign); nor is it a *position* that represents someone for another position (i.e. it is not yet a signifier either); it is, however, generated in order to attain this signifying position. Neither model nor copy, the *chora* precedes and underlies figuration and thus specularisation, and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm (26).

⁴ According to Sean Burke, "semiotic language ... arises from a maelstrom of irrational signification to which Kristeva gives the Greek term *chora*." In *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*, 2nd. Ed (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1998) 49.

The *chora* is highly conceptual – it is not positioned or represented; nevertheless, Kristeva speaks eloquently on its part and aims to remove the “mystery” and “incomprehension” that Plato saw as part of its composition.⁵ While the *chora* is indeterminate and rhythmic, Kristeva’s aim “is to restore this motility’s gestural and vocal play (to mention only the aspect relevant to language) on the level of the socialised body in order to remove motility from ontology and amorphousness where Plato confined it in an apparent attempt to conceal it from Democritean rhythm” (*Revolution* 26). To express it differently, the *chora*’s mystery is lessened when gesture and vocal play are “restored” to its arrangement. The “semiotic” is the term used to describe gestural and vocal play at the level of poetic language and Kristeva uses it as a way of describing the *chora*. The semiotic and the *chora* coalesce when the latter goes through a form of organisation in which the positionless *chora* is constituted as signifiante and is “subject to a regulating process” (26) – by and large, through the symbolic. The term ‘semiotic’, however, traditionally used to denote the science of signs, has at its disposal two interchangeable suffixes, and it might be argued that Kristeva exchanges semiotic *chora* with semiotic space⁶ as a way of generating an “ordering” with no thesis or determined fixture:

We emphasise the regulated aspect of the *chora*: its vocal and gestural organisation is subject to what we shall call an objective *ordering* [*ordonnement*], which is dictated by natural or socio-historical constraints such as the biological difference between the sexes or family structure. We may therefore posit that social organisation, always already symbolic, imprints its constraint in a mediated form which organises the *chora* not according to a *law* (a term we reserve for the symbolic) but through an *ordering* (*Revolution* 27).

⁵ Plato describes the *chora* as “an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible” *Timaeus*, 51, trans. and ed. R. D. Archer-Hind (Cambridge: CUP) 171.

⁶ For example, Kristeva argues that drives “precede the acquisition of language, and organise preverbal semiotic space according to logical categories, which are thereby shown to precede or transcend language.” Continuing down the page, she adds: “The mother’s body is therefore what mediates the symbolic law organising social relations and becomes the ordering principle of the semiotic *chora* (*Revolution* 27). Semiotic space and semiotic *chora* are contiguous, then, in that they are generative terms connoting a type of pre-symbolic ‘place’ that is archaic and pre-verbal, and not static. The interchangeable use of the terms avoids setting up a reverse logic to the symbolic and allows the rhythmic motility to consist of potentially unmediated matter while defining its terms.

This needs some unpacking, because Kristeva is now curiously adding organisatory 'traits' to the *chora*; not only does it contain the trace of the semiotic, but the *chora* is ordered by natural constraints such as biological difference, and social constraints, like those of the family. A central feature of the *chora* can be located here as the subtle notion of difference between "ordering" and "law" is outlined: the symbolic represents the law, such as social ruling, grammatical organisation, and patriarchal governance. The semiotic, as vocal and gestural rhythm is independent of the symbolic, but it is organised when the "imprints" of the latter are mediated through it. Therefore the symbolic is superimposed upon the semiotic to order and 'name' it. Nevertheless, the semiotic *chora* remains different from the symbolic.

The *chora* is described as "matrix space, nourishing, unnameable, anterior to the One, to God and, consequently, defying metaphysics."⁷ The dynamic formations which seem to summarise the negative space of the *chora* are based on a dialectical⁸ interplay with metaphysics in the recapitulation of the antithetical other, and although "unnameable," the semiotic *chora* can only be 'described' in language. In particular, the unusual way in which the semiotic signifies (through a functional, but not a representational, relation to objects), can only be taken into account when it is represented through rule-governed signs. In that sense, the semiotic can only signify once it has been ordered by the symbolic. This is why Kristeva writes: "Once the break instituting the symbolic has been established, what we have called the semiotic *chora* acquires a more precise status. Although

⁷ J. Kristeva, "Women's Time," trans. A. Jardine and H. Blake, in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. T. Moi (London: Blackwell, 1990) 191.

⁸ There is an essential dialectical process in Kristeva's work "that has its source in infancy, and is implicated in sexual differentiation. Such a dialectic comprises drives and impulses on the one hand, the family and society structures on the other" ("Introduction," L. S. Roudiez, *Revolution*, 4). Kristeva is concerned with the dialectics that run between different modes of articulation. It is this potential mediation which introduces new works and new dialectics. As Kristeva writes:

Although semiotic functioning can be defined as the articulation of facilitations and stases that mean nothing, this mechanism must immediately be considered within the signifying chain instituted by the thetic. Without this new *dialectic*, a description of this functioning might eventually be related to the semiotic *chora* preceding the mirror stage and the Oedipal stage, but not to a signifying practice that is anti-Oedipal to the extent that it is anti-thetic, paradoxical (*Revolution* 82).

The semiotic *chora* can only be a signifying anti-thetic and para-doxical practice when there is a dialectical tension between drives and societal laws.

originally a precondition of the symbolic, the semiotic functions within signifying practices as the result of a transgression of the symbolic" (68). The transgression of the symbolic by the semiotic is a crucial point because it is what Kristeva bases the idea of poetic revolution on, moreover, it sets her apart from other theorists.⁹ The transgressive process alters the shape of the symbolic and, as Kristeva maintains, the semiotic is clearly within a double matrix: as a transgressive process it subverts the terms it appropriates, therefore the symbolic as social order, by dint of association, is also critiqued. Although she is not the first to do so, the advantage of this is that Kristeva can scrutinise society through a critique of language.¹⁰

Kristeva distinguishes between the semiotic and the symbolic and allocates the latter the role of 'composer'; thus, as rule-governed social system of communication, the symbolic orders the semiotic. Moreover, the differences between the semiotic and the symbolic seem to correspond to the differences between the pre-linguistic conditions of language, the ordering of drives in relation to objects, and the development of language in which signs refer to objects. Taking up a Freudian position, the pre-Oedipal drives are chaotic and potentially destructive; as Kristeva sees it, the semiotic *chora* is both the place where the subject is constituted and also potentially destroyed. Identity is only fully established, however, with the development of the symbolic modality: voiced,

⁹ What sets Kristeva apart from other thinkers is her position on the poetic in which she establishes *poetic language* as the object of linguistics' attention in its pursuit of truth in language. This does not necessarily mean, as is often said today, that poetic language is subject to *more* constraints than 'ordinary language'. It does mean that we must analyse those elements of the complex operation that I shall call poetic language that are screened out by ordinary language, i.e., *social constraint*.

In *Desire in Language*, trans. T. Gora, A. Jardine and L. S. Roudiez, ed. L. S. Roudiez (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980) 24-25.

¹⁰ A very brief example of Marx's critique of society and the means involved in forging a transgression against bourgeois productive forces is outlined:

Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so can we not judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained rather from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social productive forces and the relations of production.

(In "'The Economics' 1857-1867," *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. D. McLellan (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977) 390). Marx's most distinctive claim is that the character of social production explains society and its shifting changes. Indeed, the dualism of agency and structure is such that Marxist theory is invaluable to any analysis of the historical processes of change. In the same way, language as a social structure enables one to conceptualise social thought through the subversion of the *parole* (actual speech usage) within the structure of the *langue*.

propositional language containing terms such as the first-person pronoun 'I' without the use of which a subject cannot exist. The symbolic modality is imbricated by the semiotic in the process of the pre-Oedipal shift into the governing society. In this sense, the speaking subject is a construct of pre-linguistic motilities and social construction.¹¹

A more tell-tale sign of the semiotic and symbolic relationship to the primal drama of Freud's recasting of the Oedipal myth is located in the terms Kristeva uses: she imitates the language of psychoanalysis to describe "the *break* instituting the symbolic" which, in turn, described the break encountered in the subject's transition from pre- to post-Oedipal development. The transition, however, is more accurately a shifting between both motilities as there is never a 'shedding off' of the semiotic. In classic Freudian and Lacanian terms, the Oedipal complex explains how the subject becomes gendered and how *it* enters language. Once the Oedipal stage is reached, the pre-Oedipal stage is left behind. Kristeva differs from Freud and Lacan in that the pre-Oedipal is a persistent trait that stays with the subject from birth to death.¹² This suggests a 'viable' strand of 'conspicuous enunciation' beyond the ordering-rule of the symbolic so that the subject enunciates from a pre- as well as post-Oedipal position. Hence, Kristeva outlines a two-fold system of language constituted by conscious and unconscious signifying processes,¹³ distinguished by a functioning that depends on a language as a sign system (*la langue*) and a vocalised, gestural rhythm (semiotic):

¹¹ This does not mean Kristeva is making any palpable reference to the notion of determinism. However she cannot objectively avoid such implication when she takes up Freud's position in the way she does.

¹² This point emphasises her main divergence from Lacan who treats the pre-symbolic as a separate entity that is determined by maturation and development. Kristeva's semiotic space is not the deposit of an event in a stage of development but an ongoing process. Furthermore, in contrast to what Lacan posits, the semiotic is a persisting psychological trait within the organisation of language. She forges an even wider distance from Lacan by constructing an argument whereby the subject can potentially signify clear traces of semiosis, fluctuating between semiotic space and symbolic space. Thus, the subject can retreat from the law of language manifesting symptoms of withdrawal, or, in psychoanalytic terms, returning to the mother.

¹³ The main point is that Kristeva argues that others ignored the speaking subject's split between unconscious and conscious motivations, that is between natural and social constraints. Therefore, her analysis is of a speaking split subject. In her essay "The Ethics of Linguistics," she outlines her position:

As soon as linguistics was established as a science (through Saussure) its field of study was thus hemmed in [*suture*]; the problem of *truth* in linguistic discourse became dissociated from any notion of the *speaking subject*. Determining *truth* was reduced to a seeking out of the object-utterance's internal coherence, which was predetermined by the coherence of the particular metalinguistic theory within which the search was conducted. Any attempt at

The kinetic functional stage of the *semiotic* precedes the establishment of the sign; it is not, therefore, cognitive in the sense of being assumed by a knowing, already constituted subject. The genesis of the *functions* organising the semiotic process can be accurately elucidated only within a theory of the subject that does not reduce the subject to one of understanding, but instead opens up within the subject this other scene of pre-symbolic functions. The Kleinian theory expanding upon Freud's positions on the drives will momentarily serve as a guide. Drives involve pre-Oedipal semiotic functions and energy discharges that connect and orient the body to the mother.... The oral and anal drives, both of which are oriented and structured around the mother's body, dominate this sensorimotor organisation. The mother's body is therefore what mediates the symbolic law organising social relations and becomes the ordering principle of the semiotic *chora*, which is on the path of destruction, aggressivity and death (*Revolution* 27-28).

The path of destruction leads to the notion of violence in the "semiotic *chora*." The processes and relations of drive¹⁴ formations are anterior to sign and syntax, and are part and parcel of the

reinserting the 'speaking subject', whether under the guise of a Cartesian subject or any other subject of enunciation more or less akin to the transcendental ego, resolves nothing as long as that subject is not posited as the place, not only of structure and its regulated transformation, but especially, of its loss, its outlay.

It follows that formulating the problem of linguistic ethics means, above all, compelling linguistics to change its object of study, the speech practice that should be its object is one in which signifying structure is defined within boundaries that can be shifted by the absence of a semiotic rhythm that no system of linguistic communication has yet been able to assimilate. It would deflect linguistics towards a consideration of language as articulation of a heterogeneous process, with the speaking subject leaving its imprint on the dialectic between the articulation and its process (in *Desire in Language* 24).

Kristeva develops the above ideas in a later essay on semiotics and uses Barthes as her springboard to include a study of the speaking subject in literature:

'Literary' and generally 'artistic' practice transforms the dependence of the subject on the signifier into a test of its freedom in relation to the signifier and reality. It is a trial where the subject reaches both its limits (the laws of the signifier) and the objective possibilities (linguistic and historic) of their displacement, by including the tensions of the 'ego' within historical contradictions, and by gradually breaking away from these tensions as the subject includes them in such contradictions and reconciles them to their struggles. It is precisely this *inclusion*, an essential specificity of the 'arts', by which an asserted 'ego' becomes outside-of-the-self, objectivised, or better, neither objective nor subjective, but both at the same time, and consequently, their 'other', to which Barthes has given its name: writing ("How Does One Speak to Literature?," in *Desire* 97).

Kristeva goes on to conclude that "in writing, the negative is formulated" (108). It establishes her explication of Hegel's "negative theology" in which she argues that writing inscribes the drives or primary processes of the semiotic. This articulatory function gives the objective possibilities of *la langue* a primitive kind of form. The 'other' in writing is the psychical mark of the semiotic.

¹⁴ As Kelly Oliver points out in her introduction to Kristeva's writings, bodily drives make their way into language through the semiotic element of signification, which does not represent bodily changes but discharges them. K. Oliver, *The Portable Kristeva* (Columbia: Columbia UP, 1997) xvi.

semiotic's eruption into the symbolic.¹⁵ In a dramatic construction of the semiotic *chora's* activity, Kristeva uses the potent language of war¹⁶ to describe the semiotisation of the symbolic and calls it an "infiltration," "cracking the socio-symbolic order, splitting it open, changing vocabulary.... Penetrating the socio-symbolic" (*Revolution* 79, 80). Kristeva claims that she is not advocating pure violence; and, as Reineke observes, it is true to say that Kristeva writes about "the *positing* of violence" on "the boundary of the infinite" (in Crownfield 79). This ensures that boundaries are always pushed further apart and are always disputed.¹⁷ Perhaps because of this Kristeva herself institutes a safe gap between politics and 'art': the two-fold processes of 'language' are analysed in relation to art, subjectivity, and psychoanalysis, and therefore should one accuse her of venerating violence (she calls violence a theology, because it represents the moment of coming into being), her defence would be that her hypothesis on drive formation traces the origins of art and language and not social violence.

Because the main thrust of Kristeva's focus is on the kind of language that is understood as 'poetic', her analysis lends itself critically to the study of literature. In fact, Kristeva calls literature the missing link of the human sciences. She writes: "literary practice remains the missing link in the socio-communicative or subjective-transcendental fabric of the so-called human sciences" because literature "enunciates but does not *name*" (*Desire* 98). While not undermining literature's declarative potential, its fabric is laced with the semiotic imprints of gesture and rhythm, which is why it is

¹⁵ The notion of violence is directly related to the mother. I will look closely at this in Chapter Three on incest.

¹⁶ Martha Reineke extends some of Kristeva's interesting metaphors of the war between the semiotic and the socio-symbolic: "Kristeva would emphasise that violence is writ large in society but it is not born there. Tracing its lineage to the pre-Oedipal drama, Kristeva would invite [us] to ... glimpse the subject at the moment of its bloody birth". Reineke is describing here multiple births: the birth of the semiotic into the symbolic, the birth of the pre-Oedipal child into the symbolic, the birth of continual repression and renewal in the shaping of language. "The Mother in Mimesis: Kristeva and Girard on Violence and the Sacred," in *Body/Text in Julia Kristeva*, ed. D. Crownfield (Albany: State University of New York, 1992) 81. Interestingly, in Plato's section on the *chora*, his spatial metaphors are taken "from 'military occupation' of or withdrawal from a position." A. E. Taylor, *A Commentary on Plato's Timaeus* (Oxford: OUP, 1928) 346.

¹⁷ In all new writing there is a kind of prophesy. The semiotic *chora* works in language to shape the prophetic value in language: that which offers a prediction for renewal. The *chora* is the receptacle which is defined as a flow of kinetic or generative rhythm.

suitable to analysis: literature is the spatial arena where the semiotic erupts into the symbolic to change and disturb “organised social relations.”

To condense the main points so far, Kristeva borrows the term *chora* to describe a provisional articulation constituted by rhythm and rupture and lends it a topology through an ordering. Now Kristeva is aware of the difficulty of “theoretically describing” (26) the *chora* since it is pre-symbolic and anterior to discourse; thus, in a similar way to Plato, she works things out through a “bastard reasoning.”¹⁸ This makes the concept more abstract in the way that such a type of reasoning might suggest: the *chora* is hybrid, not pertaining to a locatable (fatherly) force and certainly not the issue of a known entity. As suggested above, the semiotic and the *chora* elucidate the same processes anterior to the sign. Yet an important criticism is that Kristeva does not state how the semiotic and the *chora* function as the same thing. The words are placed together to introduce the chapter “The Semiotic *Chora*”¹⁹ but it is not shown constructively *how* the process of similarity takes place. All the same, Kristeva’s attempt to link the *chora* with her own concept of the semiotic is not based on whimsy, nor the desire to borrow prestige, but on definite points of likeness between the two. If the words once they are joined signify the same thing, then it should be a tautology, but it is not; rather the two words placed together signify not excess, but privation: the “semiotic *chora*” manifests the struggle one has with naming.²⁰ The semiotic is that which is of a certain quality and the *chora* has

¹⁸ “And the third kind is space everlasting, admitting not destruction, but affording place for all things that come into being, itself apprehensive without sensation by a sort of bastard reasoning” *Timaeus* 52A-52B.

¹⁹ See the sub-chapter “The Semiotic *Chora* Ordering the Drives,” in *Revolution* 25-30.

²⁰ Derrida, in his essay entitled “*Khôra*”, sets about placing a name on things (naming the name), and calls into play the notion of context. At the same time, he attempts to define the *chora*, in his usual aporetic way, as a pre-sign: a maternal and virginal “pre-name”. Nevertheless for Derrida, more than anything else, the *chora* is a sonorous and displacing space that performs in language as dislocation. See *On the Name* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995) 89-127. In contrast to this proposition, and in attempting to understand Kristeva’s delineation of *chora*, Kaja Silverman argues that Kristeva shrinks from naming. In her interpretation of the maternal voice, as allegedly outlined by Kristeva, Silverman suggests: “Kristeva’s *choric* fantasy ... is motivated by the desire to retreat from the superego and the symbolic rather than by the desire to approximate the position of discursive mastery which they represent.... The maternal voice provide[s] the focal point for two such powerful fantasies of retreat from the auditory aura”. What fundamentally distinguishes Derrida’s position from Silverman’s is that for both Derrida and Kristeva alike, the *chora* executes a primary role in the act of resistance against all the categories that govern the production of order as an approach to naming. My position clearly gravitates towards the Derridean position rather than that outlined by Silverman. For Silverman’s discussion see *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1988).

the same sort of quality. We have now to think of qualities which are not also things, but only transient appearances, and there is a poverty in this. These are the notions that Plato also sought to explain in the *Timaeus*.

2. A past spatial hypothesis: Kristeva and Plato

Plato's *Timaeus* dates probably from about 360 BC as a dialogue that offers an explanation of the cosmos. Although before this date it most likely functioned as something else, much of the first part of the *Timaeus* is a summary of the *Republic* in which Plato sets down a theory of Forms and Ideals. The dialogue is a reminder to fellow philosophers and other state officials of what their perceived goals were in relation to the physical world, and their understanding of verisimilitude is central to how they relate to the world. From Section II onwards the dialogue possesses more of a quality of discourse delivered in a long-running sequence in which the dialectic relations of objects are considered in relation to space. Space plays a central part in that it forces thinking and sensing to work in unison (*Tim* 48c-49a). In the main, then, it is space which enables Plato to move forward and outline the broad principles of becoming through a process of transformation, disintegration and reformation. *Timaeus* illustrates that an account of the sensible world cannot be given in terms of less than three factors: 'objects', space-time', and 'events' (51e-52d). The 'space (52a) is one of the three fundamental focuses by which Plato accounts for the physical world. The point of special importance, however, is that space is responsible for 'becoming':

Space ever receives all things into it and has nowhere any form in any wise like to aught of the shapes that enter into it. For it is as the substance wherein all things are naturally moulded, being stirred and informed by the entering shapes; and owing to them it appears different from time to time. But the shapes which pass in and out are likenesses of the eternal existences, being copied from them in a fashion wondrous and hard to declare, ... we must conceive three kinds: first that which comes to be, secondly that wherein it comes to be, third that from which the becoming is copied when it is created, and we may liken the recipient to a mother, the model to a father, and that which is between them to a child; and we must remember that if a moulded copy is to present to view all varieties of form, the matter in which it is moulded

cannot be rightly prepared unless it be entirely bereft of all those forms which it is about to receive from without.²¹

The quality of the *choric* space is analogous to a mother: as a “recipient of creation” it is a receptacle, and the nurse, of all becoming (49A). The discourse is concerned with the question of how something comes to appear in space, and a comparison is made with the physical world in which the father is the intelligible model, “that which comes to be,” the mother is the medium, or receptacle, “the recipient of nature,” while the child is the perceptible formation of images.

How something comes to be for Plato depends upon space as much as it does upon the intelligible model that fashions images in our sphere. “Space... is the unobtrusive containment which makes possible, *that* changing things appear to be something.”²² Space is something out of which multiple, common containment is wrought. Thus, the expression *in which* and *out of which* are the proper prepositional markers of spatiality through the dialogue” (118).

Because space is unobtrusive it changes shape as images encroach upon it: just as the air cannot be coloured when paint is thrown into the atmosphere, so it is with space, the shapes which pass in and out of it do not change its substance. Plato goes on to say:

Therefore the mother and recipient of creation which is visible and by any sense perceptible we must call neither earth nor air nor fire nor water, nor the combinations of these nor the elements of which they are formed: but we shall not err in affirming it to be a viewless nature and formless, all receiving, in some manner most bewildering and hard to comprehend partaking of the intelligible (178).

To take away some of the bewilderment, Plato makes a further analogy in which space is likened to gold in the furnace; it demonstrates that even if gold is moulded into many different shapes, it still remains gold. Space, therefore, is a recipient of impressions (*Timaeus*, 50C2), and a container of the images of intelligible things (50C5). Although space is linked by analogy to ‘actual things’ (if the mother can be called such), Plato does not claim to understand its nature as it exceeds all

²¹ Plato, *Timaeus* 50D, 51B, 171.

²² A. Freire Ashbaugh, *Plato's Theory of Explanation* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988) 118.

configuration; therefore the examples are drawn to outline a process in which one can envisage the formation of images as activities in relation to becoming and change. As an authority on the *Timaeus* observes: “This is its very nature: to be that in which the new is brought forth and the old is abolished, to be the unlimited source of change, and yet to be free from any quality that appears in it (50b).”²³ The overriding point is that “Space... is the unobtrusive containment which makes possible *that* changing things appear to be something” (Ashbough 118). Thus space ‘manifests’ change.

In relation to Kristeva, the space that makes things possible is described by her as the “path of production,” and it is this detail she ponders in the movement from nineteenth-century literature to the change that brought about Modernism. As I see it, the theme underlying Kristeva’s questioning of Modernism is based on a premise similar to the one Plato takes in pondering “wherein [the text] comes to be”:

Such practice has been carried out in texts that have been accepted by our culture since the late nineteenth century. In the case of texts by Lautréamont, Mallarmé, Joyce, and Artaud, *reading* means giving up the lexical, syntactic, and semantic operation of deciphering, and instead retracing the path of their production. How many readers can do this? We read signifiers, weave traces, reproduce narratives, systems, and driftings, but never the dangerous and violent crucible of which these texts are only the evidence (*Revolution* 103-104).

Anticipating an objection to this method of reading, it is true one can argue that Kristeva is concerned with the cultural forces, or the ‘place’ from where modernism is started, and not space; however, the path of semiotic production is central to Kristeva’s “semanalysis”²⁴ of literature. Therefore, it is argued here that Kristeva is concerned more with semiotic space than place.²⁵ As Claghorn so

²³ G. S. Claghorn, *Aristotle’s Criticism of Plato’s Timaeus* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1954) 7.

²⁴ Semiotics carries its own definite meaning, therefore Kristeva is led sometimes to use her own word “semanalysis”: superimposing “semiotic” upon “analysis”, which etymologically derives from *analyein*, to dissolve; dissolving the sign.

²⁵ When discussing the *khora*, Derrida asks “what does ‘receive’ mean”? The “receptacle of all” is the receiver of all things and that means it is assigned a place and an identity. It is assimilated and permeated by culture as an “invested place” rather than an “abstract place.” He writes: “*Khora* ‘means’: place occupied by someone, country, inhabited place, marked place, rank, post, assigned position, territory, or region. And in fact, *khora* will always already be occupied, invested, even as a general place, and even when it is distinguished from everything that takes place in it” (*On the Name* 109). Derrida argues that we understand and name space because we occupy a position in relation to it: from our ‘location’ we inscribe its presence, rather than describing its

succinctly explains, the difference between place and space is that “A place describes an existing thing, but cannot bring it about. A space is more than the thing existing in it at the moment; it has the ability to bring forth a new body where the old ceases to be” (17). The *space that is more than the thing existing at the moment, that has the ability to bring forth newness* is the basis of Kristeva’s method.

Returning to Plato, there is a central paradox in Platonism, which is that while the concept of the transcendent realm is an essential absolute, there are realms or sites which are distinct from the absolute. In addition, Platonism suggests that all truth can be attained through the philosopher. Kant distrusts this notion, and in his own philosophical inquiry proposes that the philosopher has no means of naming the limits of representation. Instead, he focuses on a non-categorisable absence and argues that representation is subsumed by absence.

The following section will consider more fully the notion of space in relation to its historic conjunctions, as the general rule of the semiotic is that it is “interwoven” in existing discourses rather than existing when the old ceases to be.

2.1 Kristeva and Kant

Although the link between Kristeva and Kant is somewhat artificial in its linear coherence, Kant is included in this study to demonstrate how Kristeva’s position is mediated through the historical and geographical conjunctions and contingencies of space and the limits of naming. Including Kant also provides the means to define transcendent space and Kristeva’s often misunderstood relation to it.

presence. This implies some *specific* combination of subjectivity and space. Alice Jardine takes up the play between subjectivity and space, and writes that Derrida’s

dissemination of all concepts leads back, in fact, very quickly to the space where there is no contradiction but only a transposition-of-spaces-in-difference – the unconscious – even while Derrida is already, always, deconstructing by ‘encrypting’ that ‘inner space’ itself. For what Derrida *is* working on has no name or place – at least not yet. Lacan’s real? Not exactly. The trace of *différance* is even more thoroughly unnameable, unrepresentable, than Lacan’s Real: ‘There is no *name* for it at all.’ Neither inner nor outer, it is in-between (*entre*), it enters (*entre*), it inter-venes between all metaphysical oppositions. And ... when the middle of an opposition is not the passageway of a mediation, there is every chance that the opposition is not ‘pertinent’. The consequences are boundless.

(A. Jardine, *Gynesis* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989) 132.) Because the *chora* is a nowhere space, it cannot be conceived of without receiving an identity; therefore, it impels us to occupy and name it as a place.

In the first part of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), “The Transcendental Doctrine of Elements,” Kant formulates a hypothesis devoting itself to the objective and subjective categories of truth. Kant’s aim is outlined in his Preface to the first edition of the *Critique*, in which he writes: “In this enquiry I have made completeness my aim, and I venture to assert that there is not a single metaphysical problem which has not been solved, or for the solution of which the key at least has not been supplied.”²⁶ Assured words that belie, however, the underlying notions of incompleteness and slippage. Thus, before Kant can claim there is nothing of which we can speak that can be convincingly placed outside the power of definition, he needs to explore what he calls the foundation of differentiation. This argument is based on descriptions (therefore language) which are necessary to the articulation of objects in space. However, he adds that space is built upon an abstraction that derives its certainty from maintaining that space is space because it does not offer “a definite significance to the most general laws of motion”.²⁷

From this less certain premise Kant derived his theory of objectivity, which asserts that there is no knowledge that does not bear the mark of both reason and experience: to this universal human characteristic of the application of reason to experience he gave the name “transcendental idealism.” Kant began from a position of *a priori* knowledge. Among true propositions, some are true not only of experience, but intuitively we name such truths *a priori*. Others owe their truth to experience, and might have been false had things been different: these are *a posteriori* truths. To formulate and distinguish these truths, two elements are required: space and time; they are the two sources from which knowledge is drawn, meaning that every sensation bears the imprint of temporal and spatial organisation. But, given Kant’s epistemic constraints, it must be asked what he is referring to in his notion of space. An appropriate way to answer an ontological question about space is to determine the referent of the term. The referent, in turn, is limited because ‘space’ restricts the ability to know. This conundrum is what sets the foundation for Kant’s philosophy: because rationally we are limited

²⁶ I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1927) xiii.

²⁷ I. Kant, “Differentiation of Regions in Space,” *Selected Pre-Critical Writings*, trans. G. B. Kereferd (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1968) 37.

space eludes us, and yet we can define it (it becomes a two-fold phenomenon). Kant writes: "For this reason ... while much can be said *a priori* as regards the form of appearances, nothing whatsoever can be asserted of the thing in itself which may underlie these appearances" (158-160). Therefore, space is 'known' through the medium of the object. The knowledge of space depends on the rational, as the referent of any term is fixed by what is known.

Of course, "knowledge" in Kantian terms has to be distinguished from the more colloquial or familiar use of the word in which it is understood. In the ordinary sense it is based on thought processes, but this is not truly knowledge for Kant, because it involves too many human limitations: rather, in the context of space and time, knowledge is an intuitive understanding which is based upon the existence of an object. Space, then, is intuited not from the observation of objective phenomena, but from an intuition corresponding to the object (91). This suggests that space is logical because it is knowable; however as that knowledge is not derived from thought processes (based on Cartesian principles of thinking and knowing through language), space is also pre-discursive, since our understanding of it is established by a pre-discursive necessity. This introduces the notion of the imagination, for what is essential to the Kantian idea of intuition is sense perception, and not purely empirical data. What this suggests is that an awareness of space is a form of imaginative awareness. Thus, Kant's philosophy implicates a theoretical and transcendent perspective. In order to explain this, I would suggest that rather than confronting space, Kant makes a gesture towards it: although space is dependent on sense perception, there is a point at which it cannot be explained. When Kant reaches this limit he does not create an irresolute theory, but shows that it is impossible to find a general concept of space, and therefore, we should avoid trying to find one.²⁸

²⁸ A similar approach is taken by Kristeva in her study of literature, modernism, and philosophy. In her own way, she is saying something similar to Kant, for she locates the idea of the imagination in the modernist text, and summons a blend of new imaginative discourse which is supported by the symbolic. In her essay, "How Does One Speak to Literature?," she writes:

Discovering a new object through a metalanguage elaborated halfway between chance and necessity seems to be the rule today in all the sciences. These limits, in themselves, appear frequently to be the ideological alibi for a barely modernised Kantianism, whose intrascientific productivity topples, having barely crossed the threshold of the 'exact sciences,' into agnoseological dam holding back the scientific theory of the speaking and knowing *subject* (psychoanalysis) and of *history* (historical materialism) (in *Desire in Language* 99).

Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that Kristeva and Kant localise space and go some way in naming it. In his *Pre-Critical Writings* (1768), Kant writes: “*Space has its own reality independently of the existence of all matter and ... it is itself the ultimate foundation of the possibility of its composition*” (“Differentiation” 37). However, whereas Kant harnesses space by binding it to intuitive knowledge, Kristeva ties it to psychical space, so that psychological drives have their ontological counterpart.

Kristeva’s interpretation of the *chora* is also intimately related to the domain of the imagination. For Kant, the imagination enables the subject to intuit space so that the objective intuition of the knowing being is held as central to deduction or understanding: rational thought deduces abstract space.²⁹ Kristeva describes the same concept employing linguistic terms: space precedes and underlies language as a rhythmic motility raised to the status of signification by the speaking subject. It would seem, then, that the rational practices of the Kantian subject are shifted from their central role by Kristeva where a signifying semiotic space is put in its place. The result is a spatial hypothesis. Such an understanding of space certainly makes the idea of a signifying/knowing subject more anarchic and unstable because semiotic space has its own primal signifying motility that is independent of rational thought, although it is not raised to the status of signification without the symbolic. Yet this does not mean that without the symbolic there is nothing. Instead, it suggests that without its interpretative representations there is only negation. This term is better explained in relation to Hegel, from where Kristeva borrows the term.

2.2 Kristeva and Hegel

In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva explores the way the imagination expresses itself as a force against thethetic. From the outset, the text incorporates the ideas of Hegel as a means of

²⁹ Suzanne Guerlac’s observations are pertinent for the way in which Kant’s ideas are put to use by Kristeva. In her allusion to the Third *Critique*, Guerlac argues, “we recognise something like the violence of purpose associated with the Kantian sublime, itself transgressive of the positions of phenomenality (subject and object) and hence transgressive with respect to the entire field of empirical knowledge.” S. Guerlac, “Transgression in Theory,” in *Ethics, Politics, and Difference in Julia Kristeva’s Writing*, ed. K. Oliver (London: Routledge, 1993) 249.

estranging thought and language. She assimilates his ideas inasmuch as he attempts to forge a space of alterity to grasp at what lies beyond immediate recognition: “In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, negativity is ... closest to what we have called a semiotic *chora*” (*Revolution* 114). For Kristeva, Hegel displaces Kantian understanding “and points towards space” where “the preconditions of symbolicity” (117) reside. “The preconditions of symbolicity,” a term Kristeva takes from Hegel, signify “the inborn bases of the symbolic function” (29).

Kristeva prefaces her introduction and first chapter in *Revolution* with two quotations from Hegel. They serve to frame Kristeva’s ideas and indicate her position; moreover, they become interpolated in her text as they act as a signpost and signifying practice for what she sets out to achieve. The first Hegelian citation is from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: “what, therefore, is important in the *study of science*, is that one should take on oneself the strenuous effort of the Notion.” I would suggest that from the outset Kristeva very cleverly frames her work as a two-fold investigation, which, on the one hand, makes an erudite empirical study, and, on the other hand, considers conceptual imaginative thought. This type of thinking Hegel essentially terms the “notion of a notion” (*Ahnung*). More accurately, if we give it Hegel’s narrow application it implies an attempted movement towards a concept (*Begriff*). In the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel declares that philosophy should be a conceptual endeavour rather than an intuitive or imaginative comprehension: “Philosophising by the light of nature, which thinks itself too good for conceptual thinking, and, because of the want of it, takes itself to have direct intuitive ideas and poetic thoughts – such philosophy trades in arbitrary combinations of an imagination merely disorganised through thinking – fictitious creations that are neither fish nor flesh, neither poetry nor philosophy.”³⁰ Hegel, unlike Kant, argued for the powers of the imagination to ‘supplement’ rational thought. Therefore, Hegel’s Notion is not an empirical conception which is defined by the ‘I’ of understanding, creating a division between what is observed and the observer; rather, the ‘I’ and the Concept are differentiated so that knowing is not seeing, but a wider experience. Knowledge cannot

³⁰ G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. J. B. Baillie (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971) 126.

be grounded on the certainty of the subject observing or intuiting an object in order to define it; knowledge is part of a much larger schema. The question is, however, can a knowledge of self-certainty be expressed? The answer is no – firstly, because the medium employed to express that certainty is language, and it fails to ‘particularise’ any self-certainty, as it is a generative medium.³¹ Secondly, knowledge cannot be defined by the ‘I’ with any certainty, as knowledge depends on something that is larger than the subject in the here and now.

Hegel finds the Kantian idea of not knowing the “thing-in-itself” (*Ding an sich*) problematic; that a thing can exist but be unknowable is absurd to Hegel. Alternatively, he expands the thing-in-itself, so that the division between the one who knows and the thing that is known can be bridged. If we relate this idea to space, it would be a matter of place (the thing that can be known) constituting potential space (absolute knowledge); therefore, rather than acknowledging space by the differentiations of place, Hegel wishes to consider the *idea* of space. This is not to know the thing in reality, but reality itself. If we take this idea further, in relation to true knowledge and Hegel’s scepticism, things in reality cannot be trusted, but reality can be. Space, then, has a similar negative certainty about it.

It must be pointed out that Hegel is not suggesting that one can attain a knowledge of everything or procure an ideal knowledge based on a mystical ideal; instead he is suggesting that knowledge as a process unfolds in history. This means that understanding is based on events in history and a not yet reached idealisation. For Hegel it is a comprehension of the world as something more than empirical certainty. He includes *Geist* (spirit) in his model of comprehension.³²

³¹ Levinas considers this same problem and concludes: “discourse as *logos* is not, on its side, a discourse *on* being, but the very being of beings or, if you like, their being as being.” In “Philosophy and Awakening,” *Who Comes After the Subject?* ed. E. Cadava, P. Conner and J. N. Nancy (London: Routledge, 1991) 206-216.

³² It was stated above that Kristeva cannot help but incorporate an element of the transcendent into her model of space. In fact, I would go as far as stating that any study of space involuntarily alludes to the transcendent only because space is ‘anterior’. Space has a metaphysical and conceptual notion that pre-empts it, and because of this it is defined by tropes similar to those used to describe the transcendent. However, my intention is to use Hegel’s understanding of *Geist*, roughly translatable as ‘mind’ in a transindividual sense.

According to Hegel, mind is not just a self-conscious characteristic, it goes beyond individual physiognomy and describes a universal consciousness, so that individuals are linked to a wider scheme of things. Hegel is shifting the self from its place of all-seeing, masterful 'I' to a murkier, less pre-defined place in which the whole is more than the sum of its conscious parts. Hegel includes space in this whole, and sets the ground for later theorists to "think differently."³³ Mind comes before individualism because it is always there; it surmounts place-in-history and challenges the mark of time and place by staying ahead of a situated knowing.

To take stock and return to an important point, Kristeva employs Hegel's negativity because it sets her ideas in relation to the *chora*, on the understanding that negativity is a trope for that which exceeds language. In this sense it is something like space; both space and the *chora* can be thought of as metaphors for an absence that generates expression through and beyond the symbolic. Hegel writes in the *Philosophy of Nature*, "the past and future of time as *being* in nature, are space, for space is negated time."³⁴ If space is negated time, it is something 'out of time'. This is true for the past and the future because they are outside the present. Therefore, negativity is the link between events, history and subjectivity; it is also the thing that confirms a pre- or post-existent space, event, subjectivity: it is the process underlying all things and it acts as the 'bridge' between the one who knows and the thing that is known. These are the important points in relation to Kristeva, as she employs negativity as the process that underlies change. She interprets drive as the negative charge that enables the child to separate from its mother; and more relevantly, as the manifestation that disrupts the thetic in language to bring about the poetic. Furthermore, Hegel's negativity allows Kristeva to find a way of describing the complex interconnections between the semiotic, which is beyond the thetic, and the symbolic, which is the thetic.

³³ Derrida suggests that an "unsolvable" contradiction requires "thinking differently." J. Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, trans. P. A. Brault and M. D. Naas (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1992).

³⁴ G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970) 37.

Kristeva reaches her own point of authority with the help of Hegel. For her his dialectical argument opens up the structures of language and thought to space as “nothing,” or that which lies beyond time and being to prevent the closure of Being. Kristeva makes the following observation in regard to negativity by arguing in *Revolution* that it “points to an outside that Hegel could only think of as something inherent in belief ... that ... prevents the immobilisation of the thetic, unsettles doxy, and lets in all the semiotic motility that prepares and exceeds it” (113). Kristeva is cleverly making use of anteriority – that which lies outside the thetic – to outline the notion of semiotic. Hegel’s negativity assists an understanding of the non-neutrality of the semiotic as the thing that unsettles doxy to throw the thetic into flux. It is this which influences Kristeva to write: “when the semiotic *chora* disturbs the thetic position by redistributing the signifying order, we note that the denoted object and the syntactic relation are disturbed as well. The denoted object proliferates in a series of connoted³⁵ objects produced by the *transposition* of the semiotic *chora*” (55). It is the notion of connotation that Kristeva develops as semiotic, but it is an appropriation of Barthes’ scheme more than Hegel’s. However, it remains a critique of boundaries, but as Silverman notes connotation on its own “results in the impoverishment of meaning.”³⁶ However, as Kristeva points out, objectivity, or the denotative signified, has its own obstacles:

I wanted to examine the states at the limits of language; the moments where language breaks up in psychosis for example; or the moments where language doesn’t yet exist such as during a child’s apprenticeship to language. It seemed to me to be impossible to content oneself with a description which held itself to be objective and neutral in these two cases, because already the selection of examples presupposes a particular type of contact with the people who talk to you (“A Question of Subjectivity” 128).

Within the formulation of a “language that doesn’t yet exist”, denotation is based on purely personal accounts organised by social and linguistic conventions, whereas Kristeva’s analysis implies a definition beyond the boundaries of the thetic function and calls it the “thetic break” (55). Because

³⁵ Kristeva makes use of these terms by suggesting that the *chora* is connotative of the mother’s body, while the symbolic denotes the communicative function of language.

³⁶ K. Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (Oxford: OUP, 1983) 31.

the break, however, does not obey the 'norms' of grammatical rules, it potentially solicits psychosis. The implications of this will be looked at in relation to Lacan.

2.3 Kristeva and Lacan

Lacan's idea of the Lack and the encounter with the Other are directly reflective of Hegel's philosophy in that both theorists, though with different effect, express ways in which to deal with boundaries.³⁷ Lacan's Lack demonstrates the influence Hegel plays in his work, especially if we think of negativity as a modification of Lack as want-of-being ("*manque-à-être*"): it is similar to the way Kristeva interprets negativity as a process-of-becoming in which the subject-on-trial can be interpreted in relation to the thing that exceeds construction and limit.

In the opening chapter of *Black Sun*, Kristeva introduces the 'affect' of "the 'Thing' as the real that does not lend itself to signification."³⁸ It would seem that the Thing does not disappear from discourse: it appears in Kant's philosophy as the thing-in-itself, Hegel takes it up to describe the underlying process in the drive towards absolute knowledge and, further down the line, we reach a point in contemporary theory in which the Thing undergoes a boiling down where it functions at the level of signification. Lacan takes up Freud's definition of the Thing as cry and alters "cry" to "word." He plays with the French meaning of the word *mot* ('word' and 'that which is silent'), and writes: "The things we are dealing with ... are things in so far as they are silent. And silent things are not quite the same as things that have no connection with words."³⁹ Therefore, Lacan firmly and characteristically links the Thing to the word. Now, if we unpack his ambiguous statement we can see that silent things are both connected and disconnected from the structure of the word. This is a

³⁷ For Lacan's influence on Hegel, see *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. A. Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977) 203-229, and "The Mirror Stage", in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. A. Sheridan, ed. J. A. Miller (London: Tavistock, 1977) 1-7.

³⁸ J. Kristeva, *Black Sun*, trans. L. S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1989) 13.

³⁹ I have used the quoted translation from L. S. Roudiez in *Black Sun*, 263 n.10, because it is less difficult to understand. The quotation can be found in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis: 1959-1960*, trans. D. Porter, ed. J. A. Miller (London: Tavistock, 1992) 54-55.

resourceful way of explaining the slippage of meaning and the difficulty faced when describing things that seem to exist apart from the word and the unconscious. The Thing is beyond-the-signified but also held in relation to signification. It is an intentional paradox of sorts, in which Lacan installs a definition while at the same time suggesting something beyond definition.

The supposition this sets up has all sorts of possibilities. For one the Thing is a way of staving off critical objections relating to the indicative claim whereby Lacan fixes his position, and for which he is always recalled: “the *unconscious* is structured like a language” (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* 20). Lacan’s structural semiology offers a definition of the subject by locating social and patriarchal forms of production in the belief that the subject is an effect of discourse. Although describing himself as a successor to Freud, he goes some way in ridding psychoanalysis of a certain Freudian essentialism and naturalism. In this semiotic place, he views the subject strictly in terms of language. However, in a similar way to the philosophies cited so far, in which each put in play a form of logic that signifies its own limit, Lacan encounters a similar challenge: how to reach beyond the limits of the ‘reality’ which signifying processes produce.⁴⁰ For Kant it is simple – he describes the thing-in-itself in such a way that as observer he is separate from the self-contained and masterless thing. In a way, he throws his hands up in the air and resigns himself to the idea that there is nothing else to be said about it. Hegel’s philosophy takes up the challenge, and working within the negative parameters that Kant brought into play, suggests that it is the very substance of unknowing that drives us to know. Therefore, the Thing is not a separate entity that cannot be known, but it is pure potential as the underlying impulse in the pursuit of knowledge. Lacan accommodates these ideas, and assimilating them into psychoanalysis, advances an idea of the negative-thing, in which the Thing is linked to language. Lacan’s Thing has many similarities with the Kantian thing-in-itself, but it maintains a certain distance: whereas Kant’s Thing is to some extent sovereign, for Lacan it is a proliferating signifier – at the level at which it is received rather than eluding meaning (which of course it does too) it produces meaning.

⁴⁰ The subject’s capacity to know the world is not determined by reality, but by the limits of its own ego.

The consequences are far-reaching: Lacanian theory is firmly rooted in history; therefore space and time appoint a linguistic prescription, so that although the Thing is beyond the Real, in the sense that there is no prediscursive reality, it is also in the Real. This is a resurrection of the Freudian Id, in more alien terms, in which the Real signifies its own alienation from the Ego. Whatever his position, he arranges a no-lose argument, saying: “The Thing speaks of itself”⁴¹ (“ça parle”). Therefore Lacan’s position suggests that he does not speak for the Thing, it speaks on behalf of itself, but only in the sense that “there is a relationship between thing and word.”⁴² When “the straw of words” is “separated from the grain of things” there is a “gap” that cannot be filled (*Ethics* 45): “I would explain the possibility of this by the congenital *gap* presented by man’s real being in his natural relations, and by the resumption, for a sometimes ideographical, but also a phonetic, not to say grammatical, usage, of imaginary elements that appear fragmented in this *gap*” (*Écrits* 127; emphasis added). Borrowing from Benveniste, Lacan famously goes on to develop this as the gap between the real self and the grammatical self (the veritable example of the phallogocentric subject). In relation to Kristeva, the gap is an important detail. “The beyond-of-the-signified”⁴³ is the essence of the semiotic and is quoted directly from Lacan. Hence, Kristeva takes the word “semiotic” and redefines it.

In some way Lacan underpins ideas proposed by Hegel and Kant and plays the most influential role in Kristevan thought by developing the Thing in a way the other two thinkers do not. The difference is that Lacan supposes that the Thing signifies secrecy. He writes:

Das Ding is not involved with what, in a manner somewhat reflexive to the extent that it can be made explicit, leads man to challenge his words as referring to the things they have nevertheless created. There is something else in *das Ding*. What is there is the true secret....

⁴¹ J. Lacan, “The Freudian Thing, or the meaning of the return to Freud in psychoanalysis” in *Écrits* 114-45; 121.

⁴² Lacan, *Ethics* 45.

⁴³ This quotation can be found in Lacan’s *Ethics* 54; and in Kristeva’s *Black Sun*, 263 n.10.

Something that wants. *The need and not just needs* (Lacan, cited in Kristeva *Black Sun*, 263 n.10).⁴⁴

The secret is the psychoanalytic feature in Lacan's reappraisal of Kant's thing-in-itself; the analyst arranges him or herself as the seeker of the analysand's secret or need. The secret/need (there can be multiple plays on the variation relating to how we place these two words) interplays as Kristeva's semiotic. It is here that Kristeva and Lacan depart from each other: Kristeva believes that the secret/need influences the subject beyond the pre-Oedipal stage and Lacan does not. For Lacan the Thing eludes the signification of the phallus (that is, through its repression it supports the economy of the phallic-symbolic). For Kristeva, however, the Thing is not outside the economy of a linguistic phallogentrism. Kristeva herself makes this distinction in *Black Sun*, when she writes: "One should differentiate my statement from that of Lacan who discusses the notion of *das Ding* ... as referring to ... the true secret.... Something that wants" (263 n.10). Kristeva claims that it is recoverable, and does most of that recovery through analysis with melancholic and depressed subjects.

As a consequence of Kristeva's psychoanalytic practice, she can confidently introduce the idea of the Thing into a working analysis because she sets out to replace or restore with the analysand that which is lost; and therefore it is not altogether the 'Gnostic' secret that Lacan inscribes, but a locatable 'need/drive.' Although for both theorists abjection, negation, and obsession are characteristic traits of the Thing, Kristeva prescribes a more optimistic view, when she claims that the "looming of the Thing summons up the subject's life force as that subject is in the process of being set up; the premature being that we all are can survive only if it clings to another.... Never is the ambivalence of drive more fearsome than in this beginning of otherness where, lacking the filter of language, I cannot inscribe my violence in 'no', nor in any other sign" (11). Violence and the Thing are closely bound, and so Kristeva is claiming that psychoanalysis provides the filter of language for the violent abjections of the Thing. Evidently, for her, the Thing is not an eternal secret.

⁴⁴ I have taken this quotation from Kristeva's *Black Sun* rather than the primary source as the translation is to be preferred. In Lacan it can be found in *Ethics*, 46.

Lacan remains useful to feminism, however, by virtue of his struggle. To name is to be positioned within the symbolic, to be governed by the law of the father. Lacan, though, like Hegel and Kant, has difficulty with naming the Thing, in his case because it is not over-determined by phallogentrism. By naming, propinquity, place, and time are positioned.⁴⁵ The Thing is therefore linked to space because it is outside those things, and this is why Lacan leaves us with a hesitation, whereas Kristeva is in no doubt that the gap is engendered by a female space where the feminine is located in the semiotic. It is a female space that sets Kristeva apart from Lacan and determines her positioning as a 'post-Lacanian' psychoanalyst. It is this modified position that allows us to somewhat read Kristeva against herself and call her a feminist even though she resists the term herself. All in all, this is the most contentious part of my argument as many critics conclude that Kristeva does not perform as a feminist; therefore an engagement with other more known and widely accepted feminists will be made to arrive at a point at which we see Kristeva's contribution.

3. The semiotic *chora* as feminine space

Jacqueline Rose, in her essay "Julia Kristeva – Take Two," writes: "It seems to me now that the concept of the semiotic, especially in those formulations which identify it with the mother and place it beyond language, is the least useful aspect of Kristeva's work."⁴⁶ As the semiotic is the place beyond language, Rose continues: "Various, and at times conjointly, Kristeva has attributed to the semiotic: femininity, colour, music, body, and affect – concepts whose oppressive lyricism has at times been welcomed by feminism but which feminism has also been the quickest to reject" (in Oliver, *Ethics* 48). It seems that on the one hand, Kristeva is accepted by the feminist 'academy', but on the other hand, the main difficulties with her work are rejected. Yet it is the difficult notion of the semiotic that holds potentially the most groundbreaking concepts for feminists to work with, while

⁴⁵ Marleen Barr redefines gender by "jumbling the order of space." She physically 'places' women into different contexts in order to transform images of women defined by their role in domestic places. In *Feminist Fabulation: Space/Postmodern Fiction* (Iowa City: Iowa UP, 1992) 52.

⁴⁶ J. Rose, "Julia Kristeva – Take Two," Oliver, *Ethics* 50.

proving to be obscured by the inexpedient 'Lacanian symbolic'. As Susan Hekman argues, it is Lacan, who many feminists see as the "very epitome of the phallogocentrism that they are pitted against[,] who is crucial to an understanding of Kristeva's work".⁴⁷ The task of formulating an otherness in relation to Lacan's work is achieved by placing the woman as other outside the symbolic. Of course, Lacan does something similar, but the difference is that Kristeva "uses the Lacanian concept of the symbolic order and the subject to form the basis of the theory of signifying practice which emphasises the disruptive and potentially revolutionary force for subjectivity of the marginal and repressed aspects of language."⁴⁸ Kristeva is following in the tradition of linking the subject to language, but it is not in the way that French *écriture* might; Kristeva goes against such practice while maintaining the problematic positionality of women to language. As Hekman explains,

one of Kristeva's central theses is that it is woman's position as other and, specifically, her *jouissance*, that contains a radical potential. Because woman does not exist inside the symbolic she possesses the capacity to disrupt and transform the symbolic. Kristeva argues that it is the *jouissance* of women that allows them to reorder and reconstruct themselves as subjects (86).

But again, Kristeva's proposals are called into question. Extending Plato's *chora* to explain a female space also comes under criticism: "Plato himself describes the *chora* as maternal.... But if Plato did so, it was because the mother was seen as playing no part in the act of procreation, a receptacle or empty vessel *merely* for the gestation of the unborn child" (50).⁴⁹ Yet, as I see it, the semiotic is logically anterior to the symbolic, and therefore its pre-linguistic characteristic hinders the understanding we might have of it as a form of language.⁵⁰ In contrast to how Rose would view it, and to underscore the argument of this thesis, Kristeva clears a space for an effective feminist practice to subvert phallogocentrism and allows us to perceive of potentially resistant spaces. To this

⁴⁷ S. Hekman, *Gender and Knowledge* (London: Polity, 1990) 84.

⁴⁸ C. Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987) 68.

⁴⁹ The most comprehensive exegesis of Plato's *chora* and account of the *Timaeus* is discussed in Freire Ashbaugh.

⁵⁰ Kristeva argues, however, that a pre-symbolic language can be located firmly in the pre-linguistic sounds of infants.

end she argues, “The apparent coherence which the term ‘woman’ assumes in contemporary ideology, apart from its ‘mass’ or ‘shock’ effect for activist purposes, essentially has the negative effect of effacing the differences among the diverse functions or structures which operate beneath this word” (“Women’s Time” 193). Kristeva attempts to analyse the activity of the word ‘woman’ on a plane of more than one dimension: ‘woman’ operates “beneath this word” as “multiplicity” – as a semiotic term, and with the help, or handicap, of the symbolic as “contemporary ideology.” Kristeva is under no illusion that her position is “less commercial”⁵¹ than that of other feminist practices, but her role does help to cast off the “patriarchal terms it seeks to overcome” (78) and locate “the specific and positive perspective of the values that individual women have sustained” (78).

The semiotic, however, cannot signify itself on its own, and this Elisabeth Grosz objects to, claiming that Kristeva fails to reject the rule of the father;⁵² as a result of which Grosz calls Kristeva the dutiful daughter of Lacan. However, I would argue that Kristeva’s feminine space is the means of resistance of all fixed linguistic and social codes. Elsewhere, in a more sympathetic reading, Grosz writes:

A language according to Kristeva is sexually differentiated. ‘Masculinity’ retains, and indeed celebrates, logical connections and linearity (the symbolic). This singularity is challenged by the semiotic which contains the ‘feminine’ drives or voice tones. So that changes to dominant histories, to capitalism and to patriarchy, will depend not only on new political practices but on new forms of language which rename the feminine.⁵³

It is my belief that Kristeva *does* forge new political practices and forms of language. In her famous, but also contentious essay, Kristeva answers the question on the prospect of a ‘new’ feminism arising from two preceding generations of feminisms,⁵⁴ and declares:

⁵¹ T. Chanter, “Female Temporality,” in *Abjection, Melancholia and Love*, ed. J. Fletcher and A. Benjamin (London: Routledge, 1990) 78.

⁵² E. Grosz, “The Body of Signification,” in *Abjection* 90.

⁵³ E. Grosz, *Sexual Subversions* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1989) 211.

⁵⁴ Alice Jardine “evokes” the second and third generation feminism that Kristeva refers to and says

A *third* generation is now forming, at least in Europe. I am not speaking of a new group of young women or of another 'mass feminist movement' taking the torch passed on from the second generation. My usage of the word 'generation' implies less a chronology than a *signifying space*, both a corporeal and desiring mental space. So it can be argued that as of now a third attitude is possible, thus a third generation, which does not exclude – quite the contrary – the *parallel* existence of all three in the same historical time, or even that they be interwoven one with the other. In this third attitude, which I strongly advocate – which I imagine? – the very dichotomy man/woman as an opposition between two rival entities may be understood as belonging to *metaphysics* ("Women's Time" 209).

Desire is central here because it indicates the space that is more than the thing existing in time at the moment⁵⁵ – this could be called the semiotic space of 'pure potential'. It must be said, however, that a signifying space is not possible: 'space', as such, does not signify; and a metaphysical space can only be imagined, as Kristeva suggests; yet although "irreducible to its intelligent verbal translation" (*Revolution* 29), a signifying space, restrained by the guarantee of syntax (29), is envisioned, as the 'quality' which brings forth a new body, not where the old ceases to be, but alongside other established discourses. This is surely the functioning of the semiotic *chora* as the "'air or song beneath the text' of woman" (29).

Grosz, however, is more ambivalent about developing Kristeva's inquiry, and argues that Kristeva's, along with other psychoanalytic feminists' challenge to phallogentrism, does not aim to replace

there would seem to be some correspondence between the ways in which our two first generations dealt with the challenges of the major new discoveries confronting them in their young intellectual lives ... there was a seduction, combined with a resistance to the full implications of those two discourses. Whereas our two second generations would seem to be in full transference with both discourses. Third, the two first generations would seem to correspond to some combination of Kristeva's first two generations of feminists evoked in her article "Women's Time", the first psychoanalytic and academic generations of women often fell either into the category of those women wanting a secure place in linear history or those women wanting to affirm a different, monumental time outside of men's history and story. Our two second generations would seem to want to correspond (at least some of the time) to Kristeva's third generation: those who want a place in male history and male stories but *only* in order to affirm their radical, singular differences.

(In "Notes for Analysis," *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, ed. T. Brennan (London: Routledge, 1989) 81-82.) The tripartite feminism forms the "third generation" of Kristeva's in which a "new theoretical and scientific space" is formulated. It comes out of two preceding generations that she identifies as militating towards sexism and anthropomorphism. (In "Women's Time" 458-459.)

⁵⁵ According to Kristeva, desire is an index of heterogeneity: "Desire causes the signifier to appear as heterogeneous and, inversely, indicates heterogeneity through and across the signifier" (*Desire*, 116).

patriarchal discourses with feminism, but “to reveal the investments patriarchal knowledges have in both representing and excluding women.”⁵⁶ While acknowledging that Kristeva implicates the role of the father in the semiotic, I would say that Kristeva adopts a contemporary feminist theory that invests primarily in the practice of locating the other.

This is a view shared by John Lechte. In his reading of the semiotic in poetic language he outlines Kristeva’s recapitulation of the *chora*, and critically assesses the viability of a combative feminine space: “The semiotic, then, is bound up with the body as *jouissance*. Yet, most of all, the body as *jouissance* comes to be seen, in the lengthy theoretical introduction to *Revolution in Poetic Language*, as the locus of drive energies in the *chora*.”⁵⁷ In addition to this, Kristeva adds a further dimension to suggest that the locus of drives at the core of the semiotic *chora* has a feminine orientation that comes into combat with the masculine law at a fixed and symbolic level. Of course this has huge repercussions for Kristeva as a theorist and psychoanalyst, for it suggests there is a definite dialectic of masculine and feminine. This is revealed in the development of her theses, for in *Desire* (1977) she suggests that the semiotic is the maternal drive emptying into the symbolic, and in the essay “Women’s Time” (1979) goes further, describing historical representations of sexual difference. Here the symbolic represents a linear ‘masculine’ time of history, while the feminine is linked to a cyclical ‘monumental’ time.

Extensive readings on the *chora* already exist alongside Kristeva’s, but they do not take the idea of a female space as far as Kristeva, who, claims Judith Butler, “insists upon this identification of the *chora* with the maternal body.”⁵⁸ In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler appropriately notes the play between the *chora* and the feminine, and affirms Kristeva’s attempt to appropriate the privileged position of the phallic for the maternal, but she theorises the *chora* in a way Kristeva did not intend. The *chora* subtends all images and speech because it is ‘prior’ to all things. The *chora* is the bastard space, and

⁵⁶ E. Grosz, “Contemporary Theories of Power and Subjectivity,” in *Feminist Knowledge*, ed. S. Gunew (London: Routledge, 1990) 91.

⁵⁷ J. Lechte, *Julia Kristeva* (London: Routledge, 1990) 128.

⁵⁸ J. Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (London: Routledge, 1993) 41.

her task, therefore, is to open up this unknowable space as the creative potential of ‘change’. Conversely, Butler argues that if woman is viewed as feminine space she “will be entered, and will give forth a further instance of what enters her, but she will never resemble either the formative principle or that which it creates” (42). The idea of woman being entered or penetrated plays on the notion of the receptacle, but in Butler’s terms it has the more negative connotation of rape and possession. I would argue, however, that Kristeva reverses the structural arrangement of an evaluation of space: while Butler starts at a theoretical position in which images and objects enter in upon space, Kristeva works in antithesis – space permeates all images, without losing its primordially.

I argue, moreover, that Kristeva develops an understanding of the female in a way that no other theorist attempts or achieves: woman becomes progenitor of a pre-discursive space. Yet, the argument only works if we read the *chora* as Plato outlined it: as a rhythmic and anterior space and not as a masculine reproductive function; which, in effect, is what Butler does when she argues that

in the place of a femininity that makes a contribution to reproduction, we have a phallic Form that reproduces only and always further versions of itself, and does this through the feminine, but with no assistance from her. Significantly, this transfer of the reproductive function from the feminine to the masculine entails the topographical suppression of *physis*, the dissimulation of *physis* as *chora*, as place (42).

Butler puts herself between two equally unattractive choices: she interprets Kristeva’s semiotic and Plato’s *chora* as the dissimulation of place where female reproduction is subsumed by a male position, and where the function of reproduction operates without the requirement of place, corporeality, contiguity, or the female gender. As a result of which, Butler’s reading of Kristeva is too preoccupied with the Platonic sub-text; as I see it, Butler reduces the subtlety of *chora* to a Platonic formula, which it is not. The *chora* is concession – it is the substance of thought that transforms a reading of Plato – it is not an absolute, but an aspiration added as an afterthought. The *chora* is Plato’s Thing, and draws attention to the limits of knowledge. Kristeva, then, is closer to the subtlety of *chora* as Thing rather than as male. In contrast, Butler argues that “reproduction” (as she

it is not. The *chora* is concession – it is the substance of thought that transforms a reading of Plato – it is not an absolute, but an aspiration added as an afterthought. The *chora* is Plato’s Thing, and draws attention to the limits of knowledge. Kristeva, then, is closer to the subtlety of *chora* as Thing rather than as male. In contrast, Butler argues that “reproduction” (as she intends its meaning here) is designed “with no assistance” from “the feminine”, rejecting the maternal illustration present in Kristeva’s work. The obvious tensions between Kristeva and Plato highlight fundamental problems in explaining the unlimited source of change as reproduction, or as *chora*. These problems should not be linked necessarily to any specific weakness with Kristeva but, as indicated above, to the difficult conception of space and ‘becoming’. Therefore, I argue that within the principles of psychoanalysis, Kristeva adopts a distinct position of her own that incorporates a theory of a feminine space which is active, resistant, and defiant: one that brings about a revolutionary practice and is nourished by the maternal.⁵⁹

The relationship between feminism and Kristeva, then, is a complex one, but in spite of her divergent arguments and contexts, she attempts to situate the absent-female⁶⁰ in the psychic space that

⁵⁹ In a collection of essays which set out to re-evaluate French feminism, Diana Meyers assesses Kristeva’s contribution to the feminist school and argues that “although Kristeva is defeated by gender polarities” (136) and “Freudian dogma” (156), she does offer possibilities aimed at revising the symbolic order. In an argument weighing up the minuses and pluses of Kristeva’s ‘feminism’, Meyers writes:

In one respect ... Kristeva’s claim that symbolic language is phallic is misleadingly hyperbolic, but, in another respect, it serves to alert women to what Kristeva deems a virtually ineradicable conceptual undercurrent and to the need to trust in destabilisation in order to bend language to the expression of women’s own apprehension of the repressed dimension of their lives.

In addition, I think that Kristeva’s point can be read politically as a reminder of the pervasiveness of gender-based power relations and of the contribution that destabilisation can make to eroding their hold. Indeed, she contends that as a result of their experience of destabilisation mothers can pose a profound challenge to the political and economic status quo.

“The Subversion of Women’s Agency in Psychoanalytic Feminism: Chodorow, Flax, Kristeva”. In *Revaluing French Feminism: Critical Essays on Difference, Agency, and Culture*, ed. N. Fraser and S. L. Bartky (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1992) 136-161. To assess Meyer’s argument, in my view much of it embodies a sensitive synopsis regarding the potentiality of resistance towards the symbolic. Unfortunately, Meyers limits Kristeva’s position to a Freudian essentialist debate that, while acknowledging the complexity of Kristeva’s endeavour, seeks a prescriptive outcome that Kristeva can never deliver.

subsumed in the signifier nevertheless explodes violently with pregnancy (the threshold of culture and nature) and the child's arrival" (*Tales of Love* 259).

Thus, the *chora* is the female progenitor because it encompasses all things. Yet a problem surfaces in that 'procreation' engenders a notion of agency void of the responsibility of the 'impregnator'. If we interpret it in the way Kristeva prescribes, we have a doubly characterised space – an inverted bastard female space where we cannot name the mother, and also, in the usurpation of the phallic, a bastard space in which the symbolic father is made absent.

Essentially it seems, this displacement of the problematics of origins depends on Kristeva's and Plato's notion of production. As the *Timaeus* outlines, we have a theory of origin from perfect to imperfect, from form to reality, and the condition for the very existence of material objects participates in our intelligibility. Yet it remains unintelligible: spoken and articulated, absent and unnameable. It is clear that such metaphysical quandaries impel Kristeva to engage with female signification outside the law of the father, to draw upon a space that exceeds, defers, and differs from obvious or 'customary' origins. Derivation, then, is for her maternal anonymity, but what it amplifies is a double absent space. The point of this, of course, is to highlight the danger in equating certain forms of 'reality' with the 'truth'. It is important to understand the notion of absence and multiplicity, but the perspectives of those outside of legitimate spaces can often appear as illegitimate, or worse, as absent. Kristeva incorporates the concept of contradictory identity and contradictory social locations within feminist analysis. To understand further the multiplicitous and contesting notions of space, a critique of standpoint theory will be made.

4. Standpoint theory

The main argument of this study is to claim that there is such a thing as a feminine space that resists and disrupts the symbolic patriarchal space; moreover, it considers how women occupy contemporary space in such a way as to challenge normative phallogentric geographies. Proceeding from the principle that language is a part of the male domain, many feminists set about remodelling the

linguistic positions and suppositions that reflect spatial reality in the hope of bringing about new sites of resistance.⁶² It can be argued that standpoint theory stresses the specificity and materiality of the body as a location for such subjective resistance.

Historically actuated and historically specific space is examined by standpoint theory in a way whose limitations can be critically instructive. This theory maintains the specificity of notions to time and place and argues for the necessary materialisation of epistemological spaces in time. In her essay “Foucault on Power” Nancy Hartsock argues that “epistemologies grow out of differing material circumstances.”⁶³ Linda McDowell, in an effort to spatialise feminism in a post-Cartesian place, uses standpoint theory to create a feminist geometry. Although they do not place themselves on the same critical plane, the hubs of both their arguments concentrate on ‘locatedness’: the construction of reasoning and how it is influenced by the relational and historical position we take. The proponents of standpoint theory argue that insight into their own and others’ position enables women to form ‘standpoints’ and share sites of experience. Understanding the structures that position them enable them to question their marginal place and produce perspectives on social limitations and experience.

Yet McDowell proffers some reservation, claiming that a number of feminists question standpoint theory, “believing that the deconstruction of *the* female subject undermines the basis for a specifically feminist politics.”⁶⁴ Potentially, meanwhile, Hartsock is concerned with “differing circumstances” (34): spaces that are either frequently changing or in discordance with dominant hierarchies; therefore she is sensitive to the charges of exclusion and unwarranted universalism that could be levelled at this theory.

Beginning with “The Persistence of Vision” and ending with “Reprise: Science Fiction, Fictions of Science and Primatology,” Donna Haraway charts the presence of persistent Western narratives

⁶² The notion of sites of resistance is a current theme in feminism, and is used as a metaphor to describe women’s individual experience of location and position in the world, and her relation both to herself and patriarchy.

⁶³ N. Hartsock, “Foucault on Power,” *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. L. J. Nicholson (London: Routledge, 1990) 158.

⁶⁴ L. McDowell, “Spatialising Feminism,” *Body Space*, ed. N. Duncan (London: Routledge, 1990) 34.

historically based on their location and space.⁶⁵ Her book explores racial and sexual difference, reproduction and survival, and the bio-political divide between human life and animal life. It takes as its spatial paradigms the extreme polarities of jungle and cyber-space and disrupts many of their differences. Rather than coming down on any particular side, however, Haraway claims that she is “edified by the traffic” (381) between the boundaries of nature and culture and disposes her theoretical position to greater chaos. She employs the notion of the ‘jungle’ and metaphorises it as a place wild and abandoned, maintaining that “women’s place is in the jungle” (279). Yet, although the jungle is now the nowhere space – condemned as unreal or untameable against the backdrop of civilised space – it is the place where “The Origin of Man” (281) was first conceived.

Therefore, although she claims that women’s place is in the jungle, it is founded on the remnants of a male terrain where the origin of Man can literally be taken to mean the origin of male mastery. This being so, the rubrics of the origins of man mean that even with women’s recoument of a discarded space, it is questionable whether there is any real opportunity for women to stand at a point which they can call their own. Standpoint theory, then, is concerned above all with contesting spaces. Focusing on the idea of a phallic-patriarchal space, the theory offers a way of defining, succinctly through language, the difficult situations that women are faced with when trying to locate a defining space that is not circumscribed by a masculine tradition. Although Haraway claims that the source of male dominion “might be a myth,” its “very real potency” (281) remains a speculation that should not resist interpretation. Haraway ends her voluminous study with the following supposition and defining question:

The terms for gestating the germ of future worlds constitute a defining dilemma of reproductive politics. The contending shapes of sameness and difference in any possible future are at stake in the primate order’s unfinished narrative of traffic across the specific cultural and political boundaries that separate and link animal, human, and machine in a continually global world where survival is at stake. Finally, this contesting world is the primate field, where with

⁶⁵ Haraway suggests that women can readjust their geographical boundaries to highlight their presence or find beneficial reasons for continuing to ‘appear’ absent (in utopia). *Primate Visions: Gender, Race and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (London: Verso, 1992).

or without our consent, we are located. She laughed bitterly. ‘I suppose I could think of this as fieldwork – but how the hell do I get out of the field?’ (382).

Haraway exposes the limits of any claim, particularly a feminist one, whereby a separatist space is considered a viable alternative to living in symbolic and material relation to the world. She is one of a number of writers in this area who has a keen interest in geography, which she applies to the shifting cultural boundaries that compete for power and ascendancy. If a separatist contesting space cannot be located then a viable alternative is to forge an arrangement of differences in which to construct a feminist position across boundaries; Haraway does this by including the polarities of nature/culture, animal/human, female/male in order to rethink the definitions of polemic space.

The differences within the assemblage of identity and culture define the space that she privileges as the possible place for change. Intelligently, Haraway draws attention to the cultural development of ideas through history, and offers some new and exciting ways in which to encounter contemporary subjectivity with history, modern machinery, and futuristic cyberspace. Even so, while her work carefully maps the relation of past to future discourses, it is positioned in the style of standpoint theory: therefore, although she claims to take “the view from nowhere” (45), she generates a study by telling and retelling stories that are specific to time and place. Nevertheless, Haraway provides a useful basis for asking further questions. For example, the one posed above which asks, “how the hell do I get out of this field?”, sums up many feminists’ dilemmas and predicaments in the encounter with phallocentrism and their own human geography.

An example of such a feminist (although not one working in standpoint theory) is Luce Irigaray, who continues the process of articulating a critique of the propositional ground from where women speak and comes up with some suitable answers. She reflects the view of those feminists who see language as absolute space in which everything that is spoken is inscribed with the mark of phallocentrism. In a feigned response to a male questioning audience, Irigaray answers:

You grant me space, you grant me my space. But in so doing you have always already taken me away from my expanding place. What you intend for me is the place which is appropriate

for the need you have of me. What you reveal to me is the place where you have positioned me, so that I remain available to your needs.⁶⁶

She is essentially claiming that there is no presently available spatiality which allows the female to be autonomous; the need “they” have of her is that she remain ‘in her place’. In her essay “Rereading Irigaray,” Margaret Whitford affirms that Irigaray reads women’s ontological status in this culture as *déréliction* in calling it “the state of abandonment.”⁶⁷ By contrast, men inhabit a space of their own: “the fundamental ontological category for men is *habiter* (dwelling), whether in a literal or figurative sense: men live in ‘grottoes, huts, women, towns, language, concepts, themes, etc.’” (112). Hence Whitford suggests that women live in the rubble and remains of men’s constructs, and with Irigaray shares the idea that the only solution is to create an independent female space. In contrast to this, I would say that living on the wasteland has many possibilities for the way one might live or write; inadvertently or actively, space can be resisted, re-constructed, and modelled in its interpretative dimensions from what is at hand.

5. Conclusion

By taking a Kristevan position, a positive and ongoing methodology can be created from what can be called a theory without borders. Although to some it represents a movement away from a tradition of feminist practice that upholds the idea of a singular space in which difference is defended as a key issue, a theory without borders provides a revolutionary potential in politics as well as in language. Moreover, it follows that the feminine is the locus of this revolutionary potential, and if, as Kristeva has asserted, the semiotic is identified with the feminine, then it is women themselves who are the revolutionaries who explode a patriarchal discourse to create the possibility of social and linguistic revolution.

⁶⁶ L. Irigaray, *Elemental Passions*, trans. J. Collie and J. Still (London: Athlone, 1992) 47.

⁶⁷ M. Whitford, “Rereading Irigaray,” in Brennan 112.

In the next chapter we will see how Foucault's spatial reasoning is a site of relation for Kristeva, particularly relating to the fact that both theorists develop accounts of language and other formal structures which contest notions of instability, anteriority, and resistance.

Chapter Two

Utilised Space

1. Introduction

In this chapter I will begin by justifying my arranging together of Foucault and Kristeva. I will then go on to explore a Foucauldian notion of space and will show the extent to which Foucault's work is defined by a 'spatial logic', so that his main tenets become spatial events in time. Foucault's most declarative exploration of space began with *The Order of Things* (1966) and followed with the essay "Of Other Spaces" (1967), in which the notion of *heterotopia* is introduced. The various categories Foucault locates are superimposed and intersected with space and time, whereby it is argued that classification is liberated from time through space, suggesting that systems of thought are extricated from culture and fall outside of representation. It is also argued that space is the paradigm guiding Foucault's approach to historical topics, and this can be used as a methodology for reading the essays and poems of Audre Lorde.

1.2 The space of a given text

The reasons for placing Foucault and Kristeva together are partly artificial and partly essential; in the synthetic sense each thinker provides sustained and critical theories of space which explore notions of anteriority. Both thinkers develop accounts of a spatiality beyond or prior to language from which vantage-point the organisation and functioning of language can be questioned. Moreover, although not theorists who would immediately be linked, each persuasively argues that space questions the appearance of finality and completeness in language. Perhaps most importantly, each in their own way concludes that space is the site where resistance to normative constructions of meaning is generated. To support this claim, firstly in relation to Kristeva, an argument will be set out to show

how intertextuality has a shared currency with Foucault's episteme. For example, Kristeva substitutes the term "genre" for "intertextuality" and utilises it to support her spatialised thinking (placing traditional notions of genre aside, and replacing it with an interwoven, textual overlap of meanings) where strands of discourses are woven together from other genres to form new discursive practices, and although the process is arbitrary, intertextuality advances achievable change and resistance to dominant existing practices:

The text is a ... *productivity*, and this means: first, that its relationship to the language in which it is situated is redistributive (destructive-constructive), and hence, can be better approached through logical categories rather than linguistic ones; and second, that it is a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralise one another (*Desire* 36).

Hence, the conditions of possibilities of meaning are brought about when a given textual arrangement is intersected by other *texts* (including the text of society and history) that can stretch across boundaries and trajectories forming social coordinates conveying differences and disjunctions. Yet this "translinguistic" "productivity" (37) is not easily identifiable, partly because genres stemming from often very different traditions and operations merge to neutralise each other.

The textuality and the interwovenness of such an embroidering suggests a convoluted mass of fibres that cannot be unwound or unpicked to return them to a singular discursive space: intertextuality, then, is an "*agreement of deviations*" (51), connections of mediations and differences that together form new textual systems such as the novel. However, these new systems remain only ever a temporary textuality, as closure is only a short-lived fixture. This is a crucial point as it fleshes out the main assertion, that an anterior space prior to language offers resistance to stable discourses. To explain this, it can be shown how Kristeva posits the notion of anteriority alongside language. By taking the reliable example of a pre-discursive infant she asks: "before any language begins to encode his 'idealities': what about the paradoxical *semiosis* of the newborn's body. What about the 'semiotic *chora*,' what about this 'space' prior to the sign, this archaic disposition of primary narcissism that a poet brings to light in order to challenge the closure of meaning" (281). This, it can be argued, is a

rhetorical question (the punctuation lacks a question mark), inasmuch as the very notion of an anterior space sets up its own proposition: because closure cannot be made, the answer is an open-ended textuality. However, although answers are deferred, her position is clear: Kristeva is referring to an anteriority – prior to the sign – that challenges the closure of meaning. But what of this anteriority? Does it always remain outside the text? Of course, Kristeva is quite clear on this point and, essentially, in as much as it is named it cannot exist beyond the symbolic, therefore, anteriority has to be assimilated into the text.

The argument additionally evokes links with the evolution of ideas relating to symbol and sign: the mediaeval and classical tradition of symbolism and classification which postulated a transcendental closure has been replaced by the notion of an open-ended and material linguistic practice. In order to further develop her position Kristeva borrows and redefines Medvedev's term "ideologeme":

The ideologeme is the intersection of a given textual arrangement (a semiotic practice) with the utterances (sequences) that it either assimilates into its own space or to which it refers in the space of exterior texts (semiotic practices). The ideologeme is that intertextual function read as 'materialised' at the different structural levels of each text, and which stretches along the entire length of its trajectory, giving it its historical and social coordinates.... The concept of text as ideologeme determines the very procedure of a semiotics that, by studying the text as intertextuality, considers it as such within (the text of) society and history (36-37).

For Kristeva, the *ideologeme* is a term which enables her to grasp the value of a spatial semiotic practice in society, and not simply the ideological value of the text from, for instance, a 'materialist' perspective. As Toril Moi observes, "In using this word, the point for Kristeva is to emphasise the fact that all forms of discourse are constructed by the social space in which they are enunciated" (*The Kristeva Reader* 62). Thus space and society are significantly linked in the productivity of meaning.

To try and set out the machinations of this productivity is, to say the least, not easy. To make a topological study of societal and historical intertextual functions would be an enormous, if not impossible, task. Therefore Kristeva uses the novel as an example of the privileged site at which different structural levels come together. Foucault does the same: in his most direct study of space, he

takes the novel as a springboard (an excerpt from Borges) and offers an analysis of classification and its linguistic functions in society. The novel seems to be the obvious choice because it contains (in the fashion of a receptacle) in micro-form, the fibres of history, society, politics, and other established discourses.

1.2 Discourse and the conditions of possibility

Because of their common exploration of the conditions of the possibility of meaning, it is essential for the intellectual coherence of this argument on narrative space to link Foucault and Kristeva together. As has already been outlined, Kristeva formulates a hypothesis to explore the social spaces from where language is spoken and written, while at the same time avoiding a 'straightforward' synopsis of the conditions and rules of texts from within the power relations of economic, political, and class structures.¹ Foucault, likewise, distances himself from what might be very loosely termed an ideological perspective. Their positioning of the novel includes views on the effects of history, but each analysis goes beyond the fundamental modes of production and social effects of the epoch by contriving the terms "intertextuality" and "episteme", words that point to a notion of power relations within the framework of social structures, but also indicating something very different from Marxism.² Foucault's position is explained through the episteme.³

¹ That is not to say that Kristeva does not include the figurative terms and complex dialectic ideas that are represented by Marx; her non-teleological account of signifying practices are developed from a Hegelian-Marxist position, yet they involve a difference in that Kristeva emphasises a non-symbolised excess "outside" of society: "The fundamental moment of practice is the heterogeneous contradiction that posits a subject put in process/on trial by a natural or social outside that is not yet symbolised, a subject in conflict with previous theses.... The subject of this experience-in-practice is an excess, never one, always already divided ..." (*Revolution* 203, 204). David Fisher elaborates on Marxism and the signification of otherness in his analysis of the *chora* as origin and as the other of signification. See "Kristeva's *chora* and the Subject of Postmodern Ethics", in *Crownfield* 91-106.

² Marx is concerned with bases of tiered power on which to place modes of production; from an ideological viewpoint, production of labour and return is a concept that develops systematically downwards from the ruling classes. Because ideology is a bourgeois 'state of consciousness' it is inherent in the ruling classes and therefore it is a 'stable' form which needs to be forcefully overturned. In all of this, the important point is that Marx's narration of history is based on a linear perception in which social hierarchy is the organic composite of capitalism.

³ The similarity between Kristeva's ideologeme and Foucault's episteme has also drawn the attention of Roudiez, whose introductions precede many of Kristeva's works. In *Desire* he writes:

Foucault's investigation of a spatial arena that renders a certain form of reasoning began with a study on the formation of rules that underlie institutional practices; this he called *archaeology*,⁴ a term used to describe the excavation of impersonal structures of knowledge. The second key term instructing and extending these ideas is the *episteme*. The *episteme* is the condition of possibilities of discourse in a given period out of which appears an "archaeology, addressing itself to the general space of knowledge" (*Order* xxiii). Simply put, the *episteme* is a network of "underground" thought that organises itself: "Such an enterprise is not so much a history, in the traditional meaning of that word, as an 'archaeology'" (*Order* xxii).

Nevertheless, although it is plainly described, Foucault's *episteme* is not to be confused with the more common usage of the term "epistemology", which reflects on empirical knowledge to explain how it is established and ordered. All epistemological thought is determined by the rules of discursive formation, but Foucault explicates further to explore the condition of possibility of discourses in a given period, arguing that archaeology (rules of formation) and space allow discourses to function at one time but not another:

I am not concerned ... to describe the progress of knowledge towards an objectivity in which today's science can finally be recognised; what I am attempting to bring to light is the epistemological field, the *episteme* in which knowledge, envisaged apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value or to its objective forms, grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history which is not that of its growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility; in this account, what should appear are those configurations within the *space* of knowledge which have given rise to the diverse forms of empirical science (xxii).

Foucault does not believe in an evolutionary progress in which changes are made and lessons are learnt from the past; the rules of formation are much more arbitrary, and it is the notion of a type of

Kristeva presents an original view of the concept of 'genre'; putting that traditional concept aside, she sees what we call the novel as narrative texture, woven together with strands borrowed from other verbal practices such as carnivalesque writing, courtly lyrics, hawkers' cries, and scholastic treatises, she also showed, among other things, how this texture is intertwined with something akin to what Michel Foucault has called *episteme*, for which she coined the neologism 'ideologeme' ("Introduction" 2).

⁴ Archaeology examines discursive rules and practices, as they stand, without tracing an origin or "concealed meaning." See M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. Sheridan-Smith (London: Tavistock, 1972) 138.

'erraticness' that interests Foucault. For example, if epistemological thought is not linear then history in the traditional sense is not the significant light bearer on why present epochs are as they are. Thus something else must be ordering epistemes, which is why Foucault asks the question, "What historical *a priori* provided the starting-point from which it was possible to define the great checkerboard of distinct identities established against the confused, undefined, faceless, and, as it were, indifferent background of differences?" (xxiv). Underlying Foucault's question is the need to understand the relationship between events and their ordering; the checkerboard is the kind of metaphor which economically and modernistically translates the arrangement of discourses and the ways they are placed as a game of chance.

In answer to the question, Foucault turns to sites of production, such as the novel, and locates three great starting points in the Renaissance, Classical and Modern periods. The novel is always an important medium because it presents unique examples of a type of stylisation that struggles against the ruling episteme:

The last of the compensations for the demotion of language, the most important, and also the most unexpected, is the appearance of literature, of literature as such – for there has of course existed in the Western world, since Dante, since Homer, a form of language that we now call 'literature'. But the word is of recent date, as is also, in our culture, the isolation of a particular language whose peculiar mode of being is 'literary'. This is because at the beginning of the nineteenth century, at a time when language was burying itself within its own density as an object and allowing itself to be traversed, through and through, by knowledge, it was also reconstituting itself elsewhere, in an independent form, difficult of access, folded back upon the enigma of its own origin and existing wholly in reference to the pure act of writing.... Literature becomes progressively more differentiated from the discourse of ideas, and encloses itself within a radical intransitivity; it becomes detached from all the values that were able to keep it in general circulation during the Classical age (taste, pleasure, naturalness, truth), and creates within its own space everything that will ensure a lucid denial of them (the scandalous, the ugly, the impossible) (*Order* 300).

The classical episteme is recognised as an era where reason is deciphered by identity and difference rather than the signs and similitudes of the Modern period. Foucault identifies the heralding of the classical phase through the novel *Don Quixote* by Cervantes, and, in similar ways to Kristeva,

Foucault intertextually weaves historical and fictional discourses; his methodology provides an example of taking anterior discourses in time and pitting them against more formal and verified discourses in history. For instance, Cervantes in *The Order of Things* is given four pages of synopsis over Descartes' two, and although as a novel *Don Quixote* is a masterwork, in the wider scheme of things it is, as it were, a very minor 'philosophical' event. Foucault uses it, however, to unlock the underground network of signifiers that fed into the making of Classical philosophical works and argues that an 'anterior' work, in relation to validated philosophical treatises, provides an understanding of the age. Foucault does the same with the Borges narrative; he elevates a modest story and sets about provoking a striking displacement of the way modern thought is constituted and, in a way not dissimilar to Kristeva's methodology, he intertextualises the novel with philosophy. This serves to make that which might be considered 'anterior' to philosophical (and linear) thought a central player in the 'order of things'. In terms of space it shortens the divide between texts⁵ and makes them perform next to one another so that classification is central to the space that validates the order of things.

1.3 Narrative space

In terms of narrative space, Foucault is concerned with how cultural codes impose order on experience and how different sets of themes come about, and, in like manner to the ideology-based theories of Marxism and feminism, sets out to expose the limitations of Western society's systems of thought. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault presents Borges' short story about a Chinese encyclopaedia ("the exotic charm of another system of thought" xvi) and quotes its ironic, modernistic form that amuses as well as teaches:

This passage quotes a 'certain Chinese encyclopaedia' in which it is written that 'animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j)

⁵ Foucault calls this the "middle region", which will be examined below.

innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies (xv).

The estrangement technique employed by Borges serves to bring attention to the notion of classification and its arbitrariness, but also its unnaturalness when it is observed from a distance and its naturalness when close up.⁶

The example certainly has demonstrative force, but the spatial organisation is the most important point here; as with Foucault's early analyses on the arrangement of discourses and their hidden otherness, one is referred back to what lies beyond classification to the space that enables the transcription of categories contained in the "non place of language" (xvii) to exist. Furthering the argument, Foucault adds: "Yet, though language can spread them [categories] before us, it can only do so in an unthinkable space" (xvii). Now the important point to be made here is that this detail is not dissimilar to Kristeva's: a thinkable space that might conceivably accommodate categories to form a stable relation is, they both recognise, impossible. As Foucault suggests:

The central category of animals 'included in the present classification', with its explicit reference to paradoxes we are familiar with, is indication enough that we shall never succeed in defining a stable relation of contained to container between each of these categories and that which included them all: if all the animals divide; up here can be placed without exception in one of the divisions' of this list, then aren't all 'the other divisions' to be found in that one division too? And then again, in what space would that single, inclusive division have *its* existence? (xvii).

For Kristeva the *chora* cannot sustain itself in its own semiotic space, hence, for both theorists, the same ponderable question is posed: "in what space would that single, inclusive division have *its* existence?" The answer is not too difficult to find – in essence, it would constitute a metaphysical, master space that is unified and conclusive.

⁶ George Lakoff takes a cognitive scientific approach and offers a detailed analysis of how human beings organise ideas and conceptualise reality. In a converse way to Borges (and defamiliarisation), Lakoff offers ways of seeing how human beings mechanically compute and make sense of perception from a distance. He calls this a "representation of reality" (xii) from a "God's eye point of view" (301), and suggests that it enables us to comprehensively naturalise a 'larger than life' picture. It is a type of "system versus capacity" cognition (329). In *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1987).

As this type of reasoning is anathema to them, an infinitely more difficult problem issues from the first question posed, and that is: if a space cannot sustain itself, and both thinkers are resolved on asserting theories in which an anterior spatiality is possible, how can it exist? Kristeva tackles the problem, as has already been argued, by raising the status of the semiotic to the symbolic so that it can be outside of language but also inscribed by it. Foucault's focus on the kind of problematisation outlined above supports a more historical and cultural critique so that although there is an anterior space, it is located in culture. Thomas Flynn has developed this crucial point of Foucault's in some detail:

What is most distinctive of Foucault as a postmodern thinker is what I have called his 'spatialisation of reason' as studied in his histories and exhibited in his writings. His implicit appeal to space, with its transformations and displacements as well as its comparativist and diacritical method, rather than time as the model for historical explanation, undermines the telic nature of traditional historical accounts, even as it restores the dispersive, 'Dionysian' character to time, which had been tamed by existentialists and other narrativists.⁷

Flynn supports Foucault's claim that a network of categories, a *tabula*, is superimposed and intersected with space, and goes on to argue that classification is liberated from time through space, meaning that systems of thought are loosened from culture and ultimately fall outside of representation itself: "Foucault's shift from time to space as the paradigm guiding his approach to historical topics counters the totalising, teleological method favoured by standard histories of ideas, with their appeal to individual and collective consciousness and to a 'tangled network of influences'" (in Gutting 41). However, what Flynn fails to elaborate is that space is very much linked to time and it is this which makes space lie both outside and inside of culture as the 'middle position':

Thus, between the already 'encoded' eye and reflexive knowledge there is a middle region which liberates order itself: it is here that it appears, according to the culture and the age in question, continuous and graduated or discontinuous and piecemeal, linked to space or constituted anew at each instant by the driving force of time, related to a series of variables or defined by separate systems of coherence, composed of resemblances which are either

⁷ T. Flynn, "Foucault's Mapping of History," *The Cambridge Guide to Foucault*, ed. G. Gutting (Cambridge: CUP, 1994) 43.

successive or corresponding, organised around increasing differences, etc. This middle region, then, in so far as it makes manifest the modes of being or order, can be posited as the most fundamental of all: anterior to words, perceptions, and gestures, which are then taken to be more or less exact, more or less happy, expressions of it (which is why this experience of order in its pure primary state always plays a critical role); more solid, more archaic, less dubious, always more 'true' than the theories that attempt to give those expressions explicit form, exhaustive application, or philosophical foundation (*Order* xxi).

Again the shift between time and space points to the spatial organisation of the institutions he discusses which also marks the point of entry for anteriority. Space is that other: "the existence of a perilous otherness" (xxiv) or, more designatedly, otherness is a heterotopic space:

Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to 'hold together'. This is why utopias permit fables and discourses to run with the every grain of language and are part of the fundamental dimension of the *fabula*; heterotopias (such as those to be found so often in Borges) desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilise the lyricism of our sentences (xviii).

Anteriority hovers between discourse in the middle regions. But we can also more importantly define Foucault's heterotopic proposition in relation to Kristeva's theoretical placing of *chora*; to liken them schematically, the heterotopia is like the *chora* in that both act upon the stability of syntax and grammar. This idea plays a significant role in the argument of this thesis as it is concerned with ways in which Barnes and Lorde combine competing and contrasting discourses between events.

Using Foucault's ideas as a methodology of reading thus helps to explain how Lorde, for example, formulates her literary endeavour in response to the configurations of rules and laws within her own social space. The contingency of Lorde's work in relation to the influences of Africa-America is evidence of the heterotopia which contests "the very possibility of grammar at its source", dissolving the "myths" of the white, patriarchal ruling discourses and invoking the sites of the middle regions of language.

However, dominant grammars are not just options that offer themselves randomly according to the current social state of play, they are conceived as conditions of possibility and therefore certain rules come into operation while others do not. These discursive formations are described by Foucault in such texts as *The Birth of the Clinic* and its treatment of medicine, *The Order of Things*, an analysis of order and being, and *Discipline and Punishment*, concerned with carceral practices and institutions.

Such examples of cultural analysis offer wide and varied explorations of space, but it is not brought to prominence so much as in the conceptualisation of the heterotopia which reveals a close understanding of spatial organisation. Foucault divides the placing and arranging of categories into two sites – one is utopian and the other is heterotopic. Utopian spaces are like Borges' Chinese encyclopaedia, they are distant and chimerical, exotic: "that privileged *site of space*" (xix). Heterotopias, on the other hand, "are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to 'hold together'" (xviii). Therefore, pertaining to Foucault's spatial reasoning, he is concerned with the composite sites that either hold or destroy systems of thought.⁸ In methodological terms, the dispersion or holding together of events involves making a practice out of the notions of position and positionality: viewing from an anterior place, writing from within the folds of language, locating gaps, and unfolding the ambiguous space of the middle region all hold promise. In this respect, ordinary social practice can be viewed from a different place to resist conceptual classifications and their contextualisation.⁹

⁸ Although the heterotopia and the *chora* are two mutually exclusive procedures, Foucault's description of the former shares features similar to the latter.

⁹ In order for meaning to be understood the condition of contextual appropriateness is crucial; any change in "context structure" influences meaning. See Teun van Dijk's discussion, "The Structure of Context", in *Text and Context: Explorations in the Semantics and Pragmatics of Discourse* (London: Longman, 1977) 191-195.

2. Archaeological space

Foucault's mapping of history unfolds in three parts. The axis of interpretation begins with archaeology, which sets his early ideas in place and maps out a preliminary understanding of power/knowledge, and is formulated as a history of knowledge.¹⁰ His middle work, termed "genealogy", or the history of ideas, explores the relation of ideas to events; and his later "ethics" is a history of experience. In relation to space, the archaeological period considers the underlying emergence of that which makes arrangement possible. The genealogical side of analysis "deals with series of affective formation of disease: it attempts to grasp it in its powers of affirmation ... the power of constituting a domain of objects" (*Archaeology* 234). Thus, Foucault's genealogy concentrates on the relations of power, knowledge, and objects in space and time. Another way of saying this is that he wishes to explore the spatial reasoning behind categorisation and the power it yields.

Thus begins Foucault's practical concern with the ways in which space is put into discourse; he considers the emergence and particular style of those discourses which render visible the otherwise imperceptible and unverifiable operations of structures of authority in certain spaces (for example, the Panopticon). The exploration of space has one specific aim, and that is to understand the reasons for creating spaces in the first place. Surveying much of what Foucault writes about in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, it is reasonable to limit his main findings to a conclusion where space is utilised to normalise behaviour as a regulating technique of control. Foucault focuses on space in order to consider how behaviour is developed through it. Alongside spaces of normalisation, Foucault looks to the strategies in discourse that seek to displace those dominant discourses.

Since discourses from a Foucauldian perspective emerge out of socio-historical practices expressed in and through spaces and places, the objective is to decipher them. The careful and systematic observation of development within space is the encounter with the general logic of

¹⁰ It seems more appropriate to call Foucault's history of knowledge "histories" as he draws stark epistemic lines of distinction between modernity, pre-modernity and post-modernity. Christopher Tilley, meanwhile, offers a reading of Foucault's histories from a more hermeneutic base; these issues he relates to post-structuralism. *Towards an Archaeology of Archaeology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

Foucault's detailed archaeology of knowledge. This later shifts into a transcription of events through genealogy. Archaeology is Foucault's first major project and establishes the terrain for his future thought. His early work examines carceral systems such as the prison and the madhouse, and from them develops theories of containing discourse. Dreyfus and Rabinow's *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* describes Foucault's archaeology as an attempt to transcribe the events of history into "serious speech acts."¹¹ This discursive formation was the first of its kind, if only because it employs a two-dimensional spatial device which operates from a power/knowledge duality. Foucault describes his undertaking in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, as an attempt to show that

to speak is to do something – something other than to express what one thinks, to translate what one knows ... to show that to add a statement to a pre-existing series of statements is to perform a complicated and costly gesture, which involves conditions (and not only a situation, a context and motives) and rules (not the logical and linguistic rules of construction); to show that a change in the order of discourse does not presuppose 'new ideas', a little invention and creativity, a different mentality, but transformations in practice, perhaps also in neighbouring practices, and in their common articulation.¹²

From the outline of this excerpt Foucault is not so much concerned with context as with practice. It is important to give this point some prominence as many critical theories have privileged the word-in-context in which processes of reading and writing have become overlaid by the authority of context and the role of the reader. The result is that aspects of feminist enquiry have been increasingly inhibited by considerations of political circumstance and contiguity. As Toril Moi suggests, "ideology becomes a monolithic unified totality that knows no contradictions; against this a miraculously intact all-pervasive 'femaleness' may pit its strength" (*Sexual/Textual* 63).

Without doubt structuralist and post-structuralist theory has been useful to feminism, where social and economic structures of space in writing are questioned: as Barthes notes, "the space of

¹¹ H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Brighton: Harvester, 1986) 48. However, there is some wide discrepancy about the way we interpret Foucault's speech acts. For example, Merquir, by contrast, argues that the archaeologist interprets discourse as "monument" not "document," the difference being that the former is "contemplated." J.G. M. Merquir, *Foucault* (London: Fontana, 1985) 78.

¹² Foucault, *Archaeology* 209.

writing is to be ranged over” (“The Death of the Author” 147). However, like some aspects of feminism, it masks the problem of contiguity and where to place the authorial voice in space, and which space to privilege. If the space of *writing* is explored it is important not to disengage with *space* itself. Now, as Foucault writes in *Archaeology*, conditions, statements, and writing are inherently repressive, and the only way to challenge them is to open up new spaces, which implies a “transformation in practice,” and this suggests going beyond the body of the writer, the authorial voice, into an anterior space.¹³ However, how this is done while remaining ‘in the field’ is problematic. Foucault embarks upon a method of inquiry where the rules that govern discourse are played down; instead, attention is given to spatial networks of power/knowledge and the transformations that arise (heterotopic changes).

2.2 Genealogical space

It is clear that the discussion so far excludes dominant philosophies such as those examined in relation to Kristeva and the theorists who influenced her. This is mainly because Foucault does not integrate other thinkers into his work to the degree Kristeva does. Foucault resists situating his work within the literature of the disciplines from where he writes; this serves to make his work highly problematic, but at the same time, the range of his work can freely cut across cultural and governing discourses. This particular type of ‘range’ has been described by Alec McHail and Wendy Grace as a “type of theorisation”; following on, they say, “Foucault is a philosopher who does philosophy as an interrogative *practice* rather than as a search for essentials.”¹⁴ Foucault’s one imposing influence, however, is Nietzsche, and the genealogical argument of Foucault’s position has been drawn largely from his writings. Genealogy opposes itself to traditional historical methods whose aim is to “record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality.”¹⁵ It is a sort of anti-thesis that

¹³ The location of the author has shifted from the authorial-self to the self-referential place of the reader. This suggests that meaning is transferred from ‘within’ the text to ‘outside’ the text. See “What is an Author,” in *The Foucault Reader* 101-121.

¹⁴ A. McHoul and W. Grace, *A Foucault Primer* (London: UCL, 1995) viii.

surreptitiously appropriates established sets of rules that impose direction and takes them along another route: “Genealogy does not oppose itself to history as the lofty and profound gaze of the philosopher might compare to the molelike perspective of the scholar; on the contrary, it rejects the meta-historical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies. It opposes itself to the search for ‘origins’” (*Language, Counter* 140).

In the traditional sense of the term, genealogy represents the tracing of family origins. Foucault, however, takes a different direction with genealogy and reformulates its basis so that it becomes a study of the play of forces in social spaces. According to Foucault the task of the genealogist is to study the interpretation of interpretations which, in turn, displace the primacy of origins. There are many lessons to be learnt from this radical shift of perspective. As Dreyfus and Rabinow argue, “Foucault is interested in how both scientific objectivity and subjective intentions emerge together in a space set up not by individuals but by social practices” (*Beyond Structuralism* 108).

What then, is the relation of Foucault to Nietzsche with regard to spatiality? Nietzsche’s *On The Genealogy of Morals* examines the moral order of Western society and destabilises inherited and revered values by demonstrating its contingency and relation to other things.¹⁶ His genealogy of morals suggests that morals have an ignoble birth, they are born of ‘Man’ and not of God, and are produced through time and space, rather than existing from all time as part of a transcendent order.¹⁷ Nietzsche’s philosophy is a dramatic shift from preceding notions of thought, and his reasoned ethics

¹⁵ M. Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *The Foucault Reader* 76.

¹⁶ Foucault’s and Nietzsche’s studies are really concerned with the nature of language. Nietzsche is concerned with representation, aesthetics and surface phenomena linked to an inexhaustible network of interpretation. Foucault mirrors this: “There is nothing absolutely primary to interpret because, at bottom, everything is already interpretation. Each sign is in itself not the thing that presents itself to interpretation, but the interpretation of other signs.” M. Foucault, “Nietzsche, Freud, Marx” cited in D. F. Krell, *Exceedingly Nietzsche* (London: Routledge, 1988) 133. Foucault is stressing the textual quality of the sign as representation. History is converted from the systematic account of natural phenomena represented by language to a series of events designated by language and thrown into the forefront of each episteme.

¹⁷ Nietzsche’s effect upon later debate is discussed by A. Schrift, *Nietzsche’s French Legacy: A Genealogy of Poststructuralism* (London: Routledge, 1995).

are often considered nihilistic and empty.¹⁸ Most pertinently, Nietzsche's ethics include a powerful spatial paradox in the suggestion that corporeal form and ambiguity replace a metaphysical certainty. However, Nietzsche's attempt to supplant humanity's gaze on God with a transference onto the self suggests that responsibility is taken for one's own place in time and space.¹⁹ This kind of self-conscious historicism means that origin inhabits a cultural place and not a transcendent space. It also means that social, political and economic developments are the responsibility of humanity and not a part of an essentialist predeterminism. In a more elaborate enquiry a theological and political debate would need to be considered, but the theoretical thread I am drawing here relates only to space: Nietzsche spatialises the sonority of being and links existence to the cultural spaces that define and deflect nature, so that the argument makes identity variational and constitutive rather than essential or ascendant. Yet, most of all, his concepts leave a brooding spatial metaphor for the representation of the modern condition: the apocalyptic space delineated by Nietzsche places the subject in a provisional shelter that shifts with time and legislation. The obvious outcome is that rather than housing the subject, Nietzsche provides the metaphoric building bricks, willing us to build the house.

The image of the subject building its own moral order is represented in the *Genealogy*. Nietzsche asks:

Under what conditions does man devise these value judgements good and evil: *and what value do they themselves possess?* Have they hitherto hindered or furthered human prosperity? Are they a sign of distress, or impoverishment, of the degeneration of life? Or is there revealed in them, on the contrary, the plenitude, force and will of life, its courage, certainty, future?²⁰

These questions are merely a rhetorical ploy by Nietzsche, as is shown by the very next thing he does, being to follow through the questions with a metaphoric enquiry. However, Foucault takes up the

¹⁸ In a chapter entitled "Limitations on Genealogy I: Nietzsche on Subjectivity and Power," Jeffrey Minson offers an stimulating critical debate on the value of Nietzsche's philosophy. In *Genealogies of Morals* (London: Macmillan, 1985) 62-78.

¹⁹ It can be argued that the moral order to which people adhere, only to have it replaced with the certainty of a cultural space, is a negative axiom.

²⁰ F. Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy of Morals*, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. and ed. W. Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1992) 453.

gauntlet and goes some way to answering these questions by removing the metaphoric ambiguity they imply. He locates the concrete reality of Nietzsche's words in discipline, surveillance, and society. He thereby takes Nietzsche at his word and translates his social ethics into the spaces alluded to by Nietzsche's genealogy. I have elucidated the means by which he does this elsewhere;²¹ for the purposes of this study, I explore the mesh of symbiotic exchange in order to understand the structure of space as a cultural and literary "form of relations among sites" ("Spaces" 24). As Ross King writes, "Space, not time, is the medium of modernity, and Nietzsche hurls us back into space – the void, the sea (the 'oceanic feeling'), the path on which we would will ourselves to travel eternally (even time can only be represented spatially), distance."²²

Foucault is firmly linked to Nietzsche as one who disrupts an essentialist or metaphysical order. Nietzsche sets the groundwork for Foucault by problematising entrenched moral value systems and clears a space to allow transformative practices to emerge. However, their relation to one another diverges again when it is recalled that it is not enough to "translate what one knows", nor is it enough "to add a statement to a pre-existing series of statements" – it is important to set one's sights on a "transformation in practice" (*Archaeology* 209). Subsequently, Foucault works through Nietzsche's genealogy and reaches a practical end in which actual political technologies, though offered as ethically sound, are interpreted as devices for behaviour. He takes the Nietzschean terms of good and evil and replaces them with words that upset the moral order even further; words such as "normalisation" and "subversion" which compel us to question behaviour and their *habitations*: Bentham's *Panopticon*, the operative principles of the nineteenth-century *workhouse*, carceral *institutions*, and the practice of sex in *brothels*, are all sites for delineating or containing behaviour, put to use by Foucault as spaces for exploring the underlying structure for forging and stabilising representations of good and evil.

²¹ E. Ball, "Technologies of the Self", in K. Simms (ed.) *Ethics and the Subject* (Critical Studies 8) (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1997) 139-146.

²² R. King, *Emancipating Space* (London: Guildford, 1996) 43.

All in all, the place where knowledge occurs is the dynamic idea at play here: it brings together Nietzsche's philosophy and metaphor, and Foucault's empirical, technical, and practical study of space. It opens up further places where Nietzsche's genealogy alludes to the utopian definition of heterotopia, while Foucault's genealogy implies a definition of heterotopia as real space. It is perhaps because Foucault has succeeded in bringing together not just multiple spaces, but his and Nietzsche's separate formulations, that new spaces come about, and if this is so Nietzsche's philosophical reflection on ethics has been translated into a modern interrogation of ethics.

2.3 Ethical space

McHoul and Grace call Foucault's field of ethics "the relation of the self to itself" (*Primer* 119). His history of ethics is essentially a mode of self-formation, a practice of liberty, "in which the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precept he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal. Subsequently, this requires him to act upon himself, to monitor, test, improve, and transform himself."²³ Therefore, Foucault's theoretical position regarding space centres very much on the subject and its own fashioning processes. The archaeological and genealogical 'outer' spaces shift to the space within. This does not mean that Foucault also shifts his interest to the psychic study of the subject: the crucial mark is that social relations forged with others come from the inner practices performed on the self and, therefore, the links with social spaces are retained.²⁴ The main point is that Foucault effects an ethics which calls for greater personal responsibility and engagement.

²³ M. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, vol. 2. Trans. R. Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986) 28.

²⁴ This is Foucault's technology of the self. An applied methodology of this theory can be found in Philip Goldstein's book *Styles of Cultural Activism*, in a chapter entitled "Althusser, Foucault, and Affirmative History" (Newark: Delaware UP, 1994) 32-44. See also my "Technologies of the Self," in which Nietzsche's genealogical analysis is linked to Foucault's discussion of language and the discursive events that take place in the clinical environment of Freud's "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria". The argument goes some way towards addressing the act of resistance in silence and the technologies that the self can competently put into practice. It argues that the *cogito*, as the founding act of reason, is a linguistic event that can be disrupted.

It is interesting to note that both Kristeva's and Foucault's enquiries include a scrutiny of ethics contingent upon historical contiguity and circumstance opening up boundaries in a bid to free the alienated subject from social (dis)approval. This is why, almost instinctively, ethics is inscribed into their theories of space. More deliberately, though, they propose a reformulation of the subject operating outside the law and inside 'subjective' laws as an alternative to traditional ethics. What both theorists are supposing is that the internal law of the subject comes before the traditional external laws of force, so that the subject creates its own self-policing strategies. Gary Gutting argues that Foucault's philosophy "of ethics as proposing styles of life is one of the most forceful and provocative directions of Foucault's later life,"²⁵ while Kelly Oliver writes that "Kristeva's models for ethics ... are all alternatives to juridical models of ethics, which presuppose autonomous subjects who relate to each other through the force of law."²⁶ However, having covered much of Kristeva's theoretical position earlier, suffice it here to say that Kristeva's texts engage in the practice of delimiting boundaries as an ethical imperative, in much the same way as Foucault's do.

The conceptual grid composed by differentiation and motility includes outer and inner space, spaces of force and personal improvement, and an infinite relation between events that are responsible for composing a powerful network of alliances, the effectiveness of which cannot be underestimated. This is why Foucault's definition of heterotopic space is an important choice for reading literature: it is socially constructed, but retains the influence of culture by delimiting prescriptive boundaries of invention, and it preserves an interest in the personal. The homogeneity and reductiveness that is sometimes effected by excluding the author is eliminated by a heterotopic reading as it serves to highlight the subject in space to retain the positionality and location of the reader, while demonstrating the personal political activism involved in writing.

²⁵ G. Gutting, *Foucault* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994) 123.

²⁶ Oliver, "Introduction," in Oliver, *Ethics*, 17.

3. The theory of space as heterotopia

In contrast to space as *chora* (which disrupts locations and boundaries as a repository of uncontained forces), the heterotopia reflects the messy encounter of locations and boundaries counteracting one another. Heterotopias can develop through chance,²⁷ as peripheral spaces, or through deliberation, as central spaces. How they develop is outside the field of certainty, but what is unequivocal is that there is a discourse to describe them. The heterotopia is both real and utopian and is specifically formulated around six principles. In “Of Other Spaces” Foucault develops his ideas leading on from *The Order of Things* and sets out a cumulative argument in which the heterotopia is succinctly described:

- The heterotopia’s first trait is that it is a constant of every culture, and therefore, it is a universal entity. Although not one universal form of heterotopia can be found, what is uniform is the way in which it functions as a space of crisis or deviation. It is an anterior space that challenges the power of the established space in society. The practical example that Foucault offers is the prison, or the honeymoon for newlyweds; in these spaces a certain performance *outside* of ‘normal’ spaces takes place.
- The second trait points out that the heterotopia can function in different ways, being a principle for the transmutation of space. For this Foucault offers the example of the cemetery – performing the same function, but altering in meaning according to spatial paradigms and cultural needs.
- The third trait is the heterotopia’s multiplicity, or space within a space, and Foucault cites the garden or the theatre as an example.

²⁷ Foucault is interested in “what space of order knowledge was constituted”, and he calls it the space which “orders the conditions of possibility ... the *space* of knowledge which have given rise to the diverse forms of empirical silence” (xxii). The space of knowledge enables an assessment of Foucault’s central position, as the term serves to distinguish him from other old and new historians alike, from traditional statements and enabling him to introduce a more spatialised reasoning in which space becomes an event. It is not by accident, therefore, that he chooses to make the event central to his historical and cultural methodology. The event enables him to distance himself comprehensively from Marxism and vague notions of continuity, consciousness, and linearism. Instead, history is random, and it is precisely “the singular randomness of events” that enables him to introduce chance into his theory of knowledge. “Language, Counter” in *Nietzsche* 139-164. See also Jean-François Lyotard, *Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event* (New York: Columbia UP, 1988).

- The fourth trait is that space is linked to time; for this Foucault offers a museum as a space containing time.
- The fifth trait is that space is exclusive. Gender, class, sexuality, social and civil lifestyle are all included in this trait, which explains why certain spaces function to meet particular needs; the church and sauna are such examples.
- Sixthly and lastly, spaces function and support each another. Brothels and colonies, although “extreme types of heterotopia” (“Spaces” 27) are a good example of the trait that functions in polarity to the spaces that remain.

The six principles are indicative of a theory which is compounded by relations of sites and power: like a bumpy terrain heterotopic space is irregular, speculative, and multi-faceted, shifting with time and place. Although the six principles all have echoes of social construction meaning that space is a difficult territory to negotiate, the locating of traits nevertheless offers a way of systematising space. Furthermore, the definition of space in these terms allows space to be described:

We might imagine a sort of systematic description – I do not say a science because the term is too galvanised now – that would, in a given society, take as its object the study, analysis, description, and ‘reading’ (as some like to say nowadays) of these different spaces, of these other places. As a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live, this description could be called heterotopology (24).

Foucault seriously confronts possibilities for naming heterotopic contours through the systematic descriptions of analysis, description, and reading. As he observes, this type of investigation is different from science, which might consider how a thing came to be: rather, it starts further down the line as a practice in reading the signs of the times.

4 Conclusion

The heterotopia stands as an important alternative option to a systematic description of space; moreover, it offers a reading of society, while at the same time contributing to the displacement of dominant discourses. The Foucauldian construction of “the space of emplacement” (“Spaces” 22)

enables the sort of reading which undertakes to show the network of systems that intermesh and combine to 'emplace' new discursive verbal structures; the spaces in themselves are part of the epistemic space of the time. With this in mind, a reading of the poems and essays of Audre Lorde and her persistent endeavour to subvert and displace the meaning of established verbal structures can be made, and this will be the task of Chapters Six and Seven below. Lorde's texts deal with her relation to white, patriarchal America; while Foucault's heterotopic space is, similarly, a way of dealing with the relational and constitutive social processes that occur in space and time. For example, his decision in *The Order of Things* to choose the far-away continent of China as an example of 'otherness' to Westernism points to that which is distant, chimerical, and utopian; but more significantly, it is a space that is exotic and at the same time real.²⁸

This means that the heterotopia enables an examination of the relation among things which serves to illuminate how spaces are utilised in culture as structures of power; this can be used as an effective methodological tool for reading women's writing and for viewing relations among often contrasting sites. For instance, Lorde works with the tensions of an Afro-American upbringing and education and shows how they are interdependent and reflect each other. Mirroring of tensions is, interestingly, also described by Foucault, who employs the metaphor of a mirror to suggest that the heterotopia is a combination of real space and utopian space:

In every Civilisation, real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call

²⁸ Edward Said in *Orientalism* gives valuable insight into the reality and myth attached to the Orient. In his extraordinary account of the West's connection with and perception of the East he writes:

The increasing influence of travel literature, imaginary utopias, moral voyages, and scientific reporting brought the Orient into sharper and more extended focus.... [A] more knowledgeable attitude towards the alien and exotic was abetted not only by travellers and explorers but also by historians for whom European experience could profitably be compared with other, as well as older, civilisations.

In *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987) 117.

them, by way of contrast to utopia, heterotopias. I believe that between utopias and these quite other sites, these heterotopias, there might be a sort of mixed, joint experience, which would be the mirror. The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place... The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal ("Spaces" 24).

Most importantly for what is being argued here, the heterotopia is both a real space and a utopian space; but because the 'nowhere' space is underscored by a real space, it means that even as a utopian ideal it can be located. Moreover, it suggests that standards can be set out in which links between the social and the symbolic, the real and the imagined, the actual and the textual can be seen notably to interact with the other.²⁹

As we shall see in Chapter Six, Lorde's texts mirror something which is both real and utopian. She links a real space and a utopian space simply because her experience does not reflect the 'rule' of her society and strives to validate her unique position in her writings. In a sense, Lorde is writing the heterotopia *par excellence*: refusing the dictates of a dominant culture which prescribes invisibility, she delineates a site that is linked to but not superimposed by the other. This being the case, she may be considered a writer who formulates her own ethics – as one who pushes the boundaries of homogenised space to emerge as different within it.

Examining Lorde's work from a site of relations provides the means to examine her work as a real event in a narrative space where writer and culture come together. Heterotopia's methodology offers, therefore, specific examples of how the breaches and cracks in the edifices of cultural spaces might be perceived from where the disruptive voice breaks through. Nevertheless, although theorisation of the heterotopia accommodates a reading of Lorde, it is impossible to ignore the tricky

²⁹ Foucault's concern is to study the forces which human beings are born into and from which problems emerge. His "general principle is that every form is a compound of relations between forces." See G. Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. S. Hand (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1990) 124. The forces in a human life enter into the forces of the given historical period. As a result of this compound of forces Foucault traverses an era interrupted by philology, biology, trade and wealth (*Archaeology* 207). In so far as conventional discourses place gender identity at the core of personal identity, resistance to such forces immediately becomes a gender issue (although language necessarily has a problematic relation to such resistance, since language inescapably inscribes and engenders the subject).

relationship feminism has with Foucault which is widely charted for purposes that seek both to include and expel his ideas from ongoing feminist debate.³⁰ However, the aim here is a straightforward endeavour which makes use of Foucault's comprehension of space in order to construct a mode of reading. Therefore, a causal relation between Foucault and feminist positions is not being sought, nor am I maintaining that there is a contest between the two whereby one position prevails over the other.³¹ Rather it is being argued that the feminist texts of Lorde can be explained in the light of the traits that constitute heterotopic space. Consequently, the final two chapters will analyse Lorde's work in the context of a study of utopian space and real space, in the forms of Exotic/Familiar space and Body space respectively.

³⁰ In her essay "Practices of Freedom," Susan Bordo debates Foucault's relevance to feminism and weighs up the idea of a feminist libertarian practice; the essay, however, falls short of illustrating a methodology or drawing any clear-cut conclusions. In *Up Against Foucault: Explorations of some tensions between Foucault and Feminism*, ed. C. Ramazanoglu (London: Routledge, 1993) 51-73.

³¹ For a fuller discussion of the relationship between Foucault and feminism, see Vikki Bell's *Interrogating Incest: Feminism, Foucault, and the Law* (London: Routledge, 1993) 14-56.

Chapter Three

Melancholic Space

"Melancholia, melancholia, it rides me like a bucking mare" (Djuna Barnes)

1. An introduction to Kristeva's melancholy as semiotic

This chapter will show how Kristeva takes the established constructions of melancholy from the classical period and Freudian tradition and overlays it with a psychoanalytic impression of her own. Her main contribution is to set up the supposition that melancholia is firmly placed in the semiotic regions of language as "an unnameable, supreme good ... something unrepresentable, that perhaps only devouring might represent, or an *invocation* might point out, but no word would signify" (*Black Sun* 13), but then goes on to argue that, in fact, a language, and indeed a theory of reading, can locate the pre-verbal aspect of language. She formulates her position by claiming that melancholy is an example of "the communicable marks of an affective reality, present, palpable to the reader" (*Black Sun* 6). Thus it will be argued that the notion of melancholy takes on an important role as it is employed in a theory of reading of literature. For Kristeva, the translation of loss into rhetoric and muteness into verbal construction is the dramatic device used to explore the pathology of melancholy with the purpose of capturing the unnameable. For the purposes of this chapter, melancholy will be examined in *Nightwood* as a device to resist the normative structures of Barnes' social context and literary inheritance.

1.2 A classical understanding of melancholy as a symbolic indication of something else

Reflecting on the philosophical perceptions of melancholy, we recognise the root of its development in the definitions of classical thought. Melancholy is modified and developed from Hippocrates' notion of the four humours, where it is understood as a pathological affliction.¹ What is striking, however, is melancholy's shift from pathology to nature and its literary and rhetorical composition elaborated by Homer.² The first melancholy hero is portrayed in the *Iliad* as the mythical "godlike" (53) Achilles, who "broke in tears, and quickly drew far away from his companions" (58); he represents a figure constituting the duality of divine will and human causation and the cycle of everyday suffering and death.

Also attributed to the melancholic is the notion of dementia and artistic development whereby the latter construction becomes a substitute for the former's 'loss' of faculties. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato writes: "This at least is worth pointing out, that the men of old who gave things their names saw no disgrace or reproach in madness; otherwise they would not have connected it with the name of the noblest of all arts, the art of discerning the future, and called it the *mantic* art."³ Plato is not necessarily making a link between madness and melancholy (although in the Greek philosophical and literary tradition melancholy was connected with medical connotations of madness); rather he is pointing out the similarity between artistic endeavour and humoral equilibrium.

Aristotle's reflection on Plato, however, makes the frank connection. In Problem XXXI he asks, "Why is it that all those who have become eminent in philosophy or politics or poetry or the arts are clearly melancholics, and some of them to such an extent as to be affected by diseases caused by black bile?"⁴ In the *Republic* there is no reason to doubt Plato's will to connect between melancholy

¹ For melancholia and its history in art and philosophy see the work by R. Klibansky and E. Panofsky, *Saturn and Melancholy* (London: Nelson, 1964).

² Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. M. Hammond (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987).

³ Plato, *Phaedrus and Letters VII - VIII*, ed. E. Radice (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) 47.

⁴ Aristotle, "Problemata," *The Works of Aristotle*, ed. W. D. Ross, trans E. S. Forster (Oxford, 1927) VII 953a.

moral unfitnes; “a man becomes a tyrant when, whether by nature or by manner of life, or both, he is a drunkard, a voluptuary and a melancholic.”⁵ These observations describe melancholy as a passion generating immoderation and inebriation. Nevertheless, there is the added suggestion that if a balance is struck, melancholy is a positive component for any inspirational temperament. Thus, in the tradition of Greek philosophy, melancholy is like wine in its effects: too much is stupefying, but in small amounts it is enlivening. The ability to hold in equipoise one’s appetite, desire, or feelings of sadness, may account for a moment of portentous creativity: as Aristotle writes, “Those in whom the excessive heat dies down to a mean temperature are atrabilious, but they are cleverer and less eccentric and in many respects superior to others either in mental accomplishments or in the arts or in public life” (*Works* VII 954a).⁶ Leaving aside the medical versions of melancholy and its physiological and psychological associations, in the fine balance required to sustain creativity, melancholy is postulated as a condition with many positive attributes.

It is the notion of melancholy as a constitutive component in the development of art that interests Kristeva. In the main, this chapter sets out explore the claims Kristeva makes for melancholia as a conveyance of grief which, at the same time, represents a ‘sign’ of something beyond a grieving disposition potentially transmogrifying into art.

Considering that an “*invocation*” of melancholy can be conveyed, the task here is to examine a text of melancholic proportions showing how firstly the semiotic is linked to melancholy and how this, in turn, can be described through the enunciative terms of the semiotic *chora*. Although the *chora* is not unified to any one thing, it does act as a functioning kinetic state that “governs connections between the body, objects, and protagonists” (*Revolution* 27). Therefore, to appreciate, or struggle to appreciate, the complex marriage that the *chora* has with creativity and melancholia, it must be known that the *chora* is connected to melancholia and art, but it is not named as either of those things because the

⁵ Plato, *Republic* LX 573c; cited in Klibansky and Panofsky 17.

⁶ In addition, Freud takes up a similar point and suggests that the melancholic is more discerning: the melancholic displays “a keener eye for the truth than other people who are not melancholic....” “Mourning and

those things because the *chora* 'in-itself' "exists only for and through discourse". The following quotation enables us to make the connections that Kristeva introduces across her narratives:

To posit the existence of a primal object, or even of a Thing, which is to be conveyed through and beyond a completed mourning – isn't that the fantasy of a melancholy theoretician? Certainly the primal object, the 'in-itself' that always remains to be conveyed, the ultimate cause of conveyability, exists only for and through discourse and the already constituted subject. Because what is conveyed is already there, the conveyable can be imagined and posited as in excess and incommensurable. Positing the existence of that other language and even of an other of language, indeed of an outside-of-language, is not necessarily setting up a preserve for metaphysics or theology. The postulate corresponds to a psychic requirement that Western metaphysics and theory have had, perhaps, the good luck and the audacity to represent. That psychic requirement is certainly not universal; Chinese civilisation, for instance, is not a civilization of the conveyability of the thing in itself; it is rather one of sign repetition and variation, that is to say, of transcription. The obsession with the primal object, the object to be conveyed, assumes a certain appropriateness (imperfect, to be sure) to be considered possible between the sign and not the referent but the nonverbal experience of the referent in the interaction with the other (*Black Sun* 66-67).

Kristeva describes melancholia as the longing and search for "the-thing-in-itself". The retreat into the self for the lost object, the loss of appetite and taste for life or language is what best depicts the melancholic who shies away from the linearism and logic of language and becomes a prisoner of the affect and silence. Lacking the filter of language, the melancholic's only way of signifying is by means of "gestures, spasms, or shouts" (15). This shows a manifestation of semiotic tendencies that recede back to the pre-verbal place of language: to the semiotic *chora* "that is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm" (*Revolution* 26).

This is important because it means that the semiotic *chora* represents the place of retreat for the melancholic – through separation from the symbolic – and even more striking is the fact that all literary representations have a melancholic aspect:

Literary creation is that adventure of the body and signs that bears witness to the affect – to sadness as imprint of separation and beginning of the symbol's sway; to the joy as imprint of the triumph that settles me in the universe of artifice and symbol, which I try to harmonise in the best possible way with my experience of reality. But that testimony is produced by literary

creation in a material that is totally different from what constitutes mood, it transposes affect into rhythms, signs, forms, the 'semiotic' and the 'symbolic' become the communicable imprints of an affective reality, perceptible to the reader (*Black Sun* 22).

If all texts are born of the melancholic condition then the melancholic narrative must be, by definition, entrenched in the affective mood; and yet to be fixed by the boundaries of the loquacity of melancholy is anathema, as the source of one's pain is an indissoluble silence that is free from all the confines of language and pathology. Therefore, Kristeva must extend a theory of melancholia to include something more: the object of which is – opening up a juncture *between* the limits of non-meaning and meaning – to reveal a space where, potentially, it is a well of agony, but potentially also where the motility of the semiotic *chora* as syntactic and polyphonic disturbance is recognised:

Like a tense link between Thing and Meaning, the unnameable and the proliferation of signs, the silent affect and the ideality that designates and goes beyond it, the *imaginary* is neither the objective description that will reach its highest point in science nor theological idealism that will be satisfied with reaching the symbolic uniqueness of a beyond. The experience of *nameable melancholia* opens up the space of a necessarily heterogeneous subjectivity, torn between the two co-necessary and co-present centres of opacity and ideal. The opacity of things, like that of the body untenanted by meaning – a repressed body, bent on suicide – is conveyed to the work's meaning, which asserts itself as at the same time absolute and corrupt, untenable, impossible, to be done all over again. A subtle alchemy of signs then compels recognition – musicalisation of signifiers, polyphony of lexemes, dislocation of lexical, syntactic, and narrative units – and this is *immediately* experienced as a psychic transformation of the speaking being between the two limits of nonmeaning and meaning, Satan and God, Fall and Resurrection (*Black Sun* 101).

Instead of engaging in a critique of the boundaries which have split meaning from non-meaning, Satan from God, and hell from heaven, Kristeva theorises both melancholy and the enunciative semiotic *chora* as a pre-linguistic source of poetic production.⁷ Due to the specific quality of this, a distinctive theoretical position emerges.

⁷ Linda Ruth Williams' interrogation of Kristeva's work on the connection of the child with its mother offers a good example of the ways in which Kristeva's work has found a focus on the heterogeneity on meaning and signification:

1.3 Kristeva's recasting of the melancholy condition

Although melancholia was traditionally understood to be a sanguine, debilitating condition that lacked order or logic, it authored its own rationalism by signifying forms of behaviour that were classed as the condition of humoral equilibrium, and in many ways Kristeva does not deviate from this Classical position. The difference, however, is that melancholy is much more than the symbolic site of language in which objects are named; Kristeva goes so far as to say that it is only through the semiotic that melancholia can be articulated: "through melody, rhythm, semantic polyvalency" (14). This means that *Black Sun* establishes a departure from the earlier work of *Revolution* at which place the semiotic always comes under the governance of the symbolic if it is to be named. In her later work, Kristeva formulates a more definitive position for the semiotic as a declarative motility. For example, Nerval's poem "El Desdichado" in *Black Sun* is articulated through the semiotic, regulated by rhythm, rhyme and alliteration to stress networks of intensities, sounds and significancies. Instead of the semiotic sharing univocal information *through* the symbolic, the semiotic communicates through the affect, so that, in Kristevan terms, abject replaces object. Moreover, the semiotic through art performs a reparative function in which melancholy is transposed into rhythms, evocations, and composition, so that the sick person finds some sort of creative healing through art.

The main departure in the relationship between the symbolic and the semiotic in *Black Sun* is that the latter is more closely linked to the body, and more specifically, the *psychotic, neurotic* affect; this means that the semiotic is no longer moored only to language – it is described in a tri-part way so that it is not only duplicitous, but triplicitous. This does not mean that the semiotic is not dependent on language – on the contrary, that will always remain – but whereas the semiotic was described through

[Kristeva] theorises the pre-Oedipal (anterior to the 'mirror stage') as an alternative poetic-linguistic source, reworked as what she calls the 'semiotic'. She uses this term to identify the phase of mother-infant fusion characterised by *jouissance* and polymorphous perversity, before the child enters the Symbolic, and before it can conceive of law or taboo (Kristeva also refers to this space as the *chora*). The rhythmic, heterogeneous impulses of the infant's bodily rhythms, which have free play in this moment prior to the intrusion of the Symbolic, suggest a way of understanding what is at stake, not just in poetic language and avant-garde communication, but in ways in which speech breaks down at moments of adult crises, as well as a more generalised unconscious strain of discourse itself.

(In *Critical Desire: Psychoanalysis and the Literary Subject* (London: Arnold, 1995) 118-119.)

the symbolic, in *Black Sun* the semiotic is linked to the melancholic which, in turn, is objectified through the symbolic functions of language, so that the semiotic is a transference of provisional articulation that makes its way as anterior space through the subject to the interpretative skills of the analyst. The link between melancholy and semiology is made clear by Kristeva when she maintains that semiology is the corollary of melancholia:

Rather than seek the meaning of despair (it is either obvious or metaphysical), let us acknowledge that there is only meaning in despair.... Semiology, concerned as it is with the zero degree of symbolism, is unavoidably led to ponder over not only the amatory state but its corollary as well, melancholia; at the same time it observes that if there is not writing other than the amorous, there is not imagination that is not, overtly or secretly, melancholy (*Black Sun* 6).

Further to this interpretation, Kristeva offers a number of other characteristics that constitute melancholia: it is likened to language with its own characteristic textual traits, it is a crisis of subjectivity, a metaphor, a rhetorical performative device, and finally, it is the basis of all creativity. It would seem that melancholy pervades all things, which makes Kristeva's claims imprecise and questionable. However, she is making the point that art and despair should be envisioned in a much wider context so that they are viewed as a natural phenomenon beyond the confines of their specific arenas: "Are religion or mania, daughter of paranoia, the only counterbalances to despair? Artistic creation integrates and expends them. Works of art thus lead us to establish relations with ourselves and others that are less destructive, more soothing" (188). Central to Kristeva's argument is the idea that melancholia is a shared experience which is indiscriminate and commonplace.

Although the role of the analyst is to open the space of the unnameable, Kristeva does not use a language that might be more suited to a clinical space in which to describe depression; she is not so much concerned with extreme manifestations of melancholia, as much as with exploring its comprehensiveness generally. This is to make melancholy a general human trait, identifying a shared susceptibility. In addition, by arranging the melancholic model in the way she does, melancholy connects with language so that space is the specification of creativity and crisis in terms of

enunciation and communication. The implication is that, since melancholy is a universal modality of experience, aesthetic activity (of even the most mediocre kind) is within the reach of everyone who retreats into the semiotic space. Thus, melancholy acts as a comprehensive example of how the semiotic inscribes itself in the symbolic, as well as locating the space of a “pre-sign” which is potentially a creative space.

Melancholy produces many contortions of itself and the range of behaviour or artistic enterprise has immense proportion. Nevertheless, it is generally agreed that the melancholic person names absence through a desire to recover that which is lost: by way of this process the subject mourns the loss that it cannot symbolise in the absent space, as a result of which metaphor or artistic activity is used to make sense of loss, and the absent non-neutral. In this sense, the suffering becomes symbolised and turns the loss which exists beyond linguistic boundaries into an object that can sustain comprehension. As John Lechte writes, “the artist tends towards the melancholic pole of the psychological spectrum.”⁸ The melancholic space that one might assume indicates loss, becomes through this conversion a space that nurtures artistic productivity. Indeed, the pre-linguistic status of melancholia is employed by Kristeva as an example to show how its conversion into words enables us to view a writing beyond the constraints of symbolic language. Thus, melancholy is as much an activity with words as it is, in itself, an experience of loss.

3. The semiotic imprint in *Nightwood*

Nightwood is a story about the inner psyches of those who exist in the already highly inverted worlds of the transvestite, homosexual, actor, and impostor. Although the date 1927 is mentioned, it is a novel that does not rely on any exteriority defining position such as place, institution or time, rather it mentions these only in oblique passing and instead focuses on the intense feelings of loss. The story concentrates on four main characters who meet at different points of circus life: Baron Felix Volkbein, Dr Matthew O'Connor and Nora Flood at a party of circus artists; and Nora, Robin Vote

⁸ J. Lechte, “Art, Love, and Melancholy,” in Fletcher 35.

and Matthew during a show. The story follows the entwined lives of the characters: Felix's marriage to Robin, her love affair with Nora, and Matthew's involvement with all three. Matthew's perceptions mainly oversee the story in which he acts as part narrator and part sage. *Nightwood* focuses on both Nora's and Felix's encounter with the somnambulist Robin and the subsequent pain of separation when the relationships fail. The togetherness of the couples each begets three paragraphs of description, while the rest of the book explores the loss. Other incidental characters within the novel are Jenny Petherbridge, an amalgam of borrowed features and traits stolen from others, and Guido, the "mentally deficient, and emotionally excessive" (154-155) child of Robin and Felix.

The story juggles with many metaphysical themes such as source, genealogy, God, and authenticity. It is, however, highly unrealistic in its content and prefers to explore the longing for a past or a future while ignoring the present. In fact, the notion of trace plays a central role where both Felix and Nora spend their time "looking for traces of Robin" (92). Robin wears clothes from a past world; she is a Byzantine figure who in the second chapter of the book wanders into Felix's life and bears him a child before abruptly leaving with only her "unpeopled thoughts" (72). Chapter Three explores the dream sequences of Nora which helps further to drive the central notion of the book's absorption with the world of the nightwood⁹ and its transcendent quality. Chapter Four introduces Jenny Petherbridge, the "dealer in the second-hand" who collects Robin (103) in her search for "other people's facts" (101). It is Nora's dream of her grandmother that makes her consult the doctor in Chapter Five. The dramatic narrative scheme reconstructs his perceptions of the night in which words are spoken in a dream sequence – ideas trigger ideas, night is privileged over day, and the following warning is ushered – "The Night, 'Beware of that dark door!'" (119). Felix and Guido's story is taken up again in Chapter Six where Felix does the things that Matthew said he would in the second chapter: "Felix drank heavily now" (175). They enter into a conversation about time, and in the same

⁹ Barnes informed Hank O'Neil, one of her friends, that the name for *Nightwood* came from Blake's poem "Tyger tyger, burning bright in the forests of the night..." In H. O'Neil, *Life is painful, nasty and short ... in my case it has only been painful and nasty* (New York: Paragon House, 1990) 104. Barnes also explained to Emily Coleman in a letter, dated 23 June 1935, that the title *Nightwood* "makes it sound like night-shade, poison and night and forest, and tough, in the meaty sense". Also, the second part of the novel's title "Wood" is the surname of her former partner on whom Robin is based.

way as the night, it is inverted because its “‘depraved’ generation” (168) is out of synch with time. In this chapter time and space converge into each other so that no-one knows “where the tree falls” when it is unobserved. Chapter Seven is taken up with Matthew’s drunken discourse and his own debilitation brought on from his friendship with Nora. The final, and easily the most disturbing chapter, shifts from France to America and describes the re-union with Nora and Robin, with the latter’s possessed spirit transforming into a bestial form before the decayed altar of Nora’s old family chapel where she submits herself at the feet of Nora, defeated and dog-like. In all of the relationships that take place, each one has a marked crippling effect on the other. Essentially, the book is part love story, but it inverts love and reveals the blackest aspects of union so that the greatest configuration of melancholy comes about. However, its poetic quality and brilliant phrasing procures a beauty that saves it from being a depressing or cruel story. Its melancholic content touches a loss that is neither unusual nor abnormal.

For Kristeva, the symbolic work of artistic creation can form a restorative strategy for acknowledging loss. But for her it is in the semiotic elements of language (inflection, tone, pace, silence, whispering ...) that traces of unacknowledged, or unsymbolised, loss can be recognised. *Nightwood* is a novel that is as much a testimony to absence and loss as it is one to presence. The novel opens with an attribution to God as the source of creation who encounters the reproach of the created. The tension that arises between an absent God and a self-willed people is part of a multi-layered allegory of the primary processes of sorrow and displacement that breathes through the book. A sense of longing for an authentic and original source is an overriding theme and is taken up with the introduction of each character in turn. Guido starts off the novel as the “outcast jew” who, denying his true lineage, is “blasphemed and lonely” (14) and finds that he must “inhabit a world whose constituents, being alien, force the mind to succumb to an imaginary populace” (14). The fragments of a past having the power continually to haunt and mimic the present shifts from dangerous dissimulation to artistry when the acquaintance with Dr Matthew O’Connor is made with a

largely artisan crowd at the circus after-party. Taking the part of host, he casts his arm around the room and observes:

‘We may all be nature’s noblemen,’ ... and the mention of a nobleman make Felix feel happier the instant he caught the word, though what followed left him in some doubt, ‘but think of the stories that do not amount to much! That is, that are forgotten in spite of all man remembers (unless he remembers himself) merely because they befell him without distinction of office to title – that’s what we call legend and it’s the best a poor man may do with his fate; the other’, he wavered his arm, ‘we call history, the best the high and mighty can do with theirs. Legend is unexpurgated, but history, because of its actors, is deflowered’ (30).

O’Connor very much ‘oversees’ *Nightwood*’s plot and brings to the reader’s attention its duplicitous design in which both story and characterisation identify their own invention and ostentation in a real world. To O’Connor, because everything in life is equivocal and potentially heroic or damning, it is also the stuff of storytelling, and it is this that makes him the semiotic artist *extraordinaire*: he orates with epigrammatic economy various philosophies and Western ideas that have settled in the human psyche and weaves them with inflection and tone into the observed lives of those around him in such a way that no-one could call him a total fraud. In fact to lie is to create and to make the mundane great; in this sense, *Nightwood* is very much influenced by the Joycean notion of modernism. O’Connor’s practised imposture and collusion (he refers to “the power of the charlatan”) points always to a certain truism or ideality. In this sense, *Nightwood* is an exceptional novel: it expresses the artfulness of its own design while making fiction truer than life itself.

Not only do the characters disqualify themselves from ‘the truth’ (though not the fiction of hyperbolic truth¹⁰); the book also draws attention to its own artifice with the disclosure, “the mechanics of machination were indeed out of control and were simplifying themselves back to their origin” (58). *Nightwood*’s deliberate use of modernist techniques questions the certainties that

¹⁰ The grotesque hyperbole of the caricatured figure who signifies an inflated ‘type’ is used as a technique to describe the Doctor’s sexuality: “His hands (which he always carried like a dog who is walking on his hind legs) seemed to be holding his attention, then he said, raising his large melancholy eyes with the bright twinkle that often came into them: ‘Why is it that whenever I hear music I think I’m a bride?’” *Nightwood* 55.

support the many modes of narrative organisation¹¹: a standard realist flow of prose is replaced by fragmented utterance and dislocation. It is precisely this violent rejection of symbolic composition that opens up the book to the rhythm and intonation of the semiotic. But the sense of ease with which one might return to the place of origin is fraught and as much a part of ‘invention’ as the mechanisation that hold ideas together. This is nowhere more manifest than in the depiction of Robin Vote who is described as the perennial lost figure seeking a return to the “way back” (64).

3.1 Literature as semiotic imprint

If we are willing to embark upon the literary adventure that the resistant novel offers, we can retrace the semiotic imprint of the text’s production. In *Black Sun*, Kristeva argues that literature bears witness to the melancholic that is inscribed in the text as a creative and semiotic imprint: “Literary creation is that adventure of the body and signs that bears witness to the affect – to sadness as imprint of separation and beginning of the symbol’s sway; to joy as imprint of the triumph that settles me in the universe of artifice and symbol” (22). We can glimpse here the broad conjunction between melancholy and writing – a writing that has its roots in separation. Thus the Kristevan model of melancholy takes the form of a conflict model, or at the least, a subject/object polarisation.¹² The subject recognises its loss and makes every attempt to recover the unifying structures of self and other by reprocessing the lost object in art and symbol. However, when loss is recovered through the symbolic, hegemony follows along with the rules of language. The influence of the father is only kept at bay when the “denial of the signifier is shored up by a denial of the father’s function” (*Black Sun* 44).

¹¹ J. B. Scott suggests that “Barnes’ themes have consistently taken the modern world to task” (*Djuna Barnes* (Boston: Twayne, 1976) 141).

¹² Carol Pateman in her essay “The Sexual Contract” examines the importance of working with such a ‘conflict model’, and argues: “The meaning of the ‘individual’ remains intact only so long as the dichotomies between natural/civil, private/public, women/individual – and sex/gender – remain intact.... For feminists to argue for the elimination of nature, biology, or sex in favour of the ‘individual’ is to play the modern patriarchal game and to join in a much wider onslaught on nature within and beyond the boundaries of civil societies.” In *The Woman Question*, ed. M. Evans (London: Sage 2nd ed. 1994) 238. While I would agree that Kristeva presents a conflict model, it is not polarised in the manner Pateman suggests, but the terms of the dichotomy are, rather, more intertextually entwined.

If we take an instance of this in literature, perhaps one of the most profound examples of the denial of the father's function is to be found first and foremost in *King Lear* and the King's rejection of his own fatherly role. When he denies his paternal function by acting out a symbolic *negation* the limits of order and language are reached. In *King Lear* a full awareness of the ability to name that which defies the resources of language is made: in madness "melancholy becomes the secret mainspring of a new rhetoric" (*Black Sun* 224). In addition, as a concept of representation and literary expression, Kristeva's model of melancholy is incorporated into the rhythmical and boundless semiotic, and the structured, organisational symbolic. If we take Lear's encounter on the pitiless heath, tyrannised by the dominant forces of nature, we conceive the microcosmic "little world of man," the fears, and sometimes realities, of one who is confronted by the horror of chaos. Lear is stripped and set loose on a plane where any fundamental foundation is banished by the irregular forces of nature – he no longer governs, but is governed by a foreign, ambiguous abyss. Removed from the civilised structures that constitute concrete measurements, he spins in a vertiginous chaos, where slowly, his mad disorientated mind shifts into another realm beyond family and social structures: it is to witness the disruption of the symbolic by the semiotic, to behold the limit of the nameable. However, as Lear's world falls to pieces, the structures that ordained and named his former world disintegrate to inform a new narrative sequence – one that is freer, rhythmical and without constraint. As a symbol of creative melancholy, Lear translates the semiotic and conveys meaning on an alien land; he discovers the bounty of primal translatability and poetry. His very madness teaches him to speak and interpret in another tongue which releases him from the patterns of kingship and earthly circumscription. I would emphasise, however, that fundamentally the space in which he finds himself augments the catharsis which influences his involvement in the semiotic rhythms of excess, chaos and imagination.¹³

¹³ Kristeva explains this in a footnote to describe the semiotic and symbolic. I quote the second section of this lengthy note as it explains the notion of linguistic and pre-linguistic signs:

We shall distinguish the semiotic (drives and their articulation) from the realm of signification, which is always that of a proposition or judgement, in other words, a realm of *positions*. This positionality, which Husserlian phenomenology orchestrates through the concepts of *doxa*, *position*, and *thesis*, is structured as a break in the signifying process, establishing the

The space on the heath is the main catalyst to Lear's inner change: it is precisely Lear's *positionedness* that leads him to understand the symbolic, and so fathom the semiotic marks outside and within himself. As a result of this positionality Lear identifies with the heath's chaotic and unbridled energy until he is able to distinguish himself as object, "posited in a space that becomes symbolic" (*Black Sun* 264-265 n. 24). When this happens, Lear sees the bonds of kingship for what they are: earthly and soiled; and so he gains a greater degree of internal wholeness by acknowledging who he is in infinite space, in the *macrocosm*. Altogether, the internal concept of self is held in balance with one's external surroundings so that identity is posited in space.

As an ongoing process of engagement in social and discursive practices, the melancholic can use the equally subjective terms to outline his or her identity. The appeal of melancholy therefore is its position in space; moreover, it has recourse to the symbolic, it is not a neutral space that represents a void or dream-world. The space that Robin Vote inhabits, meanwhile, is specifically non-neutral: she is a melancholic who is "posited in a space that *becomes* symbolic." In other words, she enters the realm of social discourse and law: she is posited in the symbolic and therefore we find the words to describe the trace of psychic energy. This has immense ramifications for both the subject of melancholy and the reader of literature. John Lechte, in his paper "Kristeva and Holbein," observes this, and offers an unrivalled reading of Kristeva in relation to what he identifies as the empty space of post-modernism (342).¹⁴ Some of the points he raises can be used to pin-point the relationship between the novel, the writer, and the transference of the melancholy mood into signs. Lechte writes:

A work of art is a defeated depression to the extent that it puts death, as unrepresentable and unnameable, into signs.... Of course, death as such cannot appear as a sign; or rather: death in art is only the *sign* of death. Even though this is true, Kristeva suggests that we have to be able to believe that language can evoke death and thus alleviate our suffering (345).

identification of the subject and its object as preconditions of propositionality. We shall call this break, which produces the positing signification, a *thetic* phase. All enunciation, whether of a word or of a sentence, is thetic. It requires an identification; in other words, the subject must separate from and through his image, from and through his objects. This image and objects must first be posited in a space that becomes symbolic because it connects the two separated positions ... (*Black Sun* 264-265 n. 24).

¹⁴ Lechte criticises readers who are "transfixed in a banal and non-transcendent post-modern experience," in Crownfield (ed.) 342.

Yet even if we do believe that language can alleviate suffering, how do we go about translating melancholia into signs? Lechte proposes that “we need to be artists, that is people who create signs and images, but who at the same time, are created as subjects *by* signs and images” (345) Lawrence Kritzman,¹⁵ on the other hand, does not interpret Kristeva’s ideas in quite the same way – he argues that melancholia isolates the subject from the symbolic law:

Melancholia ... is distinguished by its pathological disposition, the result of a more elusive loss. The depression associated with melancholy stems from a failed separation from the maternal object and the abyss of sadness that it produces within the human subject. At the core of this anxiety is a shattered consciousness that belongs to a subject incapable of ... entering the ... realm of the symbolic (144).

According to this view, the naming of the melancholic mood, beyond a simple sadness, is hopeless because the melancholic inhabits a maternal space where language is irrecoverable; therefore any hope there is in understanding the melancholic subject is bleak. Even in his choice of title, Kritzman frames his ideas by emphasising the isolating effects of melancholia: by signifying a difficulty with naming it, there is a sense of hesitation and reaching of limits when he settles for “Kristeva’s invisible thing”. He goes on to say that melancholy “manifests an emptiness that hinders symbolic constructions” (145). I would disagree with Kritzman’s suggestions, and argue that his mis-reading of Kristeva’s model of melancholia is owing to the fact that he fails to make a distinction between melancholy and depression, but instead indiscriminately lumps them together. As I suggested earlier, Kristeva’s contribution to the understanding of melancholia is her ability to translate melancholy into a discourse of some creative means rather than to perceive it as an unnameable space.

3.2 *Nightwood’s* reception

T. S. Eliot was the first critical reader of *Nightwood*. His recommendation of the text comes with a guarded defence in which he makes a series of judgements: “it took me, with this book, some time to

¹⁵ L. Kritzman, “Melancholia becomes the subject: Kristeva’s invisible ‘Thing’ and the making of culture,” *Paragraph* 14.2 (July 1991) 144-151.

come to an appreciation of its meaning as a whole.”¹⁶ In relation to the book’s narrative form, he writes: “To say that *Nightwood* will appeal primarily to readers of poetry does not mean that it is not a novel, but that it is so good a novel that only sensibilities trained on poetry can wholly appreciate it” (2). When he takes account of the novel’s content, he implies a certain objection: “And finally, it ought to be superfluous to observe – but perhaps to anyone reading the book for the first time, it is not superfluous – that the book is not a psychopathic study” (5). Rather it has a “quality of horror and doom very nearly related to that of Elizabethan tragedy” (7). The claim that it is *not* a psychopathic study, that it is *very nearly* related to an Elizabethan tragedy suggests that it in some way misses the mark: never quite getting there, or fitting into a suitable genre. Benstock, for instance, admits that it is “precisely Barnes’s relation to literary tradition that so troubles assessments of her work: readers do not know where to ‘place’ her.”¹⁷ In this sense, Eliot is right that *Nightwood* is a book that eludes definition: it is this that arguably makes it a ‘semiotic novel’. What I mean by this is that the language used upsets definition; the novel is permeated by allusion, slippage, and resistance.

Donna Gerstenberger’s response to Eliot’s reading of *Nightwood* is circumspect: “the reception of *Nightwood* was at once cursed and blessed by the high priest of modernism, whose proprietary anxiousness in his well-meaning introduction to the novel seems surprising from the man who had published fourteen years earlier what was to become the most influential poem of the first quarter of the century.”¹⁸ If, as Eliot suggests, the text might for some readers take a manner of getting used to, it *is* because of its poetic method. The book contains ideas composed uniquely of openings in which sentences broach impressions and then move on to another image or notion; a convolution of meanings ensues:

As the altar of a church would present but a barren stylisation but for the uncalculated offerings of the confused and humble; as the *corsage* of a woman is made suddenly martial and

¹⁶ T. S. Eliot, “Introduction,” in D. Barnes, *Nightwood* (London: Faber, 1985) 1.

¹⁷ S. Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940* (Austin: Texas UP, 1988) 242.

¹⁸ D. Gerstenberger, “The Radical Narrative of Djuna Barnes’s *Nightwood*,” *Breaking the Sequence: Women’s Experimental Fiction*, ed. E. G. Friedman and M. Fuchs (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989) 129.

sorrowful by the rose thrust among the more decorous blooms by the hand of a lover suffering the violence of the overlapping of the permission to bestow a last embrace, and its withdrawal: making a vanishing and infinitesimal bull's eye of that which had a moment before been a buoyant and showy bosom, by dragging time out of his bowels (for a lover knows two times, that which he is given, and that which he must make) – so Felix was astonished to find that the most touching flowers laid on the altar he had raised to his imagination were placed by the people of the underworld, and that the reddest was to be the rose of the doctor (50).

The altar of the church which stands as an established focus and concrete edifice of faith is but a barren stylisation of pious conviction, whereas 'real faith' is to be found in the personal and marginalised world of the 'transgressive' Doctor. Therefore, anything which is understood as a shared or concrete belief is thrown open to question and doubt. What is taking place here is a transposition of certainties in which the established signs and symbols of the faithful are subverted in favour of the violent uncertainties of the sinner. In psychoanalytic terms, Felix narrates the longing for union with the symbolic (as church, altar, the ritual object of the flowers) which only the melancholic can encounter in redolent images beyond the creed of orthodoxy. What seem to be more verifiable are the inner convictions of the 'black souls' of the "people of the underworld". In addition, the physical spatial imaginary of Felix as purveyor of events is replaced by the motivation of the sinner.

The novel is a fine example of a poetic modernist style, which makes its reading both compelling and resistant. Moreover, it exposes the fragmented existence of human nature and the tragic effects of the self's loss from its contingent circumstances. In fact, *Nightwood* "bears witness to the affect"¹⁹ to signify, above all, a sense of estrangement. Allowing for this, we might argue that the book focuses on estrangement and loss. In some agreement with Caroline Allen, "*Nightwood* may be read as a theoretical fiction, or as a fiction of theory – a narrative that produces theory as well as story,"²⁰ but to go further, violence, horror, and loss perpetuate an inevitable bewilderment and distraction that

¹⁹ J. Kristeva, "On the melancholic imaginary," *Discourse in Psychoanalysis and Literature*, trans. L. Burchill (London: Methuen, 1987) 108.

²⁰ C. Allen, *Following Djuna* (Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1996) 24.

theorise the condition of human contingency. As Gerstenberger endeavours to point out, the narrative form is a fundamental component of the novel's content and is utilised to make meaning resistant. Gerstenberger, however, forces a compromise between form and content in a way that Barnes herself resisted. In one of her letters to Emily Coleman in October 1935, Barnes writes: "I have gone on fighting over terms, as over the idea that for me plot, structure etc., seem wrong. They did seem wrong, because I was aiming at the soul as in Blake's picture, not realising that in leaving out the body of the death [of Blake's figures] I was bewildering the onlooker."²¹ Barnes does bewilder the onlooker but in such a way that it forces an interpretation and re-interpretation of the novel and its content. In this sense, to call *Nightwood* a semiotic novel is not out of place with its intention as it signifies resistance to meaning through the poetic language of the melancholic and the malcontent.

4. Freud and melancholy

Kristeva's essay on the "melancholic imaginary" takes as its starting position a summary of classical psychoanalytic theory of melancholy from Abraham, Freud, and Klein.²² She writes: "depression, like mourning, hides an aggression against the lost object.... 'I love him/her', but, even more, 'I hate him/her; because I love him/her.'"²³ In describing the gesture of rejection/acceptance, Kristeva is recasting classical psychoanalysis, particularly Freud's, to suggest that the process of rejection is a condition of the speaking, writing subject.

In his renowned essay "Mourning and Melancholia" (1915), Freud examines the whole nature of identification and rejection and comes to the conclusion that melancholia is experienced because of the pre-Oedipal longing for the lost object: he concludes that it is "the normal affect of mourning"

²¹ Djuna Barnes, letter to Emily Coleman, October 1935: Djuna Barnes Collection, McKeldin Library, University of Maryland at College Park, Maryland.

²² The space between Klein and Kristeva is mapped out by Janice Doan and Devon Hodges who effectively examine the enduring theme of the blamed mother: they explore the negative images that surround the notion of the mother figure as she has been prescribed by various aspects of psychoanalysis, and argue that they have a political validity as much as a literary pertinence. *From Klein to Kristeva: Psychoanalytic Feminism and the Search for the 'Good Enough' Mother* (Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 1992).

²³ Kristeva, "Melancholic Imaginary" 106.

("Mourning and Melancholia" 251). The experience of loss is usefully understood through the psychological construct of melancholy recast by Kristeva. Her melancholic model defines a subject whose lack of inner cohesiveness, a "schizoid splitting" (*Black Sun* 18), or falling to bits, fosters a sense of absence and loss that has little to do with desire for the absent other outside the self. In *Black Sun*, Kristeva takes her prompt from Freud and Klein²⁴ to offer a clear definition of what constitutes melancholy – "Be it biologically determined, following upon *preobject* narcissistic traumas, or quite simply caused by inversion of aggressiveness, the phenomenon that might be described as *a breakdown of biological and logical sequentiality* finds its radical manifestation in melancholia" (20). Kristeva explores how melancholy is secondary to the fragmentation of self that object-loss confers on the subject. Thus, the subject's inner turmoil exhibits a drive toward cohesion: "The depressive mood constitutes itself as a narcissistic support" (19). Therefore, periods of melancholy are described by Kristeva as inner voids manifested in the subject-in-process who longs for union within the self. Kristeva may be drawing heavily on metaphysical, or essentialist, traditions, but if we put her ideas in dialogue with Freud, we can see how she develops her own position, and departs from a traditional understanding of melancholia.

The Freudian model, in which the subject's perception of loss is prompted by an awareness of difference between self and other, inscribes in melancholy the absent loved one, but, it must be stressed, not absence itself. What is important here is that while Kristeva's model emphasises the subject's individual and inner space, Freud's model neglects it because his emphasis is placed on the role of the object. In Freud's view, the object-thing²⁵ fulfils the subject's desire as the subject increasingly identifies and devours the other so that the feeling of loss is replaced by something outside itself. This occurs in *Nightwood* between Nora and Robin.

²⁴ The longing for the other is considered by Melanie Klein in "Some Theoretical Conclusions regarding the Emotional Life of the Infant". *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-1963*, ed. Melanie Klein Trust (London: Virago, 1983) 91.

²⁵ While not wanting to go into his theoretical position in any depth, we might acknowledge Heidegger's contribution to the idea of the thing which explores how 'things' in the world are beyond and outside of the subject, and, as Freud might view it, while the thing is part of the dialectic it is also alien and beyond communication.

Nora's all-consuming love for Robin, her object of desire, means she cannot escape the tormenting consequences of its destructive force: "I thought I loved her for her sake, and I found it was for my own" (214). When she comes to the realisation of its consequences, it is too late to recover either her self or her lover:

"Suddenly, she began to cry, holding her hands. 'Matthew,' she said, 'have you ever loved someone and it became yourself?'... 'Robin can go anywhere, do anything,' Nora continued, 'because I remember.' She came towards him. 'Matthew', she said, 'you think I have always been like this. Once I was remorseless, but this is another love – it goes everywhere, there is no place for it to stop – it rots me away'" (215).

This is important, for if the subject devalues itself enough to identify *fully* with the desired object then there is the suggestion that melancholy is not in the least bit positive, rather it increases devalorisation because there is self-denigration and potential cannibalisation of the other. Although Kritzman in his reading of *Black Sun* aligns melancholy with depression in a way I resist, he rightly points out that "the depressive subject's sense of survival is based on the cannibalistic behaviour of a melancholic imagination that nourishes the self by destroying the other" (144). Nora feels that she is literally rotting away because of her all-consuming love for the other, but she may also be rotting because she has *not* been cannibalised by Robin who has now left her: Nora has been left to rot and whether she is accepted or rejected by Robin, she will always feel that she is the object of the cannibalist.

5. Creativity / negativity and the abject

In the light of a theory of abjection, Kristeva develops a discussion and exploration of creativity and melancholy in *Black Sun* subtitled "Depression and Melancholia", where she defines melancholy as the "institutional symptomatology of inhibition and asymbolia" (9). This definition refers to the subject's inability to integrate itself in the form or schema of the symbolic law as the law of the father (23). Instead, the subject exhibits the "*impossible mourning for the maternal subject*" (9). A loss of the completeness of the subject is explored in Jeremy Tambling's paper on the repression of

melancholy in Dante's *Paradiso*, which indicates some of Kristeva's considerations: "This delimitation of the self is Kristeva's theme in writing on abjection, where the price of discrete subjectivity is the violent separation from the body."²⁶ We can explore this idea in *Nightwood* when we consider the hostile attitude to the body which runs through the novel. The Doctor's denunciation of his own body is owing to his hostility towards feeling like a woman on the inside and looking like a man on the outside:

The wise men say that the remembrance of things past is all that we have for a future, and am I to blame if I've turned up this time as I shouldn't have been, when it was a high soprano I wanted, and deep corn curls to my bum, with a womb as big as the king's kettle, and a bosom as high as the bowsprit of a fishing schooner? And what do I get but a face on me like an old child's bottom – is that a happiness, do you think? (132).

Consequently, because the abject hovers on the edge of the doctor's identity, he is potentially open to a kind of dislocation in which he could fall into the abyss of his own psychic space. To guard against this, feelings of melancholy are harnessed to keep the abject at bay: through socially validating activities he enters and remains in the symbolic. Therefore, the doctor lives a symbolically typical life by day (i.e. the role of doctor), but by night he disregards custom and exists in a more semiotic, anarchic space: "As she spoke, she wondered why she was so dismayed to have come upon the doctor at the hour when he had evacuated custom and gone back into his dress" (117). Being however in the symbolic becomes a crisis-ridden act in which the doctor allows his nightly actions (that is, withdrawal and refusal to conform) to be defined by language and socially approved symbolic structures by day but not by night. The point of crisis for the doctor's actions as a personal work of art, might be described by Kristeva in the following way:

It's necessary to see how all great works of art – one thinks of Mallarmé, of Joyce, of Artaud, to mention only literature – are, to be brief, masterful sublimations of those crises of subjectivity which are known, in another connection, as psychotic crisis. That has nothing to do with the freedom of expression of some vague kind of subjectivity which would have been

²⁶ J. Tambling, "Getting Above the Thunder: Dante in the Sphere of Saturn," *Modern Language Review*, 90.3 (July 1995) 632-645.

there beforehand. It is, very simply, through the work and the play of signs, a crisis of subjectivity which is the basis for all creation, one which takes as its very precondition the possibility of survival. I would even say that signs are what produce a body, that – and the artist knows it well – if he doesn't work, if he doesn't produce his music or his page or his sculpture, he would be, quite simply, ill or not alive. Symbolic production's power to constitute *soma* and to give an identity is completely visible in modern texts. And moreover, all of his experience, literary as well as critical, is preoccupied with this problem ("Interview with Kristeva" 131-2).

It seems that melancholy is as much an activity with words as it is a painful event. However, when those crises become too much to bear, the precondition for creativity is having the ability to channel loss into images and symbols. When the doctor can no longer perform these symbolic tasks it means that he crosses the space from melancholic towards psychotic space. This occurs in the penultimate chapter when the doctor ends his tirade on the cafe dwellers about the night:

He began to scream with sobbing laughter. 'Talking to me – all of them – sitting on me as heavy as a truck horse – talking! Love falling buttered side down, fate falling arse up! Why doesn't anyone know when everything is over, except me?... He came down upon the table with all his weight, his arms spread, his head between them, his eyes wide open and crying, staring along the table where the ash blew and fluttered with his gasping breath. 'For Christ's sweet sake!' he said, and his voice was a whisper, 'Now that you have all heard what you wanted to hear, can't you let me loose now, let me go? I've not only lived my life for nothing, but I've told it for nothing – abominable among the filthy people – I know, it's all over, everything's over, and nobody knows it but me – drunk as a fiddler's bitch – lasting too long – 'He tried to get to his feet, gave it up. 'Now,' he said, 'the end – 'mark my words – now *nothing, but wrath and weeping!*' (*Nightwood* 233).

His screaming and sobbing is indicative of a distressing sorrow that has been brought on by his meditation of the night to Nora. But not only does Matthew now "Go Down" (as the chapter inscribes), the story reaches further into the abyss as the central character folds among the ashes of the cafe's debris; the most interesting aspect of the event however is that the 'overseer' of both the narrative and others' lives ends his tale with a prophet-like warning, "'mark my words – now *nothing, but wrath and weeping!*'" The intertextual nature of Matthew's words resonate with an Old Testament Jeremian-lament of the hollowness of human action.

Further, the most profound aspect of the chapter's ending is that it inscribes an Old Testament theme and rejects a New Testament redemptive hope. Again, this is another indication in the novel of its difficulty with the symbolic and its need to transgress it: the patriarchal figures of the Old Testament are unmistakably palpable and are ridiculed by modern-day spectators through Matthew. It might suggest too that the melancholic writer is one who struggles with the fatherly aspect of the symbolic in which loss of faith testifies to a resistance of order or security. Instead, any sense of thematic hope hovers on the edge of negativity and is almost impossible to verbalise as the resistant semiotic is prior to the formal constructs of the symbolic. For example, in Kristeva's account of Holbein's dead Christ she recalls Prince Myshkin's response to the sight of the bruised and battered body in the tomb: "they would lose their faith' he exclaimed." The agony instated in him a melancholic mood brought on by his observation of the defeated Christ.

It would seem then, from a Kristevan perspective, that all art seeks to bring about the expression of an idea, of a mood, and even more importantly, an act of composition.²⁷ Holbein's Christ is a picture of stark, minimalist, and naked, almost irreverent, corporeality. Yet it is his mystery that calls us to contemplate the suffering of the Christ figure, not as a deity but as a corpse, justifying the stark melancholic severance from the symbolic father.

Furthermore, melancholia, if we take a Freudian and Kristevan analysis as a theoretical basis, is contingent upon inner and outer events: emotion corresponding to the world, attachment to the father and the mother,²⁸ and sufficient mobility between semiotic and symbolic. Alison Ainley, in her discussion of the "possibility of different positionalities of the subject,"²⁹ writes that the site of potential subversion is on "the threshold of nature and culture" (58). In a similar tone, Kristeva in

²⁷ Lechte notes that as a psychoanalyst, Kristeva negates a separation between art and the artist. He says, "Even though this does not mean that a work of art is to be seen simply as a representation of the intentions or personality of the artist, Kristeva's position may yet seem surprising given the tenacity of our structuralist and post-structuralist heritage." In "Art, Love, and Melancholy," Fletcher 24.

²⁸ Elizabeth Grosz writes in "The Body of Signification," "Civilisation is founded on the sacrifice or expulsion of pre-Oedipal polymorphous pleasures and 'impure' incestuous attachments to parental love objects" (in Fletcher 86).

²⁹ A. Ainley, "The Ethics of Sexual Difference," in Fletcher 59.

the 'Melancholic Imaginary' suggests that "Sorrow ... is the *psychic representation of displacements of psychic energy* provoked by external or internal traumas" (107). The notions of creativity and balance are further hindered by those who hold the power: we can all feel the ascendancy of the first reader, the subjective gaze of the Oedipal father, and, conversely, the paradigmatic shifts that triumph over the fixity of language to vanquish the codes, rules, and forms of the shifted other. Creativity remains, then, a resistant and precariously held concept in the balance between order and chaos.

Moreover, creativity is a function of the political climate it either inadvertently sustains or denigrates. As Suzanne Guerlac suggests, art "is a vehicle for the manifestation of a radical, irrecoverable negativity."³⁰ Negativity is the negation of the symbolic functions of language and the various rules that go with it.³¹ Therefore, for any radical manifestation of art to take place it is necessary that some disruption of the symbolic by the semiotic occurs. Both the semiotic and melancholic go outside the framework of the symbolic utterance, with its normative rules, to formulate new resistant spaces.

5.1 Melancholy and its struggle with form

All resistant spaces, necessarily, struggle with form, and all institutions founded on authority fight to keep resistance at bay, if they do not completely repress it. The degree to which resistance is made depends on the relation to the semiotic-mother and rejection of the symbolic-father.³² Kristeva shows

³⁰ S. Guerlac, "Transgression in Theory: Genius and the Subject of *La Révolution du langage poétique*," in *Ethics*, ed. Oliver 239.

³¹ By negating the symbolic the subject retreats into the semiotic and embraces its loss through the other; this causes a double negative. Elspeth Probyn explores women's relation to their role models which can hold the effect of loss. See the chapter "Without *her* I'm nothing," *Sexing the Self: Gendered Positions in Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1993)138-164.

³² This idea is taken up by Lechte:

This implies that the artist, perhaps more than any other person, recognises that a mother is also an unrepresentable body (*chora*), a locus of *jouissance* because she is both other and inseparable from the subject's own self. For, strictly speaking, the mother is prior to the subject's entry into the symbolic signalled in particular by the mastery of language, and thus prior to the capacity to posit another like oneself – a capacity indicated, for instance, by the mastery of the pronouns 'I/you' (in *Kristeva* 132).

in her reading of Giotto's paintings how the radical other is sketched, but more significantly how the role of the mother is an indistinct shape and difficult to formulate, as it is primarily "a luminous spatialisation, the ultimate language of a *jouissance* at the far limits of repression, whence bodies, identities, and signs are begotten."³³ This is true, too, of Barnes, who understood perhaps more than any other female writing in the same period that woman is a luminous space defined only at the far limits of repression where she can only be safely understood as a transcendent figure outside history:

He said to himself that possibly she had greatness hidden in the non-committal. He felt that her attention, somehow in spite of him, had already been taken, by something not yet in history. Always she seemed to be listening to the echo of some foray in the blood, that had no known setting; and when he came to know her this was all he could base his intimacy on (69).

Robin is the semiotic figure as she represents that which is not yet in history: potentially waiting to burst into symbolism, but always remaining an echo; an unknown. Yet she is also Felix's life blood.

A measure of Robin emerges from the symbolic space of cultural law and language which serves as a symbolic function to preserve solidarity and homogeneity. The semiotic makes its mark on Robin in the shape of semiotic drives and articulations; these drives challenge the symbolic and bring about Felix's creative exchange in his need to interpret her. Lechte effectively explains this process in the following way: "It is the drive charges of rejection which challenge the bland tranquility of a technocratic structure based on representation" (in Fletcher 28). With Felix we sense the desire to interpret mood in the space between the semiotic and symbolic:

The Baron, who was always troubled by obscenity, would never, in the case of the doctor, resent it; he felt the seriousness, the *melancholy* hidden beneath every jest and malediction that the doctor uttered, therefore he answered him seriously. 'To pay homage to our past is the only gesture that also includes the future'" (62-63; my italics).

The excerpt is an example of melancholy as a creative condition. Beneath the symbolic lies the disordered flow of energy drives that surfaces through the symbolic as imperceptibly as mood and gesture. It is Felix who, sensing this, names the melancholic space of Matthew O'Connor locating it

³³ Kristeva, "Motherhood according to Giovanni Bellini," in *Desire* 269.

in the other's jest and malediction. He is receptive enough also to realise the potential of the melancholy mood and attributes Matthew's malediction to the changes. Any future change is dependent on the past, and there is the sense that the melancholic figure is more absorbed by past than those not subject to melancholic moods: "To pay homage to our past is the only gesture that also includes the future" – interruption of the present by the past is the mark of melancholy itself. This means that the melancholy mood influences artistic output so that the crisis and disorientation is converted into writing.³⁴ Kristeva explains this process in the following way: "It is, very simply, through the work and play of signs, a crisis of subjectivity which is the basis for all creation."³⁵ Because there is a crisis of subjectivity the subject works with a system of signs that become creative acts in themselves. Therefore, although crisis takes place in the hidden semiotic space, it is raised to the level of signification when there is a desire to name one's loss.

Naming, however, means that we must begin with a loss of words: Felix and the doctor experience an inner feeling of loss and difference that produces an empty space. Melancholy inscribes absence and because of this it gives them both that melancholy feeling; but it is also a feeling that can be described, for the term melancholy ascribes and proffers a definition. It is the notion of naming that makes Kristeva's contribution to melancholy distinctive from others.³⁶ "In on the melancholic imaginary," Kristeva attempts to name melancholia and begins by asking the question, "Is mood a language?" (107). She proffers the following inquiry:

Sorrow ... is the *psychic representation of displacements of psychic energy* provoked by external or internal traumas. The exact status of these psychic representatives of energy-displacements remains ... imprecise: no conceptual framework of the constituted sciences

³⁴ Karen Levy examines how the melancholic's gap is closed through discussion which turns into the sharing of stories. In "The Perilous Journey From Melancholy to Love: A Kristevan Reading of *Le Médianoche amoureux*," *Studies in Twentieth Century Literature* 19:2 (summer 1995): 186-205.

³⁵ Perry Meisel, "Interview with Julia Kristeva," trans. M. Waller, *Partisan Review* 51 (winter 1984): 131-2.

³⁶ Noreen O'Connor brings out the relation of the archaic mother to the semiotic and identifies the impossibility of naming: "The archaic mother is resistant to meaning, she is unnameable." In "The An-Arche of Psychotherapy," *Abjection, Melancholia and Love*, ed. J. Fletcher and A. Benjamin (London: Routledge, 1990) 46.

(linguistics, in particular) shows itself adequate for the comprehension of this seemingly very rudimentary representation (pre-sign and pre-language) (107).

However, she concludes, “Mood ... marks *all* behaviour and all sign systems.... These are grounds to think that what is at play here is an archaic *energy-signal* ... which in the psychic space of the human being finds itself, *however*, immediately taken into charge by verbal representation and consciousness.... So the moods would be inscriptions of energy-ruptures” (107-108). This implies that moods break into the symbolic to signify affect. Thus, mood is a psychic energy, at the level of the semiotic, but it makes its way into the symbolic as an energy signal; hence, the melancholic trace is perceptible and locatable in both ‘language’ motilities. However, as Kristeva points out, “the exact status of these psychic representatives of energy-displacements remains ... imprecise.” Although Lechte is discussing subjectivity in relation to Christianity, his perceptive ideas relate to my own notions when he writes:

No science is going to be able to verify, or legitimate, this coming together of the symbolic and the real in the imaginary. For science is the result of the radical separation of the symbolic and the real. Consequently, Christianity may not be the basis of scientific truth, but scientific truth, in its turn, cannot do justice to the psychic truth upon which human subjectivity is founded.³⁷

The absence of a framework is something worth explaining in which the impression of locating a melancholic language becomes a challenge. For example, Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* is one of a variety of texts that describes the rupturing of a fully realised Symbolic with an atmospheric surreal world in a play between an Imperialist Symbolic world and the chaotic abyss of non-language. Barnes herself was painfully aware of her own sense of loss which led her to write *Nightwood*. In one of her letters to Emily Coleman (on 20 September 1935), Barnes describes retrospectively and most poignantly the autobiographical nature of the book:

God knows who could have written as much about their blood while it was still running.... I wrote it you must remember ... when I still did not know Thelma would come back to me or

³⁷ J. Lechte, “Kristeva and Holbein, Artist of Melancholy,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 20.4 (October 1990) 342-349.

not..; in that turmoil of Charles and Morocco, sickness, Hayford Hall – everything, then the end here in New York.³⁸

Struggling with form, melancholy could easily be seen to indicate only an inherently semiotic motility – the valley of sorrow, the place of non-communicable grief and inexpressible depression – all notions that exceed the limits of language. However, melancholy is the metaphor which fully sums up the pain and rapture of the blinding mood and the space where Horror is encountered and creativity considered. Another way of explaining this is simply to say that melancholy, like all concepts in search of a form, is metaphoric: melancholy belongs to an axis with a double organisational constraint in which it is possible to elaborate that loss through language. It becomes a discourse to describe the mental and physical mood of the outward behaviour of grief and creates a crucial relation between a melancholic's identification with a feeling of inner absence and the process through which he or she might identify and name a creative process.

To take the argument of melancholy discourse a stage further, J. L. Austin³⁹ outlines communication through *constative* and *performative* statements, and this can help to unpack Kristeva's ideas on the 'language' of melancholy. The *constative* statement, where something is said that can be categorised as true or false, is largely absent from the melancholic's discourse. Robin, for example, is known widely in the novel for her withdrawal; therefore she is more inclined to use *performative* statements, where there is no proposition being made about the outside world, or no referential. She is taken up with herself and her own internal falling to bits. Performative language tends to be more resourceful where language is spoken with metaphoric, heightened and lyrical persuasion; this position is taken by the doctor. This suggests firstly that melancholy is a rhetorical performative device, and secondly, that melancholy has more proximity to an inner space rather than to an external place. As a performative device, then, it can be said that Robin is situated in the non-specific place of withdrawal. However, as a silent melancholic she enters the public domain because

³⁸ A small number of the unpublished correspondences of Barnes to Emily Coleman are housed in the Emily Holmes Coleman Papers, Special Collections, University of Delaware, Newark.

³⁹ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd. ed. (Oxford: OUP, 1975).

she calls others to speech – Robin summons them to describe her behaviour and make sense of it. In *Nightwood*, Robin, who lacks all detail, is described by a perplexed Felix:

Thinking of her, visualising her, was an extreme act of the will; to recall her after she had gone, however, was as easy as the recollection of a sensation of beauty, without its details. When she smiled the smile was only in the mouth, and a little bitter: the face of an incurable yet to be stricken with its malady (65).

Robin is an impression of the other's perception of her. Thus, melancholy is rhetorical and unencumbered of the most basic axiom, its fluidity lacks detail and therefore it is useful for describing the slippage of subjectivity. Aptly, discourses used to describe Robin say more about the structure of language in use than the description of Robin.

5.2 Place and space

Melancholy comes about through a dissatisfaction with the places we occupy. This can be seen when Felix takes Robin around Europe to visit places of historic interest. "He took her first to Vienna. To reassure himself he showed her all the historic buildings. He kept saying to himself that sooner or later, in this garden or that palace, she would suddenly be moved as he was moved. Yet it seemed that he too was a sightseer" (67). In Felix the desire for a place in which to belong becomes the drive that initiates a search for the lost other; but, as sightseer, the other, who is represented by Robin, eludes him. Derrida sums up the relation of space to the withdrawn, or unlocatable, subject when he suggests that the "duplicity of this self exclusion, the simulacrum of this withdrawal, plays on the belonging to the proper place, as a political place and as a habitation" (*Name* 108). The space Felix inhabits, then, becomes political as it symbolises the very infrastructure he uses to define Robin. Even so, some critics find that the spatial context of *Nightwood* is an obstacle to our understanding of it. Nimeiri observes:

Even when critics find meaning in the novel, it is often abstract with no bearing on any particular situation, as if the story occurs in a void or a dream-world where the characters move about in a landscape of metaphors, images, and myths. This view of the novel ignores,

regards as irrelevant, or even denies, the existence of the obvious experiential context and its decisive effect on determining the theme.⁴⁰

Nimeiri rightly points out that there is a strong experiential aspect to the novel, which means that Barnes is concerned less with narrative form and more with the subject of loss. As Lynn de Vore argues: "The book's linguistic complexities have directed critics to analyse especially the form and structure of the text as well as to speak only of its verbal tapestry in terms of imagistic, expressionistic, cubistic, or surrealist affinities while slighting its altogether human dimensions."⁴¹ However, *Nightwood's* melancholic subjects represent the human dimensions of loss; the novel names that experience and so finds a response to absence which is the desire for a 'form' of identity.⁴²

5.3 Robin as melancholic figure

Robin Vote is a character whose very melancholy⁴³ opens up the illusion of an interior space; as a lost object she encrypts absence which others seek to fill and inscribe. That being the case, through absence and silence the dynamic principles of creativity constitute a space that requires filling,⁴⁴ but Robin herself is unable to name: she never articulates more than a sentence of four lines. Yet,

⁴⁰ A. Nimeiri, "Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* and 'the experience of America,'" *Critique* 2 (Winter 1993) 100.

⁴¹ Lynn de Vore, "The Backgrounds of *Nightwood*: Robin, Felix, and Nora," *Journal of Modern Literature* 10 (March 1983) 71.

⁴² Peter Brooker considers how modernist texts set about naming loss as a 'symptom' of 'insular realism', and suggests how a theme of 'closing the gap' was sought as a prescriptive remedy. In "Introduction," *Modernism/Postmodernism* (London: Longman, 1992) 1-29.

⁴³ The "contemporary Hamlet soliloquy" that Kristeva speaks of encapsulates the concomitant circumstance of Barnes' characters in *Nightwood*. See Kristeva's *Nations without Nationalism*, trans. L. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1993) 2.

⁴⁴ The notion of 'filling' silence is examined by Susan Sontag, who writes: "Through its advocacy of silence and reduction, art commits an act of violence upon itself, turning art into a species of auto-manipulation, of conjuring – trying to bring these new ways of thinking to birth.... Silence is a strategy for the transvaluation of art." In "The Aesthetics of Silence," *A Susan Sontag Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982) 192.

strangely enough, this melancholic figure impels her onlookers to elaborate her personality;⁴⁵ as a silent melancholic figure she instigates in others the overwhelming desire to name. Creativity is shifted from the melancholic to the observer. Matthew understands this when he remarks, “The woman who presents herself to the spectator as a ‘picture’ forever arranged, is, for the contemplative mind, the chiefest danger” (59). All this suggests that we are dealing with a text and a character in which we find more because we have less, just as the idea of seeing a little tantalises the eye – gesture, rhythm, and inarticulation fascinate both the reader and the characters who encircle Robin.

Although everything in the text regarding Robin is conjectural and suppositional, the voices of the others and their ability to name are rich and evocative. Yet because she is noted rather than denoted, they construct for her a kind of representation that is soulless, motiveless, and empty of all recognisable drives that might either confirm or contradict her disposition. Jenny Petherbridge “accused Robin of a ‘sensuous communion with unclean spirits’” (235). Robin is ‘otherworldly’ and is perceived as spiritual and therefore ethereal, yet she is also demonic because she eludes definition. “Because Robin’s engagements were with something unseen, because in her speech and in her gestures there was a desperate anonymity” (235), Jenny is alarmed by the unfillable potential of space where infinite possibilities lurk.⁴⁶ Therefore, Robin is subject to the inscriber’s closure, misunderstanding, and relative translation. As her observers attempt to raise her amorphous subjectivity to the status of signification she is constructed as an object (and always an object of desire), yet she continues to transgress the symbolic, for as a disinherited subject she is posited by the symbolic as a semiotic psychical mark that signifies the limits of naming, and as such, the dynamics of the enigma. Thus she incarnates the lost object.

⁴⁵ Leigh Gilmore argues that Barnes evokes a body in which “expectation will not stick.” She continues: “Robin Vote ... is presented as the simulacrum of the unconscious ... who wanders in and out of Nora’s life with the crash and clatter of a narcoleptic given to violent outbursts upon waking.” In “Obscenity, Modernity, Identity: Legalising *The Well of Loneliness* and *Nightwood*,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 4.4 (1994): 615-616.

⁴⁶ But any possibility for filling the space is based upon how we use language to describe Robin; the unfillable potential space does not contain essential truths about her. As Bonnie Kime Scott suggests “Barnes works with words and not essences.” In “Barnes Being Beast Familiar,” *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 13.3 (fall 1993): 41-52.

Again, the melancholic person initiates a series of contradictory identifications – some of which the onlooker, more than the melancholic, tries to reconcile. In this sense, Robin doubles as a sick person and an object of love. When Baron Felix and Matthew share their perceptions of Robin, Felix declares:

‘Strange, I have never seen the Baronin in this light before,’ ... and he crossed his knees. ‘If I should try to put it into words, I mean how I did see her, it would be incomprehensible, for the simple reason that I find that I never did have a really clear idea of her at any time. I had an image of her, but that is not the same thing. An image is a stop the mind makes between uncertainties. I had gathered, of course, a good deal from you, and later, after she went away, from others, but this only strengthened my confusion. The more we learn of a person, the less we know. It does not, for instance, help me to know anything of *Chartres* above the fact that it possesses a cathedral, unless I have lived in *Chartres* and so keep the relative heights of the cathedral and the lives of its population in proportion ... just as children who have a little knowledge of life will draw a man and a barn on the same scale’ (160-1).

It is as the lost object of desire that Robin Vote is truly representational of the melancholic. The notion of the melancholic here is different from that of the classic Renaissance melancholic, who characterises a more ‘lyrical’ state, utilising language in a way that the melancholics in *Nightwood* cannot. For example, the Shakespearean melancholic is aware of a language to be learned: the afflicted can translate lack, loss, and need into melancholic naming. In turn, we can name the Shakespearean melancholic’s pathology and identify it as “the melancholy person who extols that boundary where the self emerges” (*Black Sun* 22). Therefore, a two-fold process of evocation and narration is formulated: one that is learned and one that is understood as naming. In contrast to this, Robin signifies a sense of absence as renunciation; only through her melancholic absence do we identify a named figure. Hence, as a subject named, she is easily distinguished in the symbolic as imprints of her in a mediated form enter a localised space. As this suggests, Robin is closely related to the semiotic but is locatable by her observers in the symbolic.⁴⁷ Pathologically speaking, we can

⁴⁷ Robin is forced to enter the symbolic by those who inscribe language upon her. As Nancy Levine writes, “Barely twenty at *Nightwood*’s opening, she is a blank slate upon which her lovers inscribe the outlines of unsuspected desire.” In “‘I’ve always suffered from sirens’: The cinema vamp and Djuna Barnes’ *Nightwood*,” *Women’s Studies* 15 (1989): 271-291.

say that those who are like Robin Vote can be explained as individuals who precede the acquisition of language: as one who fails to separate from the maternal. Yet I think that Kristeva's model is suggesting that the 'lost subject' should not so much be understood pathologically, but recognised as analogous to space: melancholics are the subject of a discourse with a language to be learnt, rather than a pathology to be treated, but if this is so, what it implies for reading is that a theory of critical interpretation is based upon identifying the inflected tones of a semiotic language that resist and bypass the strictures of the symbolic. As other, Robin is the female melancholic incarnate – unwavering and unstinted in her otherness, she personifies meaning, but it is a shifting and subverting stream of signifiers that are reformulated repeatedly by her observers.

6. Conclusion

Deciphering *Nightwood* entails teetering on the edge of the symbolic to listen to the non-articulate gesture and movement that calls us to the threshold of the semiotic. Because it is a novel of such melancholic proportions it is, necessarily, by Kristevan definition, resistant and maternal, and this being so it prompts us in the direction of a communicative function of interpretation that is creative and crisis-filled. As Kristeva argued above, how many readers can give up the lexical, syntactic, and semantic operation of deciphering? In answer, instead of interpreting the symbolic and thus valorising the rule of the Father and his law, Kristeva re-instates the structuration of the mother as semiotic, but that has its own difficulties, as it is not only the source of creativity but also the place of mourning and loss, which means that a resistant space is the painful entry into the semiotic. However, Kristeva's achievement is to offer a viable, locatable subjectivity so that a double act in which to name melancholy and translate it into something creative can be performed. It is through this double performance that a location of the irregular and chaotic aspects of writing alongside writing as a purely symbolic form can be inscribed. Kristeva's conception of melancholy enables us to overcome the predicament encountered when we read a novel like *Nightwood* in which all of its characters are described "as if in a melancholy that had no beginning or end" (158). The question is whether we can enter into something that has no beginning and no end. With the assistance of Kristeva's theory of

reading it can be argued that we intervene in the mood of the melancholic character and mediate between the pre-language status of melancholy and its presentation in words, so that something more can be learned about the multiplicity of melancholy and the literary formation of resistant spaces in the construction of the novel.

Chapter Four

Incestuous Space

"Nora heard her voice saying, 'Come up, this is Grandmother's room,' yet knowing it was impossible, because the room was taboo" (94).

1. Introduction

Resistant spaces come about through the transgression of the symbolic. To further encounter transgression in *Nightwood* I will consider the notion of desire and incest, two main themes in the book which produce resistance to reading. I will consider incest from the psychoanalytical terms provided by Kristeva in what, arguably, suppresses the symbolic and raises the profile of "the mother". If, as Kristeva writes, incest is the *jouissance* of the mother we should be able to identify a link between incest and the semiotic *chora* and read *Nightwood* as a novel which successfully operates from a transgressive spatial authority. That being so, I will set out to show through examples from the text the various stylistic tropes and thematic structures that culminate in an affirmation of resistance.

1.2 Alienation and transgression beyond the symbolic

According to *Powers of Horror*, abjection is the main source of horror that is tangible in those who are most estranged from language. However, abjection is a biological and cognitive part of all human behaviour (such as bodily functions) and operates psychically in the repressed unconscious. When horror is kept in a repressed state, master discourses responsible for religion, law, and such like, develop and expand. Yet behind these powerful authorities lurks a horror and dissemination of the symbolic. In a literary context Kristeva identifies Céline as the writer who best presents the

experience of abject literature, and adds that style is the main feature of the abject in language; however, the abject is such that, lacking solid meaning, it derives beauty from itself:

Neither Céline, who is such a writer, nor the catastrophic exclamation that constitutes his style, can find outside support to maintain themselves. Their only sustenance lies in the beauty of a gesture that, here, on the page compels language to come nearest to the human enigma, to the place where it kills, thinks, and experiences *jouissance* all at the same time (*Powers of Horror* 206).

In her more recent work *Strangers to Ourselves*, Kristeva widens her enquiry to include a discussion on the relationship the personal has with the public domain. In this text, Kristeva discusses the role of the stranger through an account of alienation and inclusion in the political and social histories of the Western tradition. Kristeva concentrates on the stranger who is defined by such terms as exile, foreigner, and immigrant; more particularly, those who, politically, are named as abject other by the nation state, and she considers their plight from the position of once being estranged herself.¹ As a writer on foreign soil, Kristeva repeatedly switches from the subject “I” to the “other” and conflates the two terms so that the obvious sense of ‘foreignness’ and difference becomes ironically assimilated: “Foreigner: a choked up rage deep down in my throat, a black angel clouding transparency, opaque, unfathomable spur. The image of hatred and of the other, a foreigner is neither the romantic victim of our clannish indolence nor the intruder responsible for all the ills of the polis.”² Polemic forms of “black” and “opaque transparency”, “deep down rage” and surface “images of hatred”, and “victim” and “intruder” exist alongside each other so that each blurs and slides across boundaries into a semblance of the other. It is a performance that demonstrates her ability to objectify the alien-other while simultaneously providing a means of inclusion through language, psychoanalysis, and history. Essentially, however, the notion of the “alien” begins with a radical examination of the stranger within the self. It is with these ideas in mind that I explore resistant spaces in *Nightwood* in the displays of alienation and transgression through incest and desire. But first I want to make clear my

¹ Kristeva arrived in Paris from Bulgaria at the close of 1965.

² J. Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. L. S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia, 1991) 1.

argument relating the cross-connection between female identity, anteriority, and space as a delimiting process.

1.3 Anterior space

Even in her earliest writing, Kristeva begins by freeing the subject from fixed, external surroundings and shifting emphasis from an anterior space to interiorisation. Representing a key moment in *Revolution*, a theory of the subject is complexly linked to space so that a rich mosaic of the characteristic traits of the symbolic (as theory) is mixed with the rhythmic space of the semiotic: “the theory of the subject proposed by the theory of the unconscious will allow us to read in this rhythmic space, which has no thesis and no position, the process by which signifiante is constituted” (*Revolution* 94). The language employed shows how Kristeva not only creates an anterior space but also sets out to distance herself from a linguistic system based on discourses of power as it subverts established ways of defining both the subject and her writing position. We might ask in what sense may the subject be associated with space? Kristeva argues: (1) A theory of the subject leads to (2) a theory of the unconscious; which in turn signifies (3) a theory of process. This eventually generates (4) a theory of space. In other words, a theory of the subject is validated by a theory of the unconscious which is upheld by a theory of being-in-process (where being is that which signifies). Kristeva forces the idea of a theoretical basis for understanding and naming the rhythmic space, yet any close reading will show how she expounds a theory which disclaims thesis and position. The semiotic’s only structure is a rhythmic, non-expressive space.

If we take the four points and rearrange them inversely, space is an ever-present phenomenon. Kristeva’s theory of space (4) is developed from Plato’s theory of the *chora*: a provisional rhythm that is as full of movement as it is unchanging. Furthermore, this space repeatedly splits language so that we get discourse as a process (3) rather than a static event. It does not develop into a permanent state at the level of language because of the theory of drives (2). These drives are motivated by the

desire to name, and, as it were, compel the subject to place itself in history; the named subject-in-history gives us a theory of the subject (1).

I wish to underline through these four points the clear association that is formed between the subject and space. They are interdependent, and, as I have outlined above, create a junction of overlap and interchange in which the subject seeks to name its loss. The crucial implication is that if the subject is linked to a space-in-motion, or a shifting ground, *the concept of identity is freed from a culture that constructs gender in relation to fixed, external surroundings*. Kristeva shifts emphasis from an anterior space to an interior space, and uses the unconscious as her starting point in which to locate the aspect of language that is still semiotic.

2. A theory of the body

It could be argued that if there is a down-side to Kristeva's contribution to feminism it is in the fact that she does not fit any *really* obvious 'feminist' category; rather her work contains many cross-references to other issues and disciplines which open up her ideas to a pluralist production and evaluation. *Woman and the stranger* is a case in point. That being said, the anteriority of woman and of the stranger hold thematically and politically a very similar position. One of the most striking aspects is that of identity. Woman and the strange alien are constructed in relation to the established and stable constructs of the place and the 'other' person by whom they are measured, be it native, male, or both. Kristeva's task is to put place and the 'alien's' relation to it into question.

To step out of 'place' is to step into anteriority, an empty foreign space, beyond the phallus. Kristeva writes: "The cells fuse, split, proliferate ... in a body that is grafted, unmasterable, and other. And no one is there, in that space both double and foreign, to signify it."³ No-one is there in the vacant place, argues Kristeva; yet she boldly enters it herself to signify her own foreignness, where, as alien, she is out of place (and speaks of out place). Because the space is so unmasterable and other, there is never any suggestion that it might be made hospitable or domestic. It is fitting to argue that

³ J. Kristeva, "Talking about Polylogue," *French Feminist Thought: A Reader*, trans. S. Hand, ed. T. Moi (New York: Blackwell, 1987) 117.

the space is hostile so as cleverly to juxtapose the stranger as intruder in a foreign land: "For the foreigner perceived as an invader reveals a buried passion within those who are entrenched: the passion to kill the *other*" (*Strangers* 20). Of course, the sense of foreignness is a fundamental principle of her work: being exiled and out of place suggests that a common language is not shared; it implies that the subject, where it is placed, is defined in contradistinction to the symbolic. Hence, the stranger in society is a resourceful metaphor: it signifies that which is beyond the paternal order of language (though not untouched and undefined).⁴ Thus woman, as stranger in the symbolic, can claim her own foreignness in the influential domain of a phallogocentric discourse.

Feminist critics who attempt such an undertaking are those whom I include in my argument on resistant narrative space. Feminists like Irigaray and Cixous work within a discursive tradition, while at the same time foregrounding the sexual status of the female by way of harnessing the very erotogenics of language.⁵ Through *écriture féminine*, the source and the voice are reclaimed: "Woman has sex organs just about everywhere",⁶ writes Luce Irigaray. Similarly, Hélène Cixous writes of woman:

Her libido is cosmic, just as her unconscious is world-wide. Her writing can only keep going, without ever inscribing or discerning contours, daring to make these vertiginous crossings of the other(s) ephemeral and passionate sojourns in him, her, the, whom she inhabits long enough to look at from the point closest to their unconscious from the moment they awaken, to

⁴ Observed from outside of their own order it would be difficult not to appropriate *Nightwood's* characters in the descriptive terms employed: "radicals, beggars, artists, and people in love; for Catholics, Protestants, Brahmins, dabblers in black magic and medicine" all of whom are a "ranting roaring crew" (77). Outside of society they would be classed as something other, but within their own space there is relevance to personal invention. Many of the characters claim a disguise which is never questioned by the other but always understood as false. "'Herr Gott!' said the Duchess. 'Am I what I say? Are you? Is the doctor?' She put her hand on his knee. 'Yes or no?'" (43). But of course the question is rhetorical and is left unanswered.

⁵ A theorisation of the body is maintained on a linguistic level by Jane Gallop, who argues that because "any discourse phallicizes", it is impossible to permeate the phallogocentric tradition with a female discourse. In *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction* (London: Macmillan, 1982) 125. However, what Gallop fails to recognise is that her critique serves only to reduce the feminist debate to a crude level where any emancipatory attempts are disregarded.

⁶ L. Irigaray, "This Sex Which Is Not One," *New French Feminisms*, trans. C. Reeder, ed. E. Marks and I. de Courtivron (Brighton: Harvester, 1980) 103.

move them at the point closest to their drives; and then further, impregnated through and through with these brief, identificatory embraces, she goes and passes into infinity.⁷

On a linguistic level, *écriture féminine* employs the language of *jouissance* and always has as its index a body and a sexuality to refer to. By reclaiming and resignifying the female's body-contours it also suggests that the anatomy of the female becomes a stable referent that in some way valorises the place of woman and her identity.⁸ By contrast, Kristeva looks beyond the anatomy of desire to an ephemeral but determinate space. Precariously, it seems, Kristeva's feminine subject lacks a shape, a definition and a place. She informs her position when she writes: "Confronting the foreigner whom I reject and with whom at the same time I identify, I lose my boundaries, I no longer have a container, the memory of experience when I had been abandoned overwhelms me, I lose my composure. I feel 'lost', 'indistinct,' 'hazy'" (*Strangers* 187). Woman, for her, is the Platonic rhythmic receptacle that admits the law of the father. Nevertheless, if we consider that much of what feminism seeks is to alter perceptions of women, then, in much the same way, Kristeva is addressing the problem of receptivity and dislocating the female from history's encoding of her.

Although we end up with a strange and foreign female, she is defined by a convincing rhetoricism that names. Kristeva asks (which we might argue acts as a basic tenet for feminism), "what is the 'relation' between the 'population' or 'race' of *men* and the 'population' or 'race' of *women*?" (*Strangers* 46). Her response is that all relations are based on the understanding that women are the foreigners in a male domain: "Your speech has no past and will have no power over the future of the group: why should one listen to it? You do not have enough status – 'no social standing' – to make your speech useful" (*Strangers* 20). With no past and no future, women are not able to find their place in the world.

⁷ H. Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," in Marks & de Courtivron 259-60.

⁸ Catherine MacKinnon, in *Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State*, doubts that a female subjectivity can be made known because "sexuality is to feminism what work is to Marxism; that which is most one's own, yet most taken away." Sexuality has been given over to another. For some feminists a female autonomy must be disputed; according to MacKinnon it is the least attainable aspect of sexual identity as woman is the product of male projection. In *Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology*, ed. N. Keohane, M. Rosaldo and B. Gelpi (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1981) 1.

Because foreigners and females are kept outside of domains where speech is powerful they are also deprived of support from it. However, they do not have to retreat into a silent space; rather, they can develop the dialect of “rhetoricism” (21) and utilise a different speech: “The foreigner’s speech can bank only on its bare rhetorical strength, and the inherent desires he or she has invested in it” (21). Clearly, there are few points of overlap between Kristeva’s ideas and *écriture féminine*. The very basis of the latter theory depends on place, most specifically the body’s contours, its accessible form, tangibility, and visual presence; whereas Kristeva locates a very real ‘place’ at the level of the symbolic which is then undermined by an anterior space. Although *écriture féminine* makes huge strides in counterbalancing and critiquing a phallogocentric discourse, it clings to a certain uniformity and inclusive arrangement. In contrast, Kristeva’s ‘difference’ lies in describing the outsider and the alien cut off from place – outside the society that contains it with the benefit of delimiting boundaries.

It is precisely the sense of mapping one’s own boundaries that enables the body to speak on two levels: firstly, to signify its distinction asserting autonomy with respect to the notion of ‘feminine’ without phallus. Secondly, to assert its difference from the notion of lacking a phallus. Yet, it is open to question whether bodies signify a pre-given and purely discursive referent. Therefore, the degree to which we allow the theorist to circumscribe ideas relating to our sexual body emerges as an important issue. Judith Butler is one such theorist who questions the claim of *écriture féminine*. She asserts that the body cannot signify its own referent without the help of those voices whose aim it is to envisage the body’s projected discourse. She argues that even the most conventional and scientific schema of the female body involves some psychic desire on the part of the speculator:

If the descriptions of the body take place in and through an imaginary schema, that is, if these descriptions are psychically and phantasmatically invested, is there still something we might call the body itself which escapes this schematisation? First, psychic projection confers boundaries and, hence, unity on the body, so that the very contours of the body are sites that vacillate between the psychic and the material (*Bodies* 66).

Kristeva appears inadvertently to answer Butler's question of whether the body itself escapes schematisation in proposing that the subject is part of a spatial motility that defies both definition and location. Kristeva points to the role of the semiotic and claims that, as a theorist, she is acutely aware of the ideological implications involved in speaking on behalf of the female body. It means, however, that she is distrusted by the more pragmatic and empirically-minded Anglophone feminists⁹ who are suspicious of an abject space that opens up beyond the logic of a symbolic language. Kristeva's argument crucially enables us to free the subject from a culture bound by its fixed external surrounding. Yet there are feminists who say Kristeva is neither feminist, nor political, nor part of the project of French feminism.¹⁰ Though we can argue whether or not Kristeva *invites* the definition of French feminist, she clearly cannot *avoid* it. Whether we wish to agree with Arleen Dallery's suggestion that French feminism "essentially deconstructs the phallic organisation of sexuality and its code,"¹¹ Kristeva problematises linguistically the sexual identification of the male and female's given difference, proclaiming a role for a metaphoric phallic mother in language.¹² Because Kristeva phallicises the mother there are theorists who categorically argue against the worth of her role as a feminist, a case in point being Toril Moi's statement that "Kristeva's work can in no way be characterised as primarily feminist: it is not even consistently political in its approach" (*Textual Politics* 167). Nevertheless, I would argue that her work on the pre-Oedipal bond with the mother is a clear contribution to feminism. However, she is not a proponent of *écriture féminine*, because she does not emphasise the potential signifying role of the female body or feminine sexuality. While

⁹ Elisabeth Grosz finds most of what Kristeva says either puzzling or ironic.

¹⁰ See B. Ludeman's "Julia Kristeva: the other of language," *The Judgement of Paris*, ed. K. Murray (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992) 23-88; and N. Frazer's *Revaluing French Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990). Nancy Frazer's text offers a constrained account of Kristeva as a feminist of *écriture féminine*, whereas Ludeman is more inclusive because she widens the parameters of French feminism.

¹¹ A. Dallery, "The Politics of Writing (the) Body: *Écriture Féminine*," *Theorising Feminism*, ed. A. C. Herrmann and A. J. Stewart (Boulder: Westview, 1994) 290.

¹² Marcia Ian finds a role for the phallic mother by linking her to fetish desire. However, it is difficult to know if this devotion to the phallic mother is anything more than a semantic challenge within the academy. *Remembering The Phallic Mother* (New York: Cornell UP, 1993).

insisting on the necessity of sexual difference, Kristeva is very clear about what hers and other women's research is *not* about:

This leads to the active research, still rare, undoubtedly hesitant but always dissident, being carried out by women in the human sciences; particularly those attempts, in the wake of contemporary art, to break the code, to shatter language, to find a specific discourse closer to the body and emotions, to the unnameable repressed by the social contract. I am not speaking here of a 'woman's language,' whose (at least syntactical) existence is highly problematic and whose apparent lexical specificity is perhaps more the product of a social marginality than of a sexual-symbolic difference ("Women's Time" 202).¹³

Since this is the case, the idea of a corporeality to which theorists of French feminism like to refer is absent from Kristeva's theory of the subject. Although both schools of thought are conscious of the master narratives that are likely to suppress the voice of women, Kristeva takes a different route in her examination of 'feminism' and takes advantage of the wake in contemporary art in which to explore "the unnameable."

Kristeva focuses on the very thing that Irigaray's and Cixous' feminine *jouissance* suppresses: the feminine disposition in art effected by the semiotic. She makes the crucial link between place, language, and the subject. The idea of place is central to an Irigarayan and Cixousian *oeuvre*, be it public, private, part of the body, or apportioned to culture; but for Kristeva place is always held in

¹³ Allison Weir describes Kristeva's essay as "her famed and notorious paper on feminism" in which

Kristeva argues that the refusal to identify with the existing order too often amounts to a refusal to give up the phallic mother. The father is condemned for breaking up the original unity with the mother. What is upheld, then, is an imaginary memory/phantasy of pure gratification, a space imagined as harmonious, continuous, without prohibitions, without breaks or separations. Blaming the father is a way of denying the necessity of separation, and of violence (in "Identification with the Divided Mother," Oliver 1993, 80).

There is a contradiction here with how Weir describes "Women's Time" and Kristeva's later text "Strangers" in which Kristeva argues that it is necessary to break with the mother, and because one does, one experiences the inner feeling of emptiness and alienation that occupies the book. See Noëlle McAfee's essay where she argues:

Abjection is a process that makes selfhood possible.... So, what is radically strange to us performs a function: constituting our being in the world as a subject. Part of our identity is as a member of a nation-state, and to this extent, at least, the foreigner manifests this radical strangeness that lays the ground for our own national identity. The foreigner is also our own projection of the stranger-within-us – our own unconscious – and thus a symptom of our own unease with this inner alterity... we cannot hope to find peace with foreigners because radical strangeness is built into our own psyches (in "Abject Strangers," Oliver 1993, 124-125).

relation to space. By including space in a debate on the source and the voice of female identity, Kristeva opens up place to anteriority. Her argument works on the assumption that if place is the limit then space is the delimit.

2.1 Transgressing the boundaries of place

Djuna Barnes is a writer whose aim is the simple attainment of spatial authority in which to open up the text to alterity and shift boundaries of closure and limit. *Nightwood* explores modern perspectives on identity, otherness, and desire, in which some of the most trenchant attitudes of society quietly repose. These are successfully transgressed when place is appropriated to include supplementarity and unrest: "Robin took to wandering again, to intermittent travel from which she came back hours, days later, disinterested. People were uneasy when she spoke to them; confronted with a catastrophe that had yet no beginning" (*Nightwood* 75). The novel locates the subtle means by which one might dispute place and the cultural boundaries it imposes by constituting an arrangement of ideas at a literary level in which the story resists any attempt to impart detail. As readers we experience the uneasiness of those whom Robin speaks to because we, too, do not understand what happens on her travels. A further example of the resistance to the detail of reality and its surrounds is when domestic places are appropriated by a dream sequence to include a spatial plurality as a device to transgress boundaries:¹⁴

She went back to bed and fell into a dream which she recognised; though in the finality of this version she knew that the dream had not been 'well dreamt' before. Where the dream had been incalculable, it was now completed with the entry of Robin.

Nora dreamed that she was standing at the top of a house, that is, the last floor but one – this was her grandmother's room – an expansive, decaying splendour; yet somehow, though set with all the belongings of her grandmother, was as bereft as the nest of a bird which will not return (93).

¹⁴ Nancy Armstrong takes a rather conventional approach to the idea of domesticity in which woman is outlined in relation to the constraints of gender and place, in "Some Call it Fiction: On the politics of domesticity," *The Other Perspective in Gender and Culture*, ed. J. Flower-MacCannel (New York: Columbia UP, 1990) 59-84.

The transgressive movement breaks up the arranged fixtures of the patriarchal culture, splitting and filling it with empty spaces. When these spaces are vacant, they are then filled with female desire.¹⁵ Nora enters the vacant place to signify her own foreignness, where, as alien, she is out of place. No one is there, because space is both double and foreign. In this sense, *Nightwood* is a transgressive text; it clears away symbolic places in order to fill them, temporarily, with the abstract and fleeting notion of female desire. Thus the notion of foreigner and desire are subtly interactive; as Kristeva observes: “the alienation of the foreigner ceases within the universality of the love for the other” (*Strangers* 84). Feelings of foreignness seem to incur the need to assimilate oneself with the other.

Place is introduced in the opening of Nora’s dream as a room where a bird has flown its nest.¹⁶ It is a vacant, desolate room, but also resplendent in its decayed elegance. There is only a remnant of a past life where strong overtones of barrenness underlie the dream. The grandmother’s room can be likened to a defunct womb – aged, sterile, and symbolic of a once fecund past. Nora, because of her relationship with her grandmother, is able to re-enter the barren room/womb, and from the top of the house calls Robin her lover, but Robin, in “the body of the house” (94), is unable to enter the space where life is no longer wrought. Nora wants to graft Robin onto her ancestral line, but “the louder she cried out the further away went the floor below” (94). There is no way that Robin can enter the familial place. In fact, the more Nora tries to include Robin the further she retreats. It is “as if Robin and she, in their extremity, were a pair of opera glasses turned to the wrong end” (94). The incongruity of images such as the aged womb and the converse opera glasses serve to estrange further the characters from each other; at the same time the images create the possibility of seeing differently. As place is made strange, the power structures that would normally sustain boundaries of

¹⁵ Peggy Kamuf describes a notion of desire that she sees perforating the dominant narratives of normalising behaviour. She argues that desire challenges the limitational boundaries of the heterosexual relation to ‘other’ ways of expressing sexuality. Although Kamuf is challenging patriarchal and normative discourses, she in some ways sustains the link between women and sex when she concludes that the relation of desire, transgression and being ‘outside’ are inseparable. In *Fictions of Feminine Desire* (Lincoln and London: Nebraska UP, 1982).

¹⁶ Gaston Bachelard explores the inhabited domestic spaces of cellars, bedrooms, and corridors, and argues that such spaces furnish the mind when we read a book: “It therefore makes sense from our standpoint of a philosophy of literature and poetry to say that we ‘write a room,’ ‘read a room,’ or ‘read a book.’” In *The Poetics of Space*, trans. J. R. Stilgoe (Boston: Beacon, 1994) 14.

desire are equally subverted. The idea of perceiving her lover as though from the wrong end of a pair of opera glasses is a resourceful metaphor to estrange both readers and characters and their sense of perception. Nora seeks a way of grafting Robin to her own life in an effort to sustain it, but finds that it is a fruitless pursuit. Nora measures herself in relation to Robin, but the position between them is widened and stretched in the immeasurable scope of dream-scape. They separated at “a speed that ran away with the two ends of the building, stretching her apart” (94), showing that even within the dream they are unable to consummate their love. What deflects them is the hierarchical model of the house as Nora looks from the top down towards Robin who lies in the basement.

There is an underlying imperialist and patriarchal model here, where the notion of place and location plays a central role: Nora is all-seeing and is therefore able to transcend her surrounding; she is a God-like figure who assumes the patriarchal role of the divine paternal inscriber of meaning. She is placed at the top of the pyramid-type model from which to look down on the domestic setting of woman in her traditional role as assimilated subject in the ‘body’ of the house. Moreover, Nora at the top of the house is therefore advantageously positioned: viewing from this position compounds the idea of power from the top down and the sources of origin associated with transferring power downwardly.

The need for Nora to incorporate Robin into her life is based upon desire. Within Nora’s dream-world desire does not sustain itself because it is not supported by structures relating to place or the normalising fabric of society. Therefore, the dream represents a vacant space: no one can enter it but Nora; it is transient and ephemeral. It serves, however, to parallel a society that rejects women’s entry into language. The vacant space represents the anteriority that lies beyond language as the space that lacks definition and power, and for this reason it is linked to a dangerous doubling. As Kristeva writes, “By giving birth ... a woman is simultaneously closer to her instinctual memory, more open to her own psychosis, and consequently, more negatory of the social, symbolic bond.”¹⁷ Despite this, by the very fact that it is unrepresentable it is also subversive – displacing the male order of logic,

¹⁷ J. Kristeva, “Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini,” in *Desire* 237.

mastery, and verisimilitude. Because Nora enters the vacant place the distinction between logic and subversiveness breaks down so that Nora speaks using the gesture of the semiotic. In so doing, she becomes both symbolic and semiotic and is transposed into the female with phallus. Kristeva describes it in the following way “... oracular discourse, split (signifier / signified) and multiplied (in its sentential and lyrical concatenations), carries the scar of not merely the *trauma* but also the *triumph* of his battle with the Phallic Mother.”¹⁸ In the same way that Irigaray’s theory draws attention to the female body, Kristeva’s theory draws attention to the strange phallus-woman standing in the midst of a much larger theoretical discussion.

2.2 Delimiting place to include female desire

To begin exploring the notion of woman as male,¹⁹ Sarah Kofman transposes Freud’s image of the woman as a narcissistic bird of prey, and celebrates the notion of the woman who, unwilling to accept castration, accepts her duplicitous and ‘flighty’ feminine sexuality. If the image of woman cannot be pinned down, then she is much like the “bird which will not return” to the room in *Nightwood*. These themes are conscripted to draw attention to the patriarchal framework within which notions of resistance may be explored. That is why *Nightwood* is a novel which goes some way towards problematising perspectives on place, language, and desire: the identity of the individuals are constructed *apart* from the places that might subscribe them to a cohesive society so that, as part of this layered novel, they may be viewed autonomously – from a place whereby their self-law is not put into question by their common environment. This makes for a non-comparable situation in which the world of *Nightwood* has a valid reality of its own. One of the most striking features of the novel is that from the outset the motif is set: “Early in life Felix had insinuated himself into the pageantry of the circus and the theatre... Here he had neither to be capable nor alien. He became for a little while a part of their splendid and reeking falsification” (*Nightwood* 24-25). The doctor who is “an Irishman

¹⁸ J. Kristeva, “The Novel as Polylogue,” in *Desire* 193.

¹⁹ S. Kofman, “The Narcissistic Woman: Freud and Girard,” *Diacritics* 10.3 (1980) 36-45.

from the Barbary Coast (Pacific Street, San Francisco), and whose interest in gynaecology had driven him half around the world” (29), is twice removed from his place of extraction. Nora and Robin, meanwhile, gravitated, independently of each other, to Europe from America in journeys that seem like acts of defiance, flitting the ready-made lifestyles of their home land. It seems that the buttress of every social code is integrated into the resistances of each character so that the novel stands as supplementary writing, in the place of a phatic moral order; and it refuses to be defined as a deviant text because it does not sustain an inverted law but a displacement in which a resistant socio-cultural counterpart is made valid.

It might be said that the positioning of Nora and Robin in the dream-space upholds traditional ideas of patriarchy, especially when Nora calls to Robin and finds that she is unable to enter the prohibited place. However, we should note that Nora is always measuring her position in relation to others. She occupies her own centre only until the object of grandmother and Robin come close enough to measure the axial position between herself and them. Additional objects further complicate the interactive relationship between Nora and others; the different levels of the rooms and the binoculars all serve to demarcate boundaries so that the idea of subject/object and the space between them furthers separation and division. The novel uses the technique of shifting its emphasis to include a demarcation of boundaries. It diversifies shape and delimits place to include the strangeness and alterity of female desire. Moreover, it might be said that the inclusion of female alterity is to acknowledge a feminine unconscious.²⁰

²⁰ To see how this works in relation to the *chora*, McAfee argues that the notion of the self as an incorporation of “conscience” and “unconscious” is a fiction. Kristeva, she argues, challenges this basic psychoanalytic assumption by throwing into question the unary subject:

In Kristeva’s terms, we could say that the call of conscience is the *chora* trying to reclaim itself from the monolithic Law of the father – the desire that had been driven underground (and unconscious) when the child left the *chora* for the symbolic realm. And this would explain the double aspect of uncanniness that Freud noted: *unheimlich* means both unhomelike and homelike. It is the eeriness of the forgotten familiar. Not just the intrauterine home that Freud links to death, but the home of the *chora*, where one has not yet differentiated oneself from the entirety of being (in Oliver 1993, 131).

Nora's perception of the room, once inhabited by her grandmother, disrupts the certainty of perceived recollection. The room is filled with familiar objects but there is a sense that the elder has long vacated the space:

She had wanted to put her hands on something in this room to prove it; the dream had never permitted her to do so. This chamber that had never been her grandmother's, which was, on the contrary, the absolute opposite of any known room her grandmother had ever moved or lived in, was nevertheless saturated with the lost presence of her grandmother, who seemed in the continual process of leaving it. The architecture of the dream had rebuilt her everlasting and continuous, flowing away in a long gown of soft folds and chintz laces (95).

The place contrived in the novel is a fragile temporary abode that is not supported by either place or history. It is in many respects a pre-Oedipal space that is pregnant with the potential of articulation but, in actuality, exists only as a pre-symbolic energy where the signifier never reaches the status of signification. This can be observed as the grandmother transgresses the boundaries of certainty when Nora attempts to locate an objective thought which will only be attained as an uncertain recollection.

Therefore, Nora's undertaking to draw Robin into a once remembered stable domestic room/womb is naïve and fanciful; belief in a matriarchal and familial order which will support desire is shown to be false. Nora learns that the place belongs to a decayed era and is therefore not part of an organic sustainable order. Instead, it has passed away and Nora finds herself no longer "able to give an invitation" (94). The relationship between others that depends so much upon context and place is precariously situated, and within the pre-symbolic dream, place is doubly defamiliarised. By merely shifting the limits Barnes exposes subject and object to the site that contains, and makes visible the historical and material relevance of boundaries.²¹

²¹ Gabriele Griffin raises the question of boundaries and place in her study of modern lesbian fiction and argues that sexuality and setting are frequently conjoined in order to explore the individual set apart from the community. She goes on to say that because Barnes does not foreground setting she is minimising the importance of sexuality:

[*Nightwood*] in its centralisation of characters conventionally considered marginal to mainstream culture, in its depiction of 'gender-benders' and in its representation of history as psychological necessity and subjective construct, it questions the apparently fixed entities of its period.... But, significantly, this questioning does not include either the representation of sexuality or its practice. (In *Heavenly Love* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1993) 140.)

2.3 Space as trace

Kristeva's model of space is a resourceful method of approach as it incorporates a sense of place and allusion to the objects which both approximate and give historical relevance to relationships that occur *between* objects. For example, when we think of space we visualise an image of emptiness or an unoccupied expanse, upholding the conventional view that space is a void. However, Kristeva's model suggests that there is no neutrality between places and therefore the non-neutrality of the semiotic is able to signify its rhythmic trace. In the Derridean sense, the trace comprehends deconstruction's notions of spacing: the trace is a question of something else, something already there; in parenthesis punctuating sentences with absence. However, trace is not only part of the narrative's chronicity and sequence, it is a more radical displacement better understood as estrangement. This is borne out in the way Robin trawls the streetside cafés at night, estranged from everyone around her:

Her thoughts were in themselves a form of locomotion. She walked with raised head, *seeming* to look at every passer-by, yet her gaze was anchored in *anticipation* and *regret*. A look of anger, intense and hurried, shadowed her face and drew her mouth down as she neared her company; yet as her eyes moved over the façades of the buildings, *searching* for the sculptured head that both she and Nora loved (a Greek head with shocked protruding eyeballs, for which the tragic mouth seemed to pour forth tears,) a quiet joy radiated from her own eyes; for this head was *remembrance* of Nora and her love, making the *anticipation* of the people she was to meet set and melancholy (*Nightwood*; my italics 90-91).

The italicised words describe Robin's state of being which, invoking analepsis and prolepsis, exclude any real reference to the present. The narrative contains the psychical marks of semiotic enunciation whose Greek meanings include the sense of "distinctive mark", "trace", "precursory sign", "imprint" (*Revolution* 25). This trace is the fabric of space itself. Space is involved in the relationship that occurs between objects, and there is a sequential and interactive relationship between those objects that invariably evokes an articulation of something else. Robin lives between these events in which the spaces themselves are marks of the past.

I would argue that the psychological necessity and subjective construct gives the novel its heightened ambiguity as a 'resistant' text, which does not necessarily mean that it avoids the political implications of sexuality.

Nora, too, goes between the places of familiarity in search of her precursory sign; what is perceived is a sense of abject inattention to the objects that surround her as she pursues the trace and not the object:

Looking at every couple as they passed, into every carriage and car, up to the lighted windows of the houses, trying to discover not Robin any longer, but traces of Robin, influences in her life (and those which were yet to be betrayed), Nora watched every moving figure for some gesture that might turn up in the movements made by Robin; avoiding the quarter where she knew her to be (93).

Barnes is drawing attention to the non-neutrality of space and the subject-of-loss who, stripped from the boundaries that support identity, clings to the torment of the residual trace. However the pursuit of the trace offers hope and resistance for Nora who prefers semblances of Robin instead of the painful reality of evidence which is too brutal and corroborative. It seems that vestiges of truth provide Nora with the means to compensate for the loss of Robin. Barnes' text is filled with a staggering multiplicity of methods to 'avoid the truth', each one offering a means of transgressing reality: variation, trace, repetition, and substitution, though none are sufficient to compensate for the feeling of loss.

If we think of language as an articulation with a semiotic current running through it, we begin to understand the systematic principles laid out by Kristeva in which a two-fold process signifies both stability and resistance. *Nightwood* is concerned with the unstable aspect of language and performs as an eluding trace of supplementarity. We see this in the example of desire which serves to represent the ever eluding notion of the trace. Desire, so conceived, is that portion of the pre-articulated need which exceeds the symbolic. In the relationship between Nora and Robin desire is the enunciation that apprehends speech and resists comprehension:

Unable to turn her eyes away, incapable of speech, experiencing a sensation of evil, complete and dismembering, Nora fell to her knees, so that her eyes were not withdrawn by her volition, but dropped from their orbit by the falling of her body. Her chin on the sill she knelt thinking, 'Now they will not hold together,' feeling that if she turned away from what Robin was doing, the design would break and melt back into Robin alone. She closed her eyes, and at that

moment she knew an awful happiness. Robin, like something dormant, was protected, moved out of death's way by the successive arms of women (97).

The passage describes the tangible pain of loss and the temporary articulation of desire itself. Yet it also observes the love and cohesion that exists between these women. This, of course, has many ideological implications. Barnes is endeavouring to transgress the construction of identity and gender in the cultural boundaries she knows. In the same way as desire shifts, the semiotic motility is forever changing stable structures assimilating and naming new spaces of resistance from the margins.²² *Nightwood* combines a departure from a patriarchal place while remaining in it to produce a critique of it as a cultural model. This is important because what we get is a dissemination of certainty in which desire becomes the transgressive feature of the text. A loving consummation and finalisation is irreconcilable but it does not seem to trouble Barnes and is clearly a concomitant of the process of transgressive desire over a stable union or conclusion.

This is because the resistant spaces that emerge are contrivances of sequential changes: "Robin is moved by the successive arms of women." This idea of process is central to the definition of the semiotic which repeatedly conducts change and loosens fixity. Kristeva describes it as the rhythmical motility that underlies all structuring. A basic definition of rhythm is a movement of elements in succession. Plato defines a rhythm that generates a signifying position as female.²³ This structural pattern is encountered in *Nightwood*, in the cameo sequences where characters seek each other out and then depart: "In the years that they lived together, the departures of Robin became a slowly increasing rhythm" (*Nightwood* 89). Yet there is a sense of repetition in the novel that sustains the idea of loss: "seeing Robin go from table to table, drink to drink, from person to person, realising that

²² Carol Brookes-Gardner argues that to write and exist within the plurality of space, or absence, is preferable to the patriarchal boundaries of place: "There are sound reasons for all women to feel vulnerable in public places. In contrast, private places such as home are sites that liberated women, along with their traditional sisters, are encouraged to use as a refuge." In "Out of Place," *Space, Time and Modernity*, eds. R. Friedland and D. Boden (Berkeley: CUP, 1994) 352. There seems to me to be an obvious degree of irony in the above quotation as it suggests that with the right dollops of luck and pluck women can either absent themselves from the outside world, or enter it with all guns blazing. There is a bit of do or die rationale here.

²³ In the *Timaeus* Plato writes that the receptacle is "most fittingly compared to a mother" (52a-52b) and that space is "the wetnurse of becoming" (52d). For a fuller discussion see Chapter One above.

if she herself were not there Robin might return to her as the one who, out of all the turbulent night, had not been lived through – Nora stayed at home” (89). Rather than giving Robin a conceptual and concrete identity, Nora objectifies her in a way that lends her a sort of ephemeral persona; in that sense Robin is like the semiotic *chora*: closer to the flows and ruptures of bodily and vocal rhythm than originating identity. Consequently, in order to avoid supplying Robin with an essential existence and make her accountable, Nora perceives Robin in the way the *chora* is understood by both Plato and Kristeva: “apprehended without the senses by a sort of bastard reasoning.... This, indeed, is that which we look upon as in a dream and say that anything that is must needs be in some place and occupy some room” (*Revolution* 239). This is why Robin occupies only the dream-room, she is too ephemeral to be contained singularly in the receptacle of either real life or language.

Nora’s dream has been recurrent and although it is the last time it will be dreamt, we understand that she is familiar with the content which is based on the rhythmic succession of women in her life. Furthermore, the concept of rhythm is generally introduced when the repetition is combined with certain lawful changes. The changes that occur between Nora’s dream world and reality are observed in the relational properties between the women encountered in the novel.

Nora situates herself analeptically and proleptically: she is defined only in connection with her grandmother and Robin; the privilege of the phallus is excluded from the arrangement.²⁴ Barnes forces us to question the connection between women and the issues this involves: loving the same confronts Nora and Robin with the possibility of not being fully integrated into the symbolic. Furthermore, assimilation puts them outside the law of procreation. Effectively, if all three women are barren – the grandmother because of age, Nora because of her love for Robin, and Robin because she is outside the room – we are faced with a sort of hybrid creativity. Therefore, the connective element amongst these women is not borne from an ability to generate children but to generate desire. Desire becomes the transgressive element in the novel because it excludes the symbolic. Moreover, it

²⁴ Each sex’s distinctiveness in relation to the phallus is discussed by Juliet Flower MacCannel. She argues that attention needs to be paid to sexual difference for woman especially as “contradiction inhabits her, body and soul.” In “Things To Come,” *Supposing the Subject*, ed. J. Copjec (London: Verso, 1994) 107.

destabilises traditional and inherited assumptions that are sustained by language. It is important that Nora finally comes to the realisation that both her grandmother and Robin symbolise another life once they are removed from the protective boundaries of the inner room. Barnes leaves us to question the position of women in our cultural setting and what happens once they enter the unmasterable space. We learn that to enter this space is to resist the symbolic. Resistance to a normative order however is never easy: places signify boundaries of cohesion and convey all kinds of meaning relating to gender, class, race, and exclusion; and it is impossible to extract ourselves from its influence. We are institutionalised and organised by dint of affiliation and represented by the contextualisation of place.

If we are to affirm the affiliation of women through the semiotic, we must consider the place of cross-identification and its lawfulness in the articulation of sexuality. Barnes produces a set of circumstances that exceed what we consider normal and within 'the law'. Nora's grandmother not only transgresses images of gender, she flouts the bounds of decency. Dressed as a man in a billycock and waistcoat, she does little to portray the subtlety of the excess encountered in Robin; even as the figure of a dream, the grandmother represents an awkwardness. The performance of an old woman in drag leaves Nora uncomfortable and confused. The mental picture of the grandmother approximates her unrealness, in the sense of perceiving her as a subversion of history in which any presupposition of a prior and original gender can be supposed. Desire as a contrivance of resistance is better understood when we read Kristeva's formulation of desire as the key feature of aporia:

Desire causes the signifier to appear as heterogeneous and, inversely, indicates heterogeneity through and across the signifier. To posit that the subject is linked by its desire to the signifier is to say, therefore, that he has access through and across the signifier to what the symbolic does not make explicit, even if it translates it: instinctual drives, historical contradictions (*Desire* 116).

Because the grandmother is inherently unreal she is an historical contradiction that can only be defined by the excesses of a heterogeneous desire. She exceeds any intended reference within the confines of the book in as much as the pageantry of the grandmother in drag attempts to open up the

possibilities of characterisation in fiction; not only that, her excessive image is a parody of male progeny, where possibilities for sexual activity are set up. This type of sexual disruption and duplicity is bound in the notions of the semiotic which works across signification as well as through it; it is this that makes *Nightwood* with the use of the semiotic *chora* a resistant and transgressive text.

3. Desire and incest as transgressive techniques

To understand how far *Nightwood* exceeds the symbolic as a novel of resistance we have to look at the way in which highly taboo social codes are co-opted into desire as a means of shattering even the most concealed aspects of symbolic origin and societal law. Nora describes her intense love for Robin in very clear terms: “For Robin is incest too; that is one of her powers” (156). In psychoanalytic terms, the notion of incest is the nearest evocation to describing how the self loses sight of itself through the transgressive love for the other. Incestuous love breaks the boundaries which lead to a notion of anterior spatiality. If incest leads the subject to a place beyond or prior to conventional or normalised behaviour then a link between incest and space can be made. Within space there is always a semiotic trace of something else (as Judith Butler suggested earlier, there is always something that escapes schematisation). Because the semiotic precedes or succeeds any objectification, definition can only be made in accordance with the underlying rhythmic motility of excess.²⁵ What this suggests is that everything that is socialised and postulated has an obvious outward form, but it also contains sonorous indicators of something else. It is the rhythmic process that encompasses all things and leaves its trace everywhere. As Kristeva maintains, “incest is a meeting with the other, the first other, the mother. It is the penetration of a heterogeneous terrain, the absorption of its bursting, and the alliance of the bursting of the ‘proper’ that follows. The poet’s *jouissance* that causes him to emerge from schizophrenic decorporealisation is the *jouissance* of the mother” (*Desire* 192). Kristeva’s argument locates incestual trace between events, such as the event of childbirth, and creates a schema in which she locates the anaphoric trope between the subjective

²⁵ Furthermore, if space is defined as a receptacle that generates a signifying position or rhythm, then space is trace itself.

and objective, between transgression and form. Foucault, meanwhile, in his critique of psychoanalysis, bestows on transgression a more formal definition, calling it desire.

As Foucault writes, incestuous desire and incest taboo are central issues to proponents of psychoanalysis, who inscribe incest “as the principle of its formation and the key of its intelligibility.”²⁶ We can examine incest as a trope in which to consider its rhetorical and figurative features of language, as opposed to understanding it as a violent and personal act (of love) upon the other.²⁷ I do not imagine such a change in perspective sanitises our view of incest, but it does enable us to explore loss through the imagination and engage in a writerly kind of incest. The creative act would therefore be the ability to elaborate feelings and master ideas through language, beginning with the acknowledgement of the loss of the mother. Therefore, speaking and writing begin with the mother, and continue to engender creativity through the search for the maternal. Kristeva writes, “I have lost an essential object that happens to be, in the final analysis, my mother.... But no, I have found her again in signs.... I can recover her in language” (*Black Sun* 43) – through language the mother is again found. Consequently, according to Kristeva, we can trace the genealogical structures of writing to the mother.

But this conception is beset with problems. For one, the trace is an intertextual structure and anything intertextual signifies the death of origin: intertextuality ensures that the active writer vanishes into textual (non)status. Consequently, the mother can never be located as the source of writing because she writes herself out. Ironically, with a Kristevan approach we are agents of our own anonymity and absence, for in order for the trace structure to exist we must absent ourselves. In addition, it is impossible to locate the mother ‘in language’ when language is part of a symbolic structure which is male and patriarchal. What is recovered then in language is the phallic mother: the

²⁶ M. Foucault, *History of Sexuality* vol. 1, trans. R. Hurley and A. Lane (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979) 113. There are other the main psychoanalytic players in this, especially Freud; see *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, trans. T. J. Strachey (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961).

²⁷ Vicki Bell argues that we do not have to accept the existence of taboo, instead we can view it as a discursive construct; see *Incest* 117.

trace of both male and female, save that the drama has to be re-enacted in real life in order to let “this Phallic Mother enter into your language where she enables you to kill the master signifier – but also reconstitutes that ultimate and tenacious repression seizing you in the veils of the ‘genital mystery’ (Nerval, Nietzsche, Artaud)” (*Desire* 191). Kristeva names those authors whom she feels best encompass the genital mystery that is in resistant writing; however, the female writer is sadly missing from her list which suggests that Kristeva will go no further than feminize the male writer. Barnes, on the other hand, forges a more radical displacement which is exemplified in the grandmother masquerading as phallic mother where she emerges from the irregular space between subject and object and offers a performance of mimicry and monstrosity.²⁸ In that relation the feminine as well as the masculine position can be filled by either the grandmother or Robin (both roles being equally unsatisfactory). The phallic mother is neither grandmother nor consenting lover but the impossible merging of all possibilities (familial and romantic), thus equally impossible to have or to be. Perhaps the difference between Barnes’ monstrous configuration and Kristeva’s ambivalent figure which bears the imprint of phallic mother / maternal phallus is that the former is more comfortable with uncanny events. Kristeva’s method, however, gives rise to increased uncertainty and the connected problem of how to define the mother who “does not ‘speak’” (*Desire* 191).

Perhaps this is one of the principal reasons why Irigaray and Cixous have a wider audience than Kristeva; in addition, they reject the more fundamental aspects of Freud’s myth of social and biological origins based on the incest taboo. Both Cixous and Irigaray clear away Freud’s influence on erotogenic language to summon a female-in-language that is undiminished in her own sexual

²⁸ Siobhan Craig examines the idea of a configuration of a monstrous dialogue. Like me she argues that there is a link between monstrosity and erotics. Her feminist discussion of Frankenstein includes the notion of a female monstrous voice through its author. But she fails to consider the idea of language as a monstrous or sexualised construct. “Monstrous Dialogues,” *A Dialogue of Voices: Feminist Literary Theory and Bakhtin*, ed. K. Hohne (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1994) 83-96. The idea, however, of a sexualised language is examined by Charles Bernheimer in “A Question of Reference: Male sexuality in Phallic Theory,” *Spectacles of Realism: Body, Gender, Genre*, ed. M. Cohen and C. Prendergast (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1995) 320-328.

identity. In contrast, Kristeva clings to the father, embroidering her work, however randomly, with his presence in creating a phallic (m)other:²⁹

No language can sing unless it confronts the Phallic Mother. For all that it must not leave her untouched, outside, opposite, against the law, the absolute esoteric code. Rather, it must swallow her, eat her, dissolve her, set her up like a boundary of the process where “I” with “she” – “the other,” “the mother” – becomes lost. Who is capable of this? “I alone am nourished by the great mother,” writes Lao Tzu. In the past, this was called “the sacred.” In any case, within the experiencing of the phallic, maternal mirage, within this consummated incest, sexuality no longer has the gratifying appeal of a return to the promised land. Know the mother, first take her place, thoroughly investigate her *jouissance* and, without releasing her, go beyond her. The language that serves as a witness to this course is iridescent with a sexuality of which it does not “speak”; it turns it into rhythm – it is rhythm (*Desire* 191).

I have argued that Cixous and Irigaray defeat a phallogentric language by providing a ‘feminised’ theory of language. However, they offer theories based on body symmetry and translations that sexualise the certainty of woman’s difference. Their arguments should therefore be read as confrontations with male ‘otherness’. In spite of the uncomfortableness of Kristeva’s model, she theorises differences within the self: the notion of strangeness, alterity, and desire are included in a scrutiny of female subjectivity and language. Various, and at times conjointly, she successfully addresses the notion of writing in relation to a maternal identity because, for her, writing is an incestuous desire for the mother: once the mother has been metaphorically consumed, cannibalised and digested, we can speak with the mother-tongue. Moreover, in order to deliver the word, all traces of her must be eaten – disposing of her through our digestive processes. Despite the apparent subjugation, we murder our mother in the most creative way possible purely because we are consumed by the universal all-consuming motive of love. There are those feminists who clearly take exception to this argument.

Anna Smith, for one, challenges the Kristevan interpretation of Freud’s Communal Meal in an overtly negative critique, and claims that

²⁹ Kristeva is, we should recall, a practising psychoanalyst in the broadly Freudian tradition.

Kristeva stages a bizarre reversal of Freud's myth and asserts that the mother must be 'eaten' in order for language to destroy the boundaries of sense and sensibility within the self, and to give rise to a heterogeneity of voices speaking at once: a polylogue. Here we see the ludicrous lengths to which Kristeva's text has gone to concoct a series of manoeuvres that will first aggrandise maternal identity in paranoid fashion and then permanently bar it from entering the scene of representation. The son-artist is invited to ravish his mother and devour her in a cannibalistic meal, overlooked by an approving daughter-critic.³⁰

As Smith suggests, Kristeva displaces and recontextualises incest, making strange even the most defamiliarised stylistic novelties in psychoanalysis.³¹ However, I would argue that the key to estranging perception offers a constant renewal of creativity subverting uniformly the law of the symbolic: the shift in perception that Kristeva and Barnes employ transforms normative language into a rich resistant textuality. Writing becomes the violent act based on the narcissistic desire to recuperate the lost and exiled self through the image of the maternal. This can be witnessed when Matthew offers a description of Robin as "outside the 'human type' – a wild thing caught in a woman's skin, monstrously alone, monstrously vain" (*Nightwood* 206). She is like an alien in the most extreme sense of the term: a figure outside of society that masquerades in a human skin.

Kristeva's and Barnes' contributions provide a writing that urges a maternal renewal, subverting and overthrowing the most ingrained patriarchal perceptions and opening up an anterior spatiality which marks the symbolic with its transgressive gaps. Smith notes that "the semiotic, together with the topology of the *chora*, introduces a feminine alterity, an ambiguously mediated materiality, *within* language" (93), suggesting that there is a mediation between semiotic space and language which signifies a process of resistance that is rooted in continual renewal. As she rightly conceptualises it,

the *topos* of the *chora* illustrates Kristeva's view of the simultaneous destruction and renewal of language and its subject. From the *chora* will issue the fire of tongues and the subject-in-

³⁰ A. Smith, *Julia Kristeva: Readings of Exile and Estrangement* (London: Macmillan, 1996) 136-7.

³¹ In her readings of Exile and Estrangement, Smith offers a similar reading to mine in her description of a Kristevan space. She writes: "In order to avoid lending the *chora* an essential existence which would assume all the paraphernalia of a distinguishable form and content, inside and outside, Kristeva suggests that it lies *before* the separation and object as an object pre-object which must be, as Plato says, 'apprehended without the senses by a sort of bastard reasoning,'" in *Readings of Exile* 92.

process. We could imagine it as a place of blinding flashes of energy, punctuating the surrounding darkness with an abrupt, obscure illumination (92).

Yet once the space has been transgressed there is perhaps a greater sense of loss where woman is further estranged. Nora feels the extreme force of this loss which the doctor sums up: "We are crazed with grief when she, who once permitted us, leaves to us the only recollection. We shed our tears of bankruptcy then" (*Nightwood* 183). For Nora, who is beguiled by the anteriority of feelings of loss for the other, recollection can only come through flashes of semiosis as the 'corporeal' Robin is lost to her forever.

As suggested in *Black Sun*, writing is born out of the desire to recover what is lost. This "unobtainable lack of satisfaction ... opens up the space" (256) to alterity, strangeness, and writing. But perhaps we discover that to remain in this abject space we have to dress like the grandmother in billycock and waistcoat and masquerade as a man. Therefore, the excursion into the semiotic can only ever be a temporary retreat supported by the logic of the symbolic.

To show that the desire to write is based upon a return to the lost maternal presence, some ground has been gained in the struggle against phallogentrism. However, if there is not a separation from the maternal, the ability to look upon the self as other and to designate a separate identity is lost. Articulation and identification command disconnection from our incestuous bonds. Our own impulsive drives and the impulses of language arouse the need in all of us to fill the space of loss with yearning for the mother. *Nightwood* offers a choice: the empty space can be filled with the law of the father in which the syntactical structures, vocal declarations, and legitimate discourses are defined by place; or the empty space can be filled with the grandmother, the metaphor for a discourse that impersonates the 'real'.³² Overall, breaking with our incestuous bonds erases the phallic mother,

³² To explain this, we can take Lacan's idea of displacement. In his view the subject (and its space) is no longer constituted as a singular and separate entity from its other. The subject does not have a stationary desire or identity; its 'alterity' subscribes excess. Lacan explains that the subject is constituted by a logic of the real, imaginary, and symbolic: the real is the *Aufhebung* of the dialectic of the imaginary and the symbolic. Any movement into alterity within discourse involves putting into discourse 'excessive' meaning: this results in a dynamic, but also anarchic, text. In relation to Barnes' portrayal of the subject, *Nightwood's* characters manifest a complex condition of psyche which re-enacts the real through excess, caricature, and parody.

while the formal device for communicating meaning gives us a structure of support that limits the monstrous effects of incestuous acts of love.

3.1 Authoring a new genealogical space

So far, it has been argued that *Nightwood* contains resistant semiotic spaces which form notions of desire and incest as ways to transgress the limits in language and identity. The novel successfully operates from the semiotic space to show how a textual space opens up between the semiotic and symbolic in which it places itself in history as a resistant novel. Even though it escapes a straightforward telling, it gives insight into a new spatial authority. Yet *Nightwood* cannot work without both the semiotic and the symbolic, and in this sense the novel needs to be understood as a two-pronged performative whereby it includes a spatial formulation as mother and trace, also defining itself as authored work within the genre of the modern novel. The entry of the text into language and a place within the literary arena is part of the pre-Oedipal drama in which an incestuous act with the mother is performed before murdering her in order to possess the ability to name. It shows that either this violent act is carried out or the text remains unwritten. The crossing of identification from union with the mother to individual conceals the murder because it is eclipsed by the birth of the new voice, or author. If the agency and erotic release of the author is to be inscribed, she must occupy a space apart from the maternal. This birth establishes Barnes' authority to name the "I" which Kristeva calls "the violent crucible" (*Revolution* 103). Butler describes this entry into language in a similar way:

The temporal structure of such a subject is chiasmic in this sense: in the place of a substantial or self-determining "subject," this juncture of discursive demands is something like a "crossroads," to use Gloria Anzaldúa's phrase, a crossroads of cultural and political discursive forces, which she herself claims cannot be understood through the notion of the "subject." There is no subject prior to its constructions, and neither is the subject determined by those constructions; it is always the nexus, the non-space of cultural collision, in which the demand

Moreover, in relation to Freud, the central configuration of incest is figured by the Oedipal myth in the relationship between the son and the mother, whereas for Barnes, the incest scenario is a compromise of the Oedipal myth.

to resignify or repeat the very terms which constitute the “we” cannot be summarily refused, but neither can they be followed in strict obedience. It is the space of this ambivalence which opens up the possibility of a reworking of the very terms by which subjectivation proceeds – and fails to proceed (*Bodies* 124).

For Butler there is no subject prior to construction, as the imagined subject is pre-Oedipal. However, when the author comes into collision with its constructions, when it is forced to redefine them, the structure it reworks does not go on to sustain its identity, because, as Butler argues, “the subject [is not] determined by those structures”. Importantly, this ambivalent space is implicitly positive, offering the author the means to transgress cultural institutions and open up a network of resistant spaces; but more to the point, Butler’s space, while it is ambivalent, is also incontestable inasmuch as it repeatedly signifies its own terms.

Regrettably, Butler does not advance the argument of space as a transgressive device – she merely calls space non-space and falls short of naming the device she claims provides the means to rename. This is in contrast to Barnes, who uses desire as the key to resistance of normative constructions. However, Butler’s intelligent study of temporal and non-temporal structures serves as a vehicle to understand the subject at the crossroads. Kristeva’s violent crucible is the point at which the semiotic meets the cohesive and ordered form of the symbolic. The point of interaction has been called many things and is assimilated by different traditions under different terms. We know it as a synchronic and diachronic intersection,³³ Kristeva’s maternal and paternal cross-genderism, and structuralism’s merging of metaphoric and metonymic devices. These cross-identifications take account of the structuring presence of the author and its history. In the production of the text, we can locate the authorial desire that is produced historically at the crossroads of disruption and order. The violent crucible describes simply how the text intersects in space and time. However, whereas in a realist narrative time and space cross each other in a rhetorical figure that conceals their discontinuity, *Nightwood* offers glimpses of its disassembling practice and its spaces of resistance –

³³ Kristeva speaks of her work as a theory which “can situate such processes and relations diachronically within the process of the constitution of the subject precisely because they function synchronically within the signifying process of the subject” (*Revolution* 29).

the characters are always out of time with history and its prevailing values: “Matthew, you have never been in time with any man’s life” (224), he remonstrates to himself. Robin also “was now beyond timely changes” (86). The sutures of time and space are made visible as a divisive technique to provide a layering effect of poetic depth.

As such, the textual space signifies the effect of poetic resistance transposed into violence at the crossroads. However, it is violence which is harnessed and brought under control by the order of the symbolic. When we ask what type of drama is played out at the juncture, we discover it to be the primal act of incest. It is a drama of both comic and tragic proportions that signifies both society’s birth and its death, containing all the components of a great play: murder, sex, envy and quest.

Of course, the reigning metaphor here is the story by Sophocles of Oedipus meeting his biological father at the crossroads, and the subsequent ‘Oedipal tug’ for authority. It is a story I wish to end on as its relation to *Nightwood* is an important one. *Oedipus* is the first ‘resistant’ narrative from which all subsequent poetic revolutions followed: born out of transgressive acts of violence, it forms a reconciliatory act with words (the symbolic) and the entry of new fictions.³⁴ Oedipus fights with his father at the crossroads, precisely because it is his father (it is the point at which the symbolic and the semiotic meet and, inadvertently, form a sort of alliance). Even though he does not know his ancestral origins, as Freud and Kristeva would assert, Oedipus must strike the blow that breaks with his paternal connection. The fulfilment of prophecy in the act of patricide and regicide means that Oedipus must follow a direction that differs from any logic he has previously known. The constructions that had once secured his identity become redundant of meaning. At the crossroads he breaks with his former thetic position and encounters a cultural collision which forces him to enter a

³⁴ In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva describes the link between incest and the pre-verbal:

If the *murder* of the father is that historical event constituting the social code as such, that is, symbolic exchange and the exchange of women, its equivalent on the level of the subjective history of each individual is therefore the *advent of language*, which breaks with perviousness if not with the chaos that precedes it and sets up denomination as an exchange of linguistic signs. Poetic language would then be, contrary to murder and the univocity of verbal message, a reconciliation with what murder as well as names were separated from. It would be an attempt to symbolise the ‘beginning’, an attempt to name the other facet of taboo: pleasure, pain. Are we finally dealing with incest? (61-62).

new and monstrous space.³⁵ From this point onwards, there is an explosive intrusion of the irrational into human history. It is an act that strikingly embodies the violent crucible where, characteristically, the moment engenders a process of unravelling and reconciling a network of traces. It is not an isolated event, and we discover, through exposition and disclosure, the fruition of other texts.

The drama of Oedipus, considered in itself, leaves construability and accountability unresolved. Yet the Oedipal drama is complicated by the problem of the third party. Already, when the scene at the crossroads takes place, the past has decided Oedipus's fate. It would seem that we can never escape from either the trace or the effects of the incestuous drive.

4. Conclusion

The desire to determine our own path at the crossroads means that we must each execute our past. This process is articulated in a symbolic and semiotic system that is both historically specific and spatially ambiguous: it is an example of a transitional moment in a resistant fiction. Thus, given Barnes' conditions of resistance in the disruption of time and space, the experience manifests itself in the abject:

'In the acceptance of depravity the sense of the past is most fully captured. What is a ruin but Time easing itself of endurance? Corruption is the Age of Time. It is the body and the blood of ecstasy, religion and love. Ah, yes,' the doctor added, 'we do not 'climb' to heights, we are eaten away to them, and then conformity, neatness, ceases to entertain us. Man is born as he dies rebuking cleanliness; and there is its middle condition, the slovenliness that is usually an accompaniment of the 'attractive' body, a sort of earth on which love feeds' (*Nightwood* 169).

The middle condition is the crossroads – the point at which we can overtly locate the description of order (kingship and patriarchy at its most symbolic) alongside a moment of violence and collapse. The inclusion of fiction, tragic drama, human emotion, and disorder suggests that the diversity of human nature or authorship can never be inscribed by a simple psychoanalysis; nor can it be

³⁵ The idea of the monster lurking at the juncture of social discourse has been well documented: see, for example, Ellen Goldner's essay "Monstrous Body, Tortured Soul: Frankenstein at the juncture between Discourses," in *Genealogy and Literature*, ed. L. Quinby (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1995) 28-47.

determined by a single event. The killing of the king (or phallic mother) is the transgressive moment in every 'author's' life. "The transgression breaks up the thetic, splits it, fills it with empty spaces and uses its devices" as "a *transgression* of position" (*Revolution* 69).

However, we discover that although the thetic is transgressed, there remains a dialogue of two discourses where the semiotic infiltrates the master language of the father. Incest, desire, absence are all powerful, intrusive and unnavigable impressions that inflect and challenge the law of the father. What makes Kristeva's contribution somewhat different from a number of other narratives of transgression is the fascination with violation that is somehow anterior to language. Yet Kristeva claims a place of privilege for the estranged and violated: it is that which enables us to extend a place of privilege for Barnes who articulates new forms. We can affirm the importance of Barnes as a writer who steps into the vacant space to embrace strangeness and alienation, finding a new access to language in this violent encounter.

Chapter Five

Discontented Space

Writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural – hence political, typically masculine – economy ... where woman has never her turn to speak – this being all the more serious and unpardonable in that writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures.

(Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa”)

1. Introduction

This chapter will examine the idea of *Nightwood* emerging out of a *discontented* space. Essentially, I employ the term ‘discontentedness’ to draw together the idea of content as text and contentment as emotion and to examine the conjunction of the two. In the main, I do this because psychoanalysis characteristically brings together bodily and textual discourses, and as I have created both a melancholic and incestuous space from a reading of *Nightwood*, the relation between the psyche and its textual interpretation is clearly evident. I would like to go on to say that a disruption in the psyche of the characters fosters a disruption in the novel so that both characterisation and content lack a clear centredness, which results in a lack of consciousness and stability. On a more practical level, discontentedness is a good substitution for the Derridean term deconstruction, which I am keen to appeal to because Barnes is decentering a number of powerful discourses; however, deconstruction would be to refigure the text in a way I wish to avoid, given that the viewing position I take is spatial. Therefore, if we say that the text constitutes a discontented space, we can still see how it displaces master discourses such as phallogentric discourses. I examine the continuity and discontinuity of female identity and desire in the novel and the way ingrained discourses are interrupted with an

alternative 'genealogy' (as history, or validation of identity).¹ In the specific application here, genealogy signifies the search for beginnings.

More specifically, the chapter is written to widen the boundaries of what are considered to be space and text. The above three Kristevan chapters are already dealing with sub-categories of a discontented space. The melancholy disposition and the essence of incestuous desire are manifestations outside language: they are examples of what lies beyond authoritative codes of behaviour. As was noted in the first chapter, the melancholic's discontentedness is often attributed to the knowledge that melancholia comes about through a dissatisfaction with the place the subject occupies. Likewise, incestuous desire results from a lack of control over place, which builds up into a deep unhappiness with outside the surrounding and prompts a withdrawal into the psychic inner space: it is this which results in an incestuous space opening up. In both cases, because the subject fails to withdraw from the maternal space of *chora* and remains attached to the pre-Oedipal mother, it does not fully integrate with language. From a psycholinguistic perspective and in the accepted sense of these terms, both sub-categories act as tropes for ways to describe a pre-Oedipal position: that which lies beyond a patriarchal language. Therefore, melancholic mood and incestuous desire are rhetorical and figurative features of a language that discloses, by extreme means, the difficulty we have with the symbolic. Space and place, then, represent the means with which to question language as a patriarchal force. Feminists, of course, have an additional duty, and that is to explore ways in which phallogentrism validates space and place.

1.2 A discontented polysemic space

If modernism is a cultural phenomenon then *Nightwood* reflects that cultural space. I would call this novel an event such as that which Paul de Man defines as a "falling away from literature and a

¹ Foucault is recognised as a modern day genealogist. He employs the term as part of an interrogative discourse, which is clearly different from my own. While Foucault explores the textual and surface area of historical events, I explore the underlying effects of powerful discourses, located and examined for the way they superimpose female identity and position subjectivity.

rejection of history.”² The text disengages with narrative history through its rejection of traditional realism and creates a new fiction in which the narrative form forces us to question the authority of presence. Authenticity, the opposite of division, is cast into a crisis (to decide, separate), and we consequently behold a narrative in which characters flamboyantly live out their own kind of fictional authenticity. By breaking from the confines of traditional literary modes the text shatters traditional dealings with characters in search of the hidden secret of authenticity. *Nightwood* describes the degenerate, the liar, the homosexual, the thief, the estranged and the dispossessed as a way of explaining a collective discontentedness and, as Matthew O’Connor, the philosopher in the novel, remarks: “There is not one of us who, given an eternal incognito, a thumbprint nowhere set against our souls, would not commit rape, murder and all abominations” (128). Therefore the text justly foregrounds its own ideas of ‘reality’ whereby it projects a consciousness of the law of the Other in an effort to rupture ‘authority’ and supply what Cixous describes as “the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought.” It is a type of fictional reality that does not recognise an authenticating ideal.

Barnes develops through *Nightwood* an awareness of place and space; more specifically, she everts female identity so that it is reconceptualised as anterior: situated outside traditional narrative paradigms, and placed inside a world that seems foreign, alien and contrived.³ It is a space that focuses on female desire, a desire that includes the longing of one who describes himself as a woman trapped in a man’s body and the desire of one woman for another; thereby it is attempting to re-code society by putting into question a cultural and literary tradition and re-reading and re-evaluating inherited beliefs, so that by writing from an anterior position she can question the neutrality of space.

² P. de Man, *Blindness and Insight* (London: Methuen, 1983 2nd ed.) 37.

³ In the chapter “What of tomorrow’s Nation?” Kristeva opens with the question “why bother with origins?”, and argues that the “values crisis and the fragmentation of individuals have reached the point where we no longer know what we are and take shelter, to preserve a token of personality under the most massive regressive common denominators: national origins and the faith of our forebears” (*Nations 2*). Kristeva shares some common ground with those who are marginalised: as foreigner and as woman she both criticises and sympathises with the needs of the subject to align itself with the dominant discourses that both define normality and ostracise the alien other. She writes prolifically on the theme of the subject who is classed as “strange” and therefore outside of the signifying practices of an already heterogeneous language.

Barnes takes up her position as author outside the dominant systems of thought and adopts an alternative matrix to the one sustained by a narrative tradition where material is selected to offer a readerly content rather than a series of gaps. For example, a strong plot, identifiable characterisation, and a sense of the commonplace provide certainty and comfort in a way that *Nightwood* does not.

Thus, central to the positing of a possible new story, there is a disruption of performance and positioning. Because the idea of reality rests on the success of the delusion that it can pass off as reality, place must be pitted against ideas beyond the illusion of substance. From the outset, *Nightwood* alludes to the meta-narratives the characters use to supplement their stories. This being so, by working within the interstices of place and space, the characters formulate their narrative layers outside of the tenets that might authenticate them – they are set aside from the possible content that might place them. Instead *Nightwood* locates a gap between space and place where invented stories are most readily composed.

This embodiment of invention is represented in contrasting ways which are both figural and allusive: they are divergent signifying practices that are portrayed through the fate of four “scorned and ridiculous” characters who “make good stories” (87). They are out of time with one another and throw into question the idea of spatiality and place. In other words, if context streamlines and concentrates meaning, and if that space cannot be trusted, there will never be the consensus of opinion needed to form stability. What we have is a novel where the real is put into question. This is manifested in the characters’ dislocation with each other; their lack of unified perception makes their world uncomfortable and disturbed.

Stylistically, the very name of Baron Felix Volkbein parodies the unlimited and fantastic possibilities that characterisation can achieve. Spatially, Felix is under construction; his aggregate character is such that he negates place and context to act as the building constructor of his own life, as a convolution of both night and day:

There was no function in the world for which he could be said to be properly garbed, wishing to be correct at any moment, he was tailored in part for the evening and in part for the day. From the mingled passions that made up his past, out of a diversity of bloods, from the crux of

a thousand impossible situations, Felix had become the accumulated and single – the embarrassed (22).

Accumulated and single, it is not only Felix who represents fragmentation. Jenny Petherbridge incarnates fully a culmination of different spaces, but those spaces, when they converge, result in a hostile characterisation which exiles the character. This means that *Nightwood* provides a spatial site in which characters are positioned between places, but it only serves to further estrange the reader from the novel as, generally, identification is denied. It also implies that we cannot rule out the suggestion that other characters could be perceived in the same way. Thus, there is little to distinguish a hate figure from an admired figure:

She had a beaked head and the body, small, feeble, and ferocious, that somehow made one associate her with Judy; they did not go together. Only severed could any part of her have been called 'right'.... She looked old, yet expectant of age; she seemed to be steaming in the vapours of someone else about to die; still she gave off an odour to the mind of a woman about to be accouchée. Her body suffered from its fare, laughter and crumbs, abuse and indulgence. But put out a hand to touch her, and her head moved perceptibly with the broken arc of two instincts, recoil and advance, so that the head rocked timidly and aggressively at the same moment, giving her a slightly shuddering and expectant rhythm (98-99).

Jenny represents the individual in the novel who most lacks stability (and most of them do). She is described as a jumble of pieces, in which she is all, yet nothing (that is, "they did not go together"). Nevertheless, there is little to define Jenny as different from the other characters. We find, for example, that Matthew is an entanglement of man and woman.⁴ Robin is "meet of child and desperado" (56), also described as the "converging halves of a broken fate" (60). With Nora, "the equilibrium of her nature" is both "savage and refined" (77). When we consider the whole narrative structure, there is no single over-arching system of characterisation in the text. Barnes speaks directly to us through O'Connor: "And, must I, perchance, like careful writers, guard myself against the conclusions of my readers?" (136). It can be safely argued, then, that Barnes is not an inferior

⁴ Andrea Harris explores the idea of inverted sexuality in "The Third Sex: Figures of Inversion in Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*," *Eroticism and Containment: Notes from the Flood Plain*, ed. C. Siegel and A. Kibbey (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994) 233-59.

(136). It can be safely argued, then, that Barnes is not an inferior character writer who refuses to signpost the way for her readers; as a writer she is busy clearing a space that will house the stranger and foreigner who refuses to be depicted by a constraining construct. Thus, however uncomfortable it might feel, she does not allow her words or the notions of her readers to be confined. Instead, architecture of a male dominated society, in which specific literary constructs confine female identity, is everted to construct a resistant narrative space free from social and literary constraints through strategic redefinitions of place and space.

It is *Nightwood's* relevance to location and society that makes it a suitable concern of feminist and theoretical debate. Since places are not proffered as a support for identity, domesticity, cultural belonging, or themes of home and exile, there is a disruption and displacement dedicated to the living out of an autonomous human life. Disconnected from place, the novel offers a time scheme that is difficult to survey as the story line is detached from either specific events or changes in location. It could be said that there is a flattening of time as minor importance is given to it. For example, the novel begins in Berlin with a shift in Chapter Two, which moves to France. The story covers two pages before the reader gains the following oblique reference to the change: "To the *Café de la Mairie du VI* he brought Felix, who turned up in Paris some weeks after the encounter in Berlin" (49). Chapter Four ends with the following sentence: "Jenny and Robin sailed for America" (114); their departure from France is signalled in the lightest way and is not picked up again until Chapter Eight, when "Robin, accompanied by Jenny Petherbridge, arrived in New York" (234). There is never any mention that Nora moves back to America – we have to work this out for ourselves.

Kristeva, and in some ways Foucault, both explore the idea of heterogeneous spaces of sites and relations. If we explore Kristeva's views first, we are able to see how space is gendered – women and space are made homologous since woman's fate is held in relation to the space she is in: space is seen as more significant than time or destiny because woman is synonymous with it. Kristeva quotes Joyce's "Father's time, Mother's species," and claims that "it seems that the evocation of women's name and fate privileges the space that generates the human species more than it does time, destiny or history.

separation, which may result from sociohistorical circumstances.”⁵ Therefore, it must be understood that by privileging space over time, destiny, and history, Kristeva is claiming that woman is part of a “pre-text,” in the sense that the maternal is combined with the semiotic pre-textual *chora*. This is a very clear argument in which women occupy a space that generates something besides time. Cora Kaplan tries to describe a similar positioning, but arrives at a rather reductive conclusion when she writes: “women have a history of reading and writing in the interstices of masculine culture, moving between use of the dominant language or form of expression and specific versions of experience based on their marginality.”⁶ However, I would argue that collectively women forge their own spatiality. It might seem that I am arguing for an impossible universal-feminist reading of *Nightwood*, but I am engaging with the notion that all women share a spatial history.

Foucault helps us to understand the personal space that influences *Nightwood*. Writing in the perspective of cultural study, Foucault, in “Of Other Spaces,” writes an elaborate discourse on modernity, in which time and history come together. His main concern is with the power structures that are involved in keeping us ‘in our place’, and he draws a parallel between the heterogeneous space, that gnaws at our discontent and calls us to creativity, and the security of place that offers identity and defence. Foucault describes the division of the subject and concludes that no matter how alien or violent space is, there is also a heterogeneous aspect to it which means that, because space is defined by a series of relations, it is as inclusive as it is disconnective. Foucault employs violent metaphors analogous to those found in Kristeva’s work: “The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space” (26). Barnes returns to the site of man marking time: “The doctor wiped his mouth. ‘In the acceptance of depravity the sense of the past is most fully captured. What is ruin but Time easing itself of endurance? Corruption is the Age of Time. It is the body and the blood of ecstasy, religion and love’” (169). By privileging space over time and

⁵ J. Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul*, trans. R. Gubberman (New York: Columbia UP, 1995) 204.

⁶ C. Kaplan, “Deterritorialisations: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse,” *Cultural Critique* 6 (Spring 1987) 187-198.

destiny we can locate change and the politicisation of that change. If we uphold the argument that the semiotic *chora* is the site where signifying practices emerge, it seems practical to explore place and its countervailances (questioning, challenging tradition) in an established sign system.

Barnes wanted to challenge the novels of her day by writing *Nightwood*. She shows how a free rehandling – in effect, a corrupting – of the realist text extends the idea of fiction. Her practice raises an important question about the cultural basis of narrative forms, as well as the dramatisation of truth. In *Nightwood* corruption is the breaking of a habit, held in time, when one cannot endure it any longer. In the modernist tradition, Barnes is conscious that “habit is the great deadener.”⁷ Therefore, transformations in space are important as they enable one to rethink central concepts around the shaping of the text.⁸ Thinking more flexibly with space and time requires a substantial reinvention of novelistic practice.⁹ That being so, one of the more cultural assumptions that Barnes is revising through *Nightwood* is the certainty of representation defined by space and time; Barnes effects this revision according to two principles. Firstly, because language is the most significant and enduring human invention designed to manage space and time, space and time are structured like a language and stabilised, in the main, by context. Secondly, because language is the primary human mode of representation, it is possible to corrupt representation by destabilising place. Largely, then, the most ordinary, flaccid representations can be convincingly defamiliarised by shifting context.

This is perhaps why Kristeva offers a complex analysis of the space that circumscribes place. Although there are many events influencing revision and change, she argues that it is the semiotic

⁷ S. Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (London: Faber, 1986) 37.

⁸ However, *Nightwood* is not a modernist text that takes as its backdrop the context of a changing architectural world. This sort of treatment contains strong echoes of some of Beaudrillard’s work; see e.g., *Jean Beaudrillard: Selected Writings*, trans. J. Mourain, ed. M. Poster (Cambridge: Polity, 1988). Although *Nightwood* is not supporting an ideology of modernism, it reflects in some way the modernist ideas of Marshall Berman: “The anarchic, explosive forces that urban modernisation once brought together, backed by an ideology of developing modernism, have pulled apart.” In “The Twentieth Century: the halo and the highway,” *Modernism/Postmodernism*, ed. P. Brooker (London: Longman, 1992) 78.

⁹ Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* is a classic example of claiming space. Bonnie Kime Scott argues that although women are often held in relation to external spaces such as the garden, it is the contrived space of the novel which offers greater freedom and challenge. She discusses the literary tradition of rearranging space in the chapter “Arranging Marriages, Partners and Spaces,” *Refiguring Modernism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995) 187-208.

chora which governs connections between the subject and what it cannot place in time. The semiotic *chora* describes the space, or absence, from where new writing surfaces into the symbolic order of language to render new ‘corrupting’ transformations. Motivated by transference of drives from the semiotic, drive impulses serve the subject as a source of fascination with, and repulsion from, the present: the place in which we find ourselves positioned. Drives are psychoanalytic constructions that are formulated to describe ways in which we are compelled to negotiate our place in time and history.

In *Nightwood*, Felix acts out this unconscious routine:

‘Once’, he said, pinching his monocle into place, ‘I wanted, as you, who are aware of everything, know, to go behind the scenes, backstage as it were, to our present condition, to find, if I could, the secret of time; good, perhaps that is an impossible ambition for the sane mind. One has, I am now certain, to be a little mad to see into the past or the future, to be a little abridged of life to know life, the obscure life – darkly seen’ (174).

To corrupt language and to represent new ways of seeing things, we must have an awareness of the discourses in history that map and position us, and a comprehension of our unconscious drive to go beyond them.

Precisely because she believes that we do not have to be incarcerated by the architecture of the symbolic, Kristeva utilises the heterogeneous structure of the *chora* to rearrange ideas within space. She shifts dominant fixed and conceptual spaces around to map out new spaces and possibilities. The organising *motif* of her *oeuvre* is looking to the margins of her history to include histories. For example, apart from intelligently (re)claiming a localised site (by delocalising history) for women, she inverts genealogy to make women and their local domestic space all-pervading and all-important. Woman is moved from the margins of place to its centre, her space is shifted to delineate an encompassing space. Drawing on the social sciences of Freud, she claims:

The modern sciences of subjectivity, of its genealogy and accidents, confirm in their own way this intuition, which is perhaps itself the result of a sociohistorical conjuncture. Freud, listening to the dreams and fantasies of his patients, thought that ‘hysteria was linked to place.’ Subsequent studies on the acquisition of the symbolic function by children show that the permanence and quality of maternal love condition the appearance of the first spatial references which induce the child’s laugh and then induce the entire range of symbolic

manifestations which lead eventually to sign and syntax. Moreover, antipsychiatry and psychoanalysis as applied to the treatment of psychoses, before attributing the capacity for transference and communication to the patient, proceed to the arrangement of new places, gratifying substitutes that repair old deficiencies in the maternal space ("Women's Time" 445).

Kristeva recognises that a limiting of space is a problem experienced by women. The theoretical position she forges therefore, enables us to transcend confining, domestic boundaries. Barnes, meanwhile, politicises a domestic setting in another way. *Nightwood's* domestic space is an area that can be understood as a personal place in which to set boundaries; there is a gap between a private and public space that Robin and Nora inhabit in order to control their life:

Nora closed her house. They travelled from Munich, Vienna and Budapest into Paris. Robin told only a little of her life, but she kept repeating in one way or another her wish for a home, as if she were afraid she would be lost again, as if she were aware, without conscious knowledge, that she belonged to Nora, and that if Nora did not make it permanent by her own strength, she would forget.

Nora bought an apartment in the rue du Cherche-Midi. Robin had chosen it. Looking from the long windows one saw a fountain figure, a tall granite woman bending forward with lifted head, one hand was held over the pelvic round as if to warn a child who goes incautiously (84).

We get no hint of who the stone-like figure is, but we might expect, because of the narrative's sequence, that it is Robin. Whoever the "tall granite woman" might be, she signifies a sculptured silence and isolation from the 'others' that she ushers and "warns" away with her hand. She typifies precisely the detail that Barnes is making: the figure is delineated, and carved – she marks and is marked by her outline.

Nightwood is, then, a feminist novel, insofar as it explores identity issues, the dynamics of desire, and the spaces women occupy (the idea of home is central to Robin in the novel in which women carve domestic spaces out). Nevertheless, the form of Barnes' explanation has met with feminist criticism. For example, Margot Backus suggests that the book collapses history, and claims that "the text is virtually erased from cultural consciousness."¹⁰ She maintains this because the novel is played

¹⁰ Margot Backus, "Looking for that Dead Girl," *American Imago* 51.4 (winter 1994) 421-454.

out in a place and time that is vague: time sequences and places shift imperceptibly between Vienna, Paris, Germany and America with little visible distinction between them. Taking direct issue with Backus on this point, I would argue that *Nightwood* is not a novel flattening history or offering escape from a world of inequality or oppression; instead it widens the boundaries of culture to question the very basis of society. The fact that the novel upsets ideas of location, identity, and foreignness by writing from the standpoint of women in a shared erotic space does not remove the novel from history. Rather, casting Barnes as a writer whose fiction of spatiality is heightened by her own retrospection enables us to view the novel as a description of the complexity of female identity, defined in a patriarchal space. Yet the problematics of naming are never far from the novel's design. Nora worshipped her carved image and naming of Robin. She loved what she had contrived to love with such consequences that when her reality clashes with her imagination, she is crushed. This, however, brings about a certain fate in which naming constitutes the dynamics of the self. It is one of the problems with the erotic connections between women,¹¹ but generally the story still permits something to develop which reaches beyond the field of the Same and the Other. The orientation of the subject is immaterial: the text considers the subject's need to superimpose the symbolic onto the semiotic, to frame identity as far as a definition with words will allow. Hence, the book is not concerned with politicising woman by desire, but with examining the way in which woman is contextualised by an essential form. The need to name (place) against the unrepresentable (space) presents a complex weaving of life (non-neutrality) and death (neutrality), where substance is repeatedly frustrated by a sense of neutrality.

2.1 Other / carnivalesque space

Barnes constructs a resistant space by employing a writing process which re-works society's norms outside an established phallogentric tradition. The process includes an evocation of carnival, for

¹¹ An insightful exposition of the universalising of sexuality is Monique Wittig's "Point of View: Universal or Particular," *Feminist Issues* 3.2 (1992) 63-69.

example, as a means of subverting what seems to be a stable order.¹² Barnes turns to the carnivalesque because it parodies 'real' space and exposes the 'framework' of a dominant order. This might suggest that Barnes is claiming that women are better placed in a carnivalesque space, but perhaps a preferred way of saying this is to employ the words of Alice Jardine: "The space outside of the conscious subject has always connoted the feminine in the history of Western thought – and any movement into alterity is a movement into that female space."¹³ The novel, then, summons this space and exchanges patriarchy for a space of illusion that potentially exposes every real space.

Barnes clearly has her own method of inverting patriarchy for a female space. In Robin and Nora's first encounter we get some impression of that movement into alterity. We might go so far as to say that the space of alterity is the melancholy space which acts as the trigger that phallicises Robin: "At that the girl rose straight up" (83). The phallic position, according to Kristeva, cannot be avoided, and so the movement into alterity is not so completely achieved. The world of alterity is symbolically drawn by Barnes through the image of circus life, but even here there is a sense that a more persistent existence beckons from outside:

The great cage for the lions had been set up, and the lions were walking up and out of their small strong boxes into the arena. Ponderous and furred they came, their tails laid down across the floor, dragging and heavy, making the air seem full of withheld strength. Then as one powerful lioness came to the turn of the bars, exactly opposite the girl, she turned her furious great head with its yellow eyes afire and went down, her paws thrust through the bars and, as she regarded the girl, as if a river were falling behind impassable heat, her eyes flowed in tears that never reached the surface. *At that the girl rose straight up.* Nora took her hand. 'Let's get out of here!' the girl said, and still holding her hand Nora took her out (83; my italics).

Nora and Robin's meeting is in keeping with the atmosphere of the circus. They draw to each other with animal instincts, words are minimal, introduction is unnecessary, and fear is abated by a certain

¹² Anne Leblans examines the link between the outsider and the carnivalesque in a discussion of Foucault and Bakhtin. "The Role of the Outsider in Carnival and Genre Theory," *Selected Essays from the International Conference on the Outsider, 1988*, ed. J. M. Crafton (Carrollton: West Georgia Coll., 1990) 23-29.

¹³ A. Jardine, "Gynesis," *Critical Theory Since 1965*, ed. H. Adams and L. Searle (Florida: Florida State UP, 1986) 565.

knowledge understood as alliance. In a similar vein to Sleary's circus in *Hard Times*, there is a different type of rationale from the one known outside the circus. Life is full of illusion and it is to be respected. It is a simple, uncomplicated axiom. However, if we consider their meeting from a psychological perspective, the flow of drives manifesting in the subject are clearly shown in the passage. Robin and Nora are dominated, ruled by, and finally reduced to, the primary (primal) pulsions that dictate their desires and movements. The magnetic forces between Nora and Robin are heightened by the narrative's sequences of events which are pared to the bone. The excerpt's sheer minimalism and lack of attention to much beyond Nora and Robin's attraction turns arbitrariness into articulation. "In the lobby Nora said, 'My name is Nora Flood,' and she waited. After a pause the girl said, 'I'm Robin Vote.' She looked about her distractedly. 'I don't want to be here.' But it was all she said; she did not explain where she wished to be" (84).

What is most remarkable about this passage is the lack of communication that usually acquaints people and draws them together; the unconventional working of the attraction is highly significant to our reading. Moreover, the minimalist discourse spoken against the backdrop of a hectic and flamboyant circus arena is startlingly paradoxical and acts as a multi-layered event. Firstly, the circus is a purified sort of anarchism which sanctions a subversion and parody of the natural social and conventional structures of society. In the circus we can locate and mark a point of extremity and alterity (happiness or sadness is written on the faces of the clowns; there is no in-between) and violation of the cohesive order which normally keeps extreme forces apart. Nora and Robin delineate different forces that are brought together with violent consequences: Nora is a mother figure who interprets and voices the incoherent needs of the dependent child. Secondly, the circus represents an 'outside' space in which boundaries and differences are disseminated: all 'types' of people constitute a circus audience. Laughter is arbitrary and enjoyment is shared. In Nora and Robin we have the subjects who are inserted into the circus's representation of symbolic order with the underlying menace of the semiotic.

In addition to the complex narrative, the coupling of drive forces in the circus between Nora and Robin signifies the complex eversion of the genealogical and patriarchal line that extends, traditionally, from the beginning of time, as a symbol of male lineage. Consequently, Barnes' strategy consists of revising and reconstructing the role of the woman. One textual strategy is to show how women and their pulsion towards each other are emblematic of the role of desire. Desire and drive between Nora and Robin are one and the same. The performance and dynamic of the desire and drive forces are anarchic, complex and irreconcilable. In other words, one cannot claim that the drive/desire for another is dependent upon sexual difference, and therefore one cannot claim to know or understand the violent forces that pass between subjects, conventions and language.

It seems, then, that it is impossible to find an impeccable logic to describe or reconcile the structuring and combining of drive facilitations – that is why the novel remains unfamiliar and strange, yet *Nightwood* competes with the origin stories familiar to us. For if drive forces explain the way in which the subject continues to learn new manoeuvres, to change and develop along the genealogical line, Nora and Robin signify those processes of change; they are an articulation and movement of the drive forces that are rearranged into a new combination whenever the semiotic enters the symbolic. The interaction between these two terms organises the signifying processes. Thus *Nightwood's* feminist practice of knowledge rearranges a story to structure possibilities of social or cultural meaning that go beyond the closed system of the symbolic. After the initial encounter of Nora and Robin, the narrative proceeds to describe the couple's independent and prosperous lifestyle:

In the passage of their lives together every object in the garden, every item in the house, every word they spoke, attested to their mutual love, the combining of their humours. There were circus chairs, wooden horses bought from a ring of an old merry-go-round, venetian chandeliers from the Flea Fair, stage-drops from Munich, cherubims from Vienna, ecclesiastical hangings from Rome, a spinet from England, and a miscellaneous collection of music boxes from many countries; such was the museum of their encounter (85).

Interestingly, the objects are all artefacts of fancy that have little value beyond that of ornament or sources of fun; they are trifling items which signify an element of whimsy and transient fulfilment, hence it is unusual that they should represent the couples' home. It is characteristic of *Nightwood*, however, to fill place with a sense of pageantry. Besides this, because the text is a multi-layered construct, it offers supplementary readings where the objects tell of where they have been and their peregrinations through various spaces: the displacement of the objects are the excuse for the mastery of various local spaces through writing in which spatial time is generalised in order to slip across linear time and boundaries.

Their dramaturgical living arrangements are a testimony to Nora and Robin's mutual love, which enables them to transcend their own cultural limits. Each object, placed thoughtfully in the house, is taken from another time analeptically signifying the past, by definition, in terms of place and time. Boundaries are broken down and foreignness is brought into a domestic space where every item punctuates its significance with its own exclusive symbolism. Nora and Robin's aim seems to have been to leave their shared space entirely open-ended and without boundaries of any kind (their only frame is the house in which the objects are housed). Acquisitions from Rome, Vienna, Munich and England summarise their love and companionship, and so clarify and order their relationship, while clarity and order is under threat as the rhythms and energy of the objects' trace disrupt stability. Consequently, the represented objects exceed meaning. Even without the fluidity and changes in love every object is a symbol of remembrance whereby once each item is removed from its country and has its function removed, it signifies redundancy and excessiveness:

When the time came that Nora was alone most of the night and part of the day, she suffered from the personality of the house, the punishment of those who collect their lives together. Unconsciously at first, she went about disturbing nothing; then she became aware that her soft and careful movements were the outcome of an unreasoning fear – if she disarranged anything Robin might become confused – might lose the scent of home (85).

When the symbolic manifestations of the items are modified by Robin's exhausted love they become dead signifiers, and so they again give way to another redundancy. In sum, the narrative sequence shows Barnes' distinct uneasiness concerning the continuing presence of the symbolic.

The objects of love represent solidity on many levels, but as the meaning that is placed upon them evaporates, so too does perspective and, thus, signification is consequently contested. In its displacement of the objects' worth and sense of place and occasion that they connote, *Nightwood* is affected by a deep suspicion and distrust of a symbolic which insistently returns. This practice of displacement performs a two-edged function. In one sense, the re-contextualisation of place and signification orders and gives a sense of logic in language to a structural rearrangement, corruption, and eversion of content, and it relinquishes one representation for another representation. In another sense, space signifies an agitated and provisional body of gesture, rhythm and movement. Literature, however, draws attention away from language as an everyday mode of communication by highlighting its own metafiction.

3. The connotative expressions of *Nightwood*

The fictional status of *Nightwood* is clearly evident as it arranges its own temporary articulation in both the human and material countenance of the subject and its objects. For example, if we examine in the novel the speech acts between Nora and Robin, we can locate the elements of gesture, indirect speech, duplicity and sheer mystification which all add up to a resistance to order. *Nightwood* breaks up the dominance of the communicative function of language by using indirect speech instead of direct speech. This has the effect of distancing the reader from the content. It also indirectly everts the dominant paternal order to privilege a feminine order. This occurs because circuitous and connotative speech is in the ambit of the semiotic. It culminates in an assemblage of words and gesture where a poetic, revolutionary 'language' disrupts the importance of the thetic, clearly linked by Kristeva to a paternal symbolic order. This is disclosed in the novel:

Yet sometimes, going about the house, in passing each other, they would fall into an agonised embrace, looking into each other's face, their two heads in their four hands, so strained

together that the space that divided them seemed to be thrusting them apart. Sometimes in these moments of insurmountable grief Robin would make some movement, use a peculiar turn of phrase not habitual to her, innocent of the betrayal, by which Nora was informed that Robin had come from a world to which she would return (88).

Most of the techniques employed in the novel are as doubling as indirect speech: "Robin would make some movement, use a peculiar turn of phrase not habitual to her." *Nightwood* employs many variations of the technique:

When Felix returned that evening Robin was dozing in a chair, one hand under her cheek and one arm fallen. A book was lying on the floor beneath her hand. The book was the memoirs of the Marquis de Sade; a line was underscored: Et lui rendit pendant sa captivité les milles services qu'un amour dévoué est seul capable de rendre, and suddenly into his mind came the question: "What is wrong?" (73).

Speech is performed via the underscoring of another's speech; it is successful enough to initiate a visible discourse, even though neither character directly speaks to the other. Presenting a convoluted speech act whereby there is a text within a text, a fictional character underscoring the words of another fiction and two omniscient narrators (both 'speakers' are directly absent and only visible through the word of another) is considerably complex. Robin coerces Sade's macabre tale into her own world so that it articulates, paradoxically in a fictional style, her own narrative.

The dialogue between Nora and Robin is the most enduring example of the interaction between semiotic and symbolic motilities. On the one hand, Robin is kept from fully entering the realm of the symbolic because she is the most elusive character. She uses minimal speech; all in all she speaks directly to her listeners four times. She speaks once only to each main character in the novel: to Jenny, Nora, Matthew, Felix, and to the 'crowd' (a party gathering). Robin is so out of reach of those who wish to name her that she is described by Matthew as "Just the girl that God forgot" (109). She is beyond the realm of what is usual and comprehensive. In a philosophical manner the doctor describes her as "estranged" and like a "beast." Yet, her indirect speech forces others to interpret her and to plunge her fully into the orbit of the symbolic. She speaks through the songs of another, plagiarises the written word for her own emotional endeavour, and thinks her untamed thoughts. By

contrast, she is still fully inscribed by the onlooker through their operation in the symbolic and remains a danger to those who believe that she will subscribe to their description of her:

Yet now, when they were alone and happy, apart from the world in their appreciation of the world, there entered with Robin a company unaware. Sometimes it rang clear in the songs she sang, sometimes Italian, sometimes French or German, songs of the people, debased and haunting, songs that Nora had never heard before, or that she had never heard in company with Robin. When the cadence changed, when it was repeated on a lower key, she knew that Robin was singing of a life that she herself had no part in; snatches of harmony as tell-tale as the possessions of a traveller from a foreign land; songs like a practised whore who turns away from no one but the one who loves her. Sometimes Nora would sing them after Robin, with the trepidation of a foreigner repeating words in an unknown tongue, uncertain of what they may mean. Sometimes unable to endure the melody that told so much and so little, she would interrupt Robin with a question. Yet more distressing would be the moment, when, after a pause, the song would be taken up again, from an inner room where Robin, unseen, gave back an echo of her unknown life more nearly tuned to its origin. Often the song would stop altogether, until unthinking, just as she was leaving the house, Robin would break out again in anticipation, changing the sound from a reminiscence to an expectation (86-87).

Since Robin is governed by both semiotic and symbolic motilities, she represents the identity/non-identity of the subject as a signifying process both prior to birth and after birth – she manifests that which lies beyond speech, and that which is outlined by signification. Another way of saying this is that she is pre-textual and post-textual and always both. A psychoanalytic summary should offer some clarity on this point. An unconscious state and an Oedipal consciousness govern the psychoanalytic subject. Kristeva suggests that the subject always weaves in and out of both spaces. Therefore, Robin is an ephemeral character who has the capacity to represent both silent and signifying motilities; potentially she is psychotic and fractured, existing in a pre-Oedipal state, for conscious ‘picturing’ she is also rational and undiminished. This is how psychoanalysis portrays and opens up Robin to analysis. Even so, whatever Robin is, no matter what actions she performs, she remains resolutely uninterpretable and consistently interpreted.

As readers, we face the same problems as Nora; because Robin’s words are borrowed words, they have the trace of the signifier constraining them. The speech of others, the shared lyrics of a song,

and the novel genre, gives us the punctual presentation of meaning in words, but with it comes a certain corruption. It is a corruption that is endless, but I give three examples of it here. Firstly, Robin corrupts her texts and songs by slicing them, cutting them up into relatable portions and submitting them before Nora and Felix. Secondly, Nora corrupts the words by taking the word and interpreting it as a symbolic extension of Robin. Finally, the word is thoroughly corrupted when Robin takes the word from its social setting and introduces it into her shared domestic space with Nora. It is a contextual problem similar to reciting a sonnet in a lecture hall or at a bus stop and finding what is acceptable in one context is reckless in another.

The song, like the sonnet and all such speech acts, works on a potentially poetic level. It involves the rhythm and timbre and self-conscious play of the word as an event outside the everyday use of language. The song is a shared, but anonymous sequence of movement, gesture and cadence which rids the utterance of any real sense or denotation, but refines connotation in such a way that it can induce emotion like no other medium. The song's suggestive structure operates from a sense of absence, which can imitate a range of experience from laughter to melancholy. Therefore, *Nightwood's* purpose in exploring the connotative expression of the song is important because the song is directly linked to the *chora*. It is necessary to clarify what is meant when debating the relationship between Robin and the song (incorporating the semiotic). Both Robin and the song are semiotic and symbolic, they are part of a flow that underlies the thetic, giving language resonance, timbre, and most of all, a certain liberation: words in the symbolic are steered here by the simplest change in cadence. Therefore, if we take the song, we have an event in which variety and freedom take hold of entrenched and tired arrangements. Robin can be a plural figure in much the same way that music takes on plural meaning.

John Lechte discusses at some length the semiotic devices of rhythm, repetition, and displacement, and notes how as a device the semiotic motility enables us to read "beyond all formal limits (grammar, etc.)" (*Kristeva* 114). This suggests that semiotic texts and semiotic meanings can be located; but, as he adds, because they remain part of the unconscious order they remain almost

impossible to interpret: "What is sometimes difficult to grasp in Kristeva's work, and perhaps even more difficult for an Anglo audience to accept, is the fact that, for the theorist of the semiotic, there is no clear separation between art, society, and language on the one hand, and the individual subject as the outcome of the interaction between the semiotic and the symbolic on the other" (130). This would imply that not only is the semiotic anterior to clear interpretation because of its indeterminate style, but the drive-based operation of the semiotic is at every cultural and symbolic level impossible to separate from the symbolic.

We are clearly encountering a problem many readers of Kristeva face: the two motilities do not have an independent functioning; their convolution is primary to their existence. If a critical methodology is to be effective, a conceptual separation must be forged; however, we cannot effect a practical separation in dealing, for example, with the functioning in a work of art. In Robin's case, we learn nothing that is not already secondary, at least once removed. Her language, which is second-hand, is both anonymous and universal and therefore integrated in the symbolic: it is a fact that the words she employs betray her because others are already familiar with them. The words, however, are corrupted variations of genre and text. Because of this, she remains a sort of pastiche and an abstract form: in this sense, she signifies the semiotic *chora* as other of representation. She is thus unmistakably regulated by both symbolic and semiotic motilities.

Barnes offers a text that endeavours to shift traditional images of how the female subject performs in a patriarchal space. There is a clear relationship between such displacement and the apparently limitless problematisation of who Robin is. Derrida's definition of the *chora* in *On The Name* deals with the question of how to avoid speaking;¹⁴ Barnes deals with the problem of how to avoid locating her character. Yet if we were to locate Robin in history, we would necessarily find her within a masculine context where she would be perceived within the discourse of a patriarchal and

¹⁴ Derrida suggests that the *chora* forms a problematic site that calls into question the act of naming while remaining mute. *Choric* space is an enigma: a "*triton genos*" in view of its (un)characteristic double being (91). For a critical reading of Derrida's (non)negative proposition, of which the *chora* forms a part, see Mark Taylor's paper where he discusses the interlocutions of speech and silence. In "Non-Negative Negative Atheology," *Diacritics* 20.14 (1990) 2-16.

symbolic organisation. Therefore, in order to decentre the female form over place and time, Barnes must de-historicise her character. Consequently, in *Nightwood* Robin is persistently defined as a displaced figure. She is described, for example, as being out of time with history: "Her clothes were of a period that he could not quite place. She wore feathers of a kind his mother had worn, flattened sharply to her face" (66). She cannot be conceived of logically in relation to the diachronic passage of time because Barnes writes in defiance of Western linear logic. She acknowledges logic in the very act of breaking it. The quotation exemplifies a way in which Barnes affirms contextual change and difference through language and the defiance of a patriarchal order. Felix describes events and cultural norms as constructed in time to produce a sense of distance between him and Robin as well as a retrospective narration. Robin can only be represented as a remembrance of things past as she expresses herself from within the parameters of an expired history where the clear relationship between the signifier and its referent is suspended. The descriptions of Robin out of time with place appear trivial, but it is possible to analyse these images to explain an awareness that Barnes has concerning language and its proximity to place. Robin does not 'fit in' because fundamentally Barnes does not want her to; she is a collection of oppositional and even antagonistic images installed in a place to problematise place. Thus she represents woman as a limitless possibility.

It might then be argued that Robin in *Nightwood* is a figure for late twentieth century women to use as a valid if problematical role model. She is full of possibilities and potential because every attempt is made to move her into alterity, the place outside a patriarchal tradition. There are, however, problems with this idea. If Barnes is concerned with dis-contenting place, she achieves it by placing Robin in surroundings that make her vertiginous and exiled. Furthermore, the displacement has the effect of estranging Robin from the reader as much as from her own surroundings. The space that *Nightwood* permeates becomes a labyrinth where there is no object, and no retreat. Space is neither cuttable, culpable, nor traversable; there is no getting round it and no escaping it either. Therefore, Robin's proximity to the reader, like distance and depth, division and boundary, like

togetherness is inevitably undecidable. Indeed, Robin could be woman's *fin de siècle* heroine except for the fact that she remains equivocally absent.

3.1 The problematics of not placing

Maintaining an admirable detachment, however, Robin transcends place and displays a more thematic and complex development that distinguishes her from both her surroundings and from others. Transforming and transcending, she serves to give prominence to another perception – one that points beyond positing place in a more ephemeral spatiality; conversely, for Felix it is a vacant space that offers him no answers. This is not to try and emphasise her unconscious nature or even, perhaps, her superficiality; Robin remains indifferent to her surroundings in order to stress the relevance of the subject who is external to place. In this way Barnes successfully creates a character that is subject-orientated rather than object-orientated. Importantly, this takes the focus away from woman as an approximation of surroundings. Instead Barnes offers the reader the same authorial spatiality in which to focus on the idea of woman outside the symbolic. It accomplishes a number of things. For one, it widens perspective, so that naming incorporates a cast beyond region and geography to question the very act of naming itself: when Robin cannot be defined in relation to place we, like Felix, flounder. For another, the highly symbolic depiction of character calls us to decipher some of the subtleties in Barnes' stance, the message of which is clear: woman can position herself in the interstices of time and place but the cost of such volition is high. Ambiguity calls for a definition and understanding from others that binds woman fully to discourse in performance. It would seem then that the more one attempts to place woman outside of history the more she is interrogated and named.

Therefore, it is questionable whether Barnes successfully elevates Robin beyond place, and so beyond the scrutiny of those who desire to name and position. If Robin is so named by a patriarchal discourse, then Barnes is compounding the difficulty of inscribing a positive female identity in an inherently male culture. Robin's placing as an object of discourse has been thoroughly examined in

Women in Search of Literary Space by Gill Grabner and Maureen Devine, who question Barnes' setting up of space as authority:

No release is offered in Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*. Rather *Nightwood* exposes the effects of patriarchal misogyny on woman and womanhood without the slightest hope for change. On the contrary, we are left with an image of Robin Vote completely defeated by a society that reduced her to a "crawling" and "barking" doglike being deprived of the ability to speak. Thus, *Nightwood* not only refuses to offer any possible solution to the problematic stance of woman and womanhood in Western patriarchy; it even presents the patriarchal system in its deadly advance against woman and womanhood at its very end.¹⁵

I have argued that Barnes is providing a space in which the reader can view woman at a distance from her societal bonds. Viewing from a wider range offers a panoramic view; therefore, the novel enlarges the reader's view of woman. However, Grabner and Devine take a contrasting view of *Nightwood*. The "stance of woman and womanhood in Western patriarchy" is engulfed by a patriarchal system that stalks women, advancing at every step in its deadly pursuit. They ignore the fact that Robin's pre-Oedipal dog-like sounds remove her from the single economy of the symbolic and place her firmly in the mystical realm of the semiotic. Their reading fuses the image of the dog and Robin in all too literal a sense, failing to acknowledge the complexities of the novel. I argue that *Nightwood* posits a more 'archaic dimension of language so that Robin and the dog do not simply serve to represent resistance: they are a more immediate expression of 'nature' and the indistinction between civilisation (the symbolic) and savagery (the semiotic).

4. An out-of-place writing

If we consider some of the complexities surrounding the final chapter, in which Robin is described as a "crawling" and "barking" being, we can see how Barnes clearly resists many of the pressures that act on the production and reception of women's writing in historically specific ways. The chapter entitled "The Possessed" marks Robin's arrival in New York and journey from Jenny back to Nora. It

¹⁵ G. M. Grabner and M. Devine, *Women in Search of a Literary Space* (Tübingen: Narr, 1981) 21.

is a chapter where the boundaries of normalisation all but fall apart to reveal in unalloyed form the most basic aspects of human aberration beyond the symbolic. As Herring suggests, “The theme of animality in *Nightwood* is related to questions of morality and religion, and here we return to the paradigm of nature.”¹⁶ It is an attempt to shock the reader’s sensibilities and it is achieved by yoking together with considerable violence beast and human. Images that are not normally associated are linked to drive home the theme of human nature when it stands alone, apart from the stabilising aspects of the symbolic. Barnes herself wanted to stand apart from the discursive practices of her day, and it is this stylistic feature which shapes her refusal to make either her characters or her style more sympathetic to her readers.

If Barnes had been less artistically uncompromising, she might have found it reasonable to provide a final chapter in which a more self-possessed picture of woman would have provided readers with accessibility without such moral disturbance. Instead, the ambivalence of Robin’s position within the new world of opportunity is clear: power and authority and civilisation as a whole are rejected for “the darkest corner,” the most “out of the way churches” and “the open country” (235). Barnes takes her characters back to the wilderness. It is a reversal of the main story where, at the beginning of the novel, Felix tries to secure his heritage as a ‘civilised’ urban aristocrat by aligning himself to a place emanating from an inflated past. The contrast between the ability to verify identity through structural lineage and a progressive disintegration into what seems close to savagery creates an abrupt end in which the reader is left to question radically what the fine line is between the ‘civilised’ and the ‘savage’:

When Robin, accompanied by Jenny Petherbridge, arrived in New York, she seemed distracted.... For the first week or two she would not go out, then, thinking herself alone, she began to haunt the terminals, taking trains into different parts of the country, wandering without design.... Robin walked the open country in the same manner, pulling at the flowers, speaking in a low voice to the animals. Those that came near, she grasped, straining their fur back until their eyes were narrowed and their teeth bare, her own teeth showing as if her hand were upon her own neck (234).

¹⁶ P. Herring, *Djuna Barnes* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995) 209.

It is particularly artful of Barnes to counterpoint, manipulate and juxtapose place and the signifiers of nature (the country) with civilisation (New York), because such juxtaposition sets about disrupting the most basic aspects of place from where we take our identity.

The last chapter is another eversion of genealogy whereby place and its contents are stripped to highlight a past that might once have been called human. For Philip Herring the central paradox of human existence in *Nightwood* is that animal innocence has been lost, and as human beings we find it impossible to achieve the position of a conscious moral subject:

Animal innocence means having no haunting conscience, no disturbing memories of the past, no guilt. This is the positive side of animal behaviour, and the attraction of Robin. Dr O'Connor says: "Have I been simple like an animal, God, or have I been thinking?" It is consciousness that in Barnes' fiction alienates humans from the animal world. Yet for humans to act subhuman is both to deny their moral nature and to bring misery to others. Despite the trend to see Robin as a liberated woman and Nora as puritanical in wanting an exclusive relationship, a broader view of Barnes' work shows something different (*Djuna Barnes* 209).

For Herring Robin and Nora remain outside of the paradigm of nature. His argument is based on his comparison of the novel with the Creation narrative and the expulsion from Eden (the definitive genealogy story); he claims that once innocence is lost, it cannot be regained. Herring holds Robin up as another Eve – an aggregate symbol of evil female passions, in which she resembles Barnes' own polygamist father, Wendell Ryder. He goes on to liken Robin to a "prowling panther" with an insatiable animal appetite. Robin represents every aspect of corruption, from insatiable evil temptress to pursuer of Christian women. Her complexity is even utilised to signify male polygamy. Herring's reading of Robin as mysterious woman is subtly reminiscent of Ben Jonson's poem where female sophistry comes under scrutiny. "That Women are but Men's Shaddows" is a sceptical analysis of the female identity and its fluidity. The poem reaches its conclusions that to master absence, or space, is man's prerogative and right. It sets about using language to parallel the themes of shadow and silence with deception and muteness, to produce an effect whereby 'nothing' (woman) is compared to 'something' (man).

With a clear knowledge of how her work may have been misconstrued in a patriarchal order, any other woman writer might have acceded to the 'first reader' and buckled under the pressure to validate her central character by another means. For example, the liberal professional practices and systems which existed for women in New York at the time when Barnes wanted *Nightwood* to perform alongside other, more integrated, texts might have offered a more acceptable alternative.

Nightwood gives us something quite different. Except for the redundant church, all sense of place in the final chapter is demolished: "Robin's engagements were with something unseen; because in her speech and in her gestures there was a desperate anonymity" (235). Robin is in "communion with unseen spirits" (235), and we, soliciting her psychic space, find ourselves in communion with the abject, the unheroic and the abhorrent. Exploring this facet of the abject, Robin relinquishes identity in rhythm, dissolves the buffer of reality and personifies the violent crucible that "exposes the subject to impossible dangers" (*Revolution* 104). She embodies the psychic space out of which comes reading and writing, the weaving of symbolic and semiotic.

4.1 A new and creative semiotic writing

It is no coincidence that Barnes structured her text in such a way that the final chapter is the most chaotic. We are included in the violent crucible; it is the site where place and space come together to create new revolutionary texts, and we are forced to weave the traces of the final chapter. As readers, we are included in the interstices of language: the space that we most fear because it is the space where chaos resides. It is a space where we might lose our minds; it is the heart of darkness, but also the site for resistance and creativity.

Consequently, *Nightwood* should be recognised as having a positive creative outcome. It is in the very act of presenting the subject outside of civilisation – in the void – that one can see a new way for positioning the reader and the author outside a masculine authorial discourse. Barnes offers us something alternative to the popular published novels of her time. She clearly gives us the maternal *chora*: the space where the 'place-like' referent is suspended so that we can glimpse woman spatially.

Positing characterisation in this way means that the boundaries of place are widened to let the unsayable speak. For example, New York is pushed into the distance to foreground the wilderness and its unpeopled countryside; it is an attempt to problematise the notion between object and subject. Shifting the ground and presenting nature itself as a spatial metaphor means that civilisation and the authorial discourses that come from ordered society can no longer function as a stable base upon which to secure identity.

If, however, Barnes is weaving together semiotic and symbolic spaces, she does not leave the duality of culture/nature intact, and she risks sustaining the dualities of a patriarchal organisation in which order and disorder are set in place. Therefore, a positive sense of identity needs the relationship between semiotic and symbolic, culture and nature if it is to resist interpretations such as Herring's, in which woman is viewed from the polarity of normal/abnormal to represent a character out of control. If authorial spatiality is to be effective, we need to make sure that the recognition of the fluid, unstable nature of space is a positive site for the nourishment and sustenance of new revolutionary texts and perceptions of women that go beyond the strictures of polarisation and normalisation.

It must be stated that Barnes overcomes dualistic differences by positioning Robin in a space that is both fictitious and real: in the interstices of two motilities it is part of the far-away unreal wild space and the civilised world of New York.¹⁷ Overall, her work is informed by the actual discourses of her day resulting in a conscious dialogue with the fixity of place, namely a patriarchal one. She upsets it by illustrating something strange and foreign, where recognising the potential for disruption helps to destabilise the rule of the father. Moreover, the image of Christian matriarchy is introduced into the passage to provide greater potential for the study of female constructions of gender difference across time and place. Like Robin, the Madonna is a figure of strange, ethereal proportions. As she is different from all other women, the Virgin is both ostracised and worshipped: "On a contrived altar, before a Madonna, two candles were burning. Their light fell across the floor

¹⁷ The New Testament is a good example of this – a set of writings placed within the cradle of a book of historical texts.

and the dusty benches. Before the image lay flowers and toys” (237). If we consider Westernisation’s female legacy, we can draw upon its ‘history’ as readers and perceive a familiar formula at play in the text, so that a convoluted relationship between Mary and Robin emerges. It reaches a climax when Robin sinks depleted before the altar of the church. The Virgin Mary evokes the archaic woman who, alone of all her sex, must suffer above all else.¹⁸ Robin, also alone, re-utters the expression of Western Christianity over centuries. Woman must remain alone and anterior to absolute presence if she is to signify the ideal image of woman; put another way, she who is without discourse, provides a discourse for the experience of absence and silence.

Consequently, Robin is an ethereal figure: she could be Mary, refigured as modern day mystery, and it is not too extravagant to suppose a likeness between Robin and the Virgin Mary, especially when we consider how throughout the novel Robin is mythologised and worshipped; so much so that, like Mary who engenders the Word as Jesus, Robin is responsible for the engendering of the Word in *Nightwood*. Equally, it is no coincidence that Thelma Wood, on whom Robin is patterned, generated the writing of *Nightwood*. Mary is the mother of the Word. Could Robin then also pass for a female figure of Jesus, the daughter of Mary about to be sacrificed? It is Matthew O’Connor who asks: “Cannot a beastly thing be analogous to a fine thing, if both are apprehensions?” (178). It seems that they are apprehensions because there are aspects of each in the other. Barnes’s answer is not to answer with any certainty but to alert us to the process of fabrication by disrupting the processes of certainty itself and parodying the image of the Virgin Mary as a cultural and patriarchal icon.

The positioning of Robin within this biblical and historical discourse can be seen to critique the content of both transcendental desire and patriarchal history whereby she inadvertently highlights the production of discourse and culture. In the space between faith and history, *Nightwood* challenges the old with a new disturbing discourse. It opens up new boundaries and, in the fashion of Borges, offers

¹⁸ Lechte provides an interesting account of the Virgin Mary when he engages with her iconographical presentation in his discussion of Kristeva. “Mary inspires a kind of ‘baroqueness’ (plenitude of signs) in art premised on ‘metaphors of non-speech, a “semiotics” that linguistic communication does not account for” (*Kristeva* 178). By its very incongruity, the pairing of Robin and Mary shifts the contextualisation and content of an essentialised female form in the cultural space as we know it.

a labyrinthine terrain where it is easy to get lost in its highly contoured 'spacelessness'. In addition, if *Nightwood* is a book premised on constructions of 'boundarylessness',¹⁹ then we are thrown into a highly structured stylised maze from where we must hunt for the exit. If this is a paradigm for the modernist project then Barnes is included since her narrative questions the very basis of realist form.

As we recognise, however, a discursive labyrinth is multi-layered and not so easily transcended. It is the labyrinth that parodies the world: the one describing the impossibility of escape. The explicit response is the fear of non-transcendence encapsulated in the "quality of horror and doom" (Eliot, "Introduction" 7) in the novel. Even so, it is the diversity of these two versions of labyrinthine structuring that gives *Nightwood* a third option, which goes beyond the other two schemas.

Barnes opens up the possibility for transcending her patriarchal surroundings by questioning the basic constructions of form. If the labyrinth is a parody (a sublime representation) of human form, then *Nightwood* is a parody of that world – we might say there is a double parody in play. Nevertheless, it is simpler than that. If we return for a moment to Plato, according to him one of the ways in which to recognise the world is through the existence of a transcendent form of ideals. If the world is an inadequate model for those ideal forms, the Platonic model must be, by definition, a representation of Ideal Form. The *chora* is derived from Plato's immaterial essence. For Barnes, the novel does not submit to form held in place by time: there is always a rupture of limits because there is always parody and play, simply because there is always space to consider. This is not to suggest that *Nightwood* is a metaphysical novel anticipating a transcendent return for its dissolute characters. As a modernist text, it includes in its method a parody of form which, in itself, is a product of lack, of inadequacy. Human nature is therefore necessarily imperfect because it is outside the semiotic *chora* as much as it is inside the labyrinth. However, there is some satisfaction in this because it highlights human nature in a self-parodying role.

It is within this modernistic space that we can trace Robin's indistinct and blurred journey from amongst the songsters of the late-night café revellers, to the barren church where she places her

¹⁹ I borrow the term from Charlene Spretnak in *The Politics of Women's Spirituality* (New York: Anchor, 1982) 66.

symbols of nature and innocence before the Madonna. Barnes' play with nature, space, wilderness and purity serves the ongoing feminist discussion of identity. The idea of woman as a construction of all the above essences is an image that feminists continue to struggle with and address. For example, Louis Kannenstine's study of *Nightwood* draws a compound list of traditional dualities, which includes animal vs. saint and nature vs. civilisation.²⁰ As I stated above, this intermediate ground is the site for discovery. As Donna Gerstenberger suggests, "*Nightwood* demands ... a reading against the dominant text of binary oppositions" (*Radical Narrative* 130). Hence, by breaking with a binary tradition and piecing together her chosen clash of images, Barnes puts into question the cultural space that sets these images in place. We are left with the impression that if nature can be so destabilised then it is not as natural as a patriarchal order might suggest.

In this way, the turning away from civilisation for Robin is part of a ritualism that marks the text throughout. Robin's constant return to churches is part of the ritualistic pattern of Western culture, but in *Nightwood* it is out of context, written as void inasmuch as it appears as a form of procedure, or ritual without consciousness. By contrast, Matthew O'Connor makes an ecclesiastical journey and roams church sites in search of something. He says to himself, "Matthew, tonight you must find a small church where there are no people, where you can be alone like an animal, and yet think" (187). Yet, there is something about entering a spiritual space that enables both Robin and Matthew to strip themselves of their worldly encumbrance.

As a result, the homology of culture and space is suggestive, but it does not appear to appeal to a novelist like Barnes who wishes to destabilise two distinct motilities. Barnes is fully immersed in her cultural space and so the images of church and animal are very deliberate. In quite a visible manner, the violent coupling of Darwinism and religion is made. The characters' animal-like instinct to roam from church to church serves to open up the boundaries of culture to question the habits of humanity, but also their cultural definitions. The manner in which the themes are articulated means that the novel (dis)orientates the reader to a range of cultural possibilities available in space. In this sense,

²⁰ L. Kannenstine, *The Art of Djuna Barnes: Duality and Damnation* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1977) 6.

Nightwood is a resistant text against the processes of realist form. Yet it advances social differences in that it not only calls for an awareness of cultural ritualism, but it also offers the notion of resistance from the strictures of essentialism.

4.2 The place of duality in a profligate space

A reading of *Nightwood* in the way I have outlined might provide for an analogy of Ecofeminism in which the question of essentialism and gender is examined.²¹ The feminist theory opens up the protracted debate that Ecofeminism with its determinist aspects have with ‘constructionism’ and the socio–historical role of women in society. In relation to Robin we can detect how the cultural organisation of female identity competes with a ‘natural’ perception of women. For example, although Barnes inscribes her character with a significantly primordial persona, Robin’s identity is cast principally through the language of others.

Ecofeminism is helpful to a reading of *Nightwood* in that it provides a more contemporary theoretical debate with issues Barnes herself may have been struggling with. In this way we can understand how Susan Griffin’s description of female becoming is not unlike Barnes’s narration of Robin:

What is she, in this night, becoming? And we in darkness. Like the carbon from the air which becomes the body of the plant and the body of the plant buried in the earth becoming coal or the body of the plant in her mouth becoming her own dark blood and her blood washing from her like tides.... Like a seed in the earth, in the soil which becomes rich with every death, animal bodies coming apart cell by cell, the plant body dispersing, element by element....²²

²¹ The following definition by Noël Sturgeon offers some insight into Ecofeminism and its fundamental theoretical basis:

Most simply put, Ecofeminism is a movement that makes connections between environmentalists and feminism; more precisely, it articulates the theory that the ideologies that authorise injustices based on gender, race, and class are related to the ideologies that sanction the exploitation and degradation of the environment.

In *Ecofeminist Nature* (London: Routledge, 1997) 23. For a more critical appraisal, see Ariel Sallah’s *Ecofeminism as Politics* (London: Zed, 1997).

²² S. Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring inside Her* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978) 167.

However, the similarity should not be extended too far, especially when some ecofeminists slide from holding the paired issues of essentialism and constructionism in tension and emphasise one aspect over the other resulting in a polemic argument.²³ In contrast, Barnes retains an inquiry which keeps both issues in tension; unwittingly, perhaps, at the cost of providing a cohesive narrative.²⁴ In saying this, it seems that Barnes calls for a form of narrative that provides a juncture at which point construction and essentialism form part of a new narrative experimentation.

Exploring the notion of natural space, Charlene Spretnak claims that women have a unique biological disposition that provides them with an ecological sense of 'boundarylessness', allowing them to know all other spaces natural and cultural (*Women's Spirituality* 66). I understand that some movement into alterity would provide the means for women to sense this, but it is an oversimplification and difficult to verify. I cannot dispute that Barnes' own biological disposition influences her writing. Her perceptions of woman certainly enable her to wander across the dualistic impressions that are held in place by a patriarchal order and send them hurtling into each other. Therefore, it is more likely that Barnes, like many of the modernist writers of her day, writes from a position of spatial authority so that, up to a point, she can break with form. By deliberately distancing herself from the more traditional forms of art, hence opening up space, Barnes highlights the diversity of methods and emphases so that authorial positioning can be widened to include spatial diversity. Producing the space in which to position herself and write means that she radically breaks with the period, but it is a difficult and rigorous undertaking.

At the same time as Barnes was writing, Georges Bataille pronounced his own attack on form. In the year in which *Nightwood* was published Bataille wrote a text entitled "Le Labyrinthe". It

²³ J. Biehl, *Finding Our Way: Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1991) 15–22. Biehl carefully considers this problem and constructs an argument that attempts to redress any polemic imbalance.

²⁴ The unevenness of the book has been commented on by a number of personal and professional critics who are minutely recorded in Herring's *Djuna*. However, I would argue that if any critical or editorial astuteness is missing from the novel, it is compensated for by the kind of experimentation technique which involves a deliberate and radical break with the conventional and 'intact' narrative form of Barnes's day.

describes a labyrinthian existence where “men act in order to be.”²⁵ Being, however, is a “nowhere” place, or “inconceivable void” (175) where the self cannot be fixed by anything in existence. Moreover, there is no being outside of language, but at the same time it is mediated by language.

Consequently, there is a sense that language is an uncuttable, untraversable labyrinth. Bataille’s statement belies an underlying desire to go beyond the boundaries of enclosure. Any drawing of a system presupposes a beyond of that system and therefore, according to Bataille, a necessary transgression can and should be made.²⁶ That is to say, it calls for the level of violence and rebellion that exists in *Nightwood*. There is, however, a connection between a transgression of ‘normality’ and violence which must be questioned. If it takes the degree of disturbance exhibited in *Nightwood* to open up the discourses that enclose us, we might justifiably feel too apprehensive to expose ourselves to the violence of the crucible. The outburst of violence that is suspended through most of *Nightwood* is brought to a climax in the conflict of love between Robin and Nora:

At the moment Nora’s body struck the wood, Robin began going down. Sliding down she went; down, her hair swinging, her arms held out, and the dog stood there, rearing back, his forelegs slanting; his paws trembling under the trembling of his rump, his hackle standing; his mouth open, his tongue slung sideways over his sharp bright teeth; whining and waiting. And down she went, until her head swung against his; on all fours now, dragging her knees.... Then, head down, dragging her forelocks in the dust, she struck against his side. He let loose one howl of misery and bit at her, dashing about her, barking, and as he sprang on either side of her he kept his head toward her, dashing his rump now this side, now that, off the wall (237-8).

One cannot fail to notice the extraordinary recurrence of “her” and “his” in this excerpt where sentences run in rapid sequence in a bid to destabilise any notion of conclusion. At a point where we might expect the novel to be tightening up, it becomes looser and more distracted. In essence, the repetitive vocabulary creates instability and lets escape any earlier hold on the dramatisation of violence. The scale of grammatical and lexical repetition creates a sense of urgency and heightens the

²⁵ G. Bataille, “The Labyrinth”, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, trans. A. Stoekl, C. R. Lovitt and D. M. Leslie, ed. A. Stoekl (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1994) 171.

²⁶ Denis Holier describes the labyrinth as “a place of violent oppositions”, in *Against Architecture* (London and Cambridge [MA]: MIT Press, 1989) 69.

moment of torment between Robin and the dog so that the pattern of “her” and “his” catapults towards a kind of apocalyptic end as the forfeiture of humanity is played out in the blurring of distinctions between beast and human. In the climax, all symbolic systems disintegrate before the church’s altar: “Then she began to bark also, crawling after him – barking in a fit of laughter, obscene and touching. The dog began to cry, running with her, head on with her head, as if to circumvent her; soft and slow his feet went ... low down in his throat crying, and she grinning and crying with him” (239). This troubling doubleness of human nature and beast breaks down the most trenchant tenets of all concerning human and animal identity; the animal takes on as much of a human role as Robin does a beastly one (where they are parodying each other), so that we are forced to confront this image and question how the bifurcation of differences advances female identity in a positive sense.

A feeling of muted disbelief certainly descends on the novel at this point. Yet the place of no return that Robin descends into, when she plays out a kind of bestiality, is not a nihilistic accomplishment in which words fail us. Rather, Barnes opens up language and discussion. As Karen Kaivola suggests, “*Nightwood’s* conception and articulation of the primitive is drawn from Western ways of processing cultural and individual differences.”²⁷ It is “a conceptual tool for articulating difference” (“The Beast” 172), and not an act of closure.

Barnes shifts the formal features of opinion held in place and time to alter the rubrics of female identity. The categories employed to define woman are split to open up essential form to something wider and more cultural. Even so, it is possible that here Barnes goes too far; in her attempt to destabilise cultural dualities we are left with a big silent space: as readers the final chapter leaves us reeling in our lack of comprehension. How do we make sense of the following concluding lines: “... she gave up, lying out, her hands beside her, her face turned and weeping; and the dog too gave up then, and lay down, his eyes bloodshot, his head flat along her knees” (239)?

However, I argue that Barnes’ spatial authority illustrates not defeat, but a new set of terms. At all events, these terms are beyond the field of what we can generally place. Barnes provides us with

²⁷ Karen Kaivola, “The Beast Turning Human,” *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 13.3 (fall 1993) 180.

an alternative space that interrogates the discursive limits of language. As Teresa de Lauretis suggests, we are looking for something completely different in terms of a space beyond the field of patriarchy: “It is the elsewhere of discourse here and now, the blind spots, or the space-off, of its representations. I think of it as spaces in the margins of hegemonic discourses, social spaces carved in the interstices of institutions and in the chinks and cracks of the power-knowledge apparatus.”²⁸ Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose claim that de Lauretis’s term “space-off” is similar “to the ‘zone of indiscernability’ that ... is found in the work of many black feminist artists.”²⁹ In the context of this study, I would suggest that the zone of indiscernability is equivalent to the transparency of the semiotic *chora*: it is a receptacle, or space that is deceptive and ambiguous and acts upon the fixity of language.

It is this emphasis that transforms stability into possibilities and discontentedness, and where characters escape wholly from their societal bonds. Robin’s transgression of the boundaries of what is human parodies the role of the beast in an attempt to question the very roots of absolute presence. Of course, this does not alter Robin’s humanity. Instead, she supplants one image for another. Like Dora Baur, one of Picasso’s painted figures, splintered on many planes and two-faced, Robin is no less human, just an altered picture of woman. In order to draw this image, however, there is necessarily some dissociation with order and humanity. We encounter Robin’s psychotic space in which to peer directly at unconsciousness and abjection.

If we are looking for some semblance of order from *Nightwood*’s chaotic end we will feel some *discontent* (in the way I have outlined the term). We are clearly not meant to solve a text in which “the space between the human and the holy head, the arena of the ‘indecent’ eternal is exposed” (222). It is only Robin and Matthew who discover what lies between the holy and the social. Even if we do enter the space between order and transcendence, we cross the threshold between reality and an image of reality that leads to the crucible, to “the centre of eroticism and death” (222), and

²⁸ T. de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender* (London: Macmillan, 1987) 25.

²⁹ A. Blunt and G. Rose, *Writing Women and Space* (New York: Guildford, 1994) 18.

because of fear every attempt is made to rationalise it. It is a text like *Nightwood* that forces us to enter into the interstices of order and transcendence and read from within a spatial (im)position.

It would seem that the relationship between nature and culture and woman's connection to it is an ongoing deliberation that cannot be easily defined. However, the manner in which Barnes articulates those fine connections enables a more readily understandable notion of a transitional space where woman is the shifting image. If this is so, then female identity will always remain between the gendered creation of an authorial discourse and nature, in "the space that generates the human species." Situated between absolute presence and the space outside of the conscious, woman is a weaving of human endeavour and transcendence; she is a combination of the maternal *chora* and discourse. Movement into that female space suggests that there is both place and space, symbolic and semiotic. Woman is bound by the discourses of her day, but there is an indecent eternal that can make all the difference in the world. As *Nightwood* makes clear: complexity, ambiguity and space are the real essences of humanity. Therefore, space in all its discontented form has the potential to alter the text's structural shape and challenge societal bonds.

5 Conclusion

The four preceding chapters have explored dimensions of melancholy, marginalisation, and other forms of social construction that position and locate individuality. *Nightwood*, locating a place for the lost other, positions marginality at the centre of its plot but in so doing, throws the notion of the subject into some form of crisis. A feeling of melancholia is incurred, and with it comes a certain resistance to the symbolic law. Although it might feel that a negative conclusion has been reached, I hope to have shown that much of Kristeva's theory of the semiotic *chora* offers a positive theory for feminist readers to construct a female space; one that can be appropriated to produce a methodology where it is possible to delineate new geometries and spatial boundaries, and where notions of positioning and discourse are broadened. Even so, it is not always easy to claim that the semiotic *chora*, at the level of poetic language, provides a convincing way of reading a text when it has so

many negative associations. Nevertheless, I argue, as Kristeva does, that when the semiotic *chora* perforates a project its most powerful contribution lies in its capacity to disrupt the law of the father as potentially resistant space, or “strange mother” as Derrida names it (*Name* 124).

I am not arguing that we should accept the semiotic as an unequivocal practice. Rather, I hope I have highlighted its limitations but, at the same time, explored a way of utilising the semiotic to transgress the boundaries of a symbolic and validating language. In addition, my endeavour is to suggest that if, as feminists, we are to revise a phallogentric tradition, we need to begin by questioning the role of the father and its genealogical trace; and it is the semiotic that helps us do this. More specifically, *chora* clears a gap for new stories to be inserted into the symbolic allowing us to recognise supplementary inscriptions between space and place.

Therefore, what the chapters outlining Kristeva’s position have argued, is that the semiotic, however comfortless a notion, is the site where potential inscription is engendered – the non-neutral space where the trace or mark of the feminine can be found and used. It was never my intention to provide a link between comfort and structure, as it would seem that there is no way of escaping the connective interweaving of a feminist practice and dislocation. It is an accepted fact that we find consolation in stability and familiarity; however, this can be indisputedly restrictive, and perhaps we can find some encouragement in the knowledge that whatever comfortable space the symbolic provides, there are shifting resistant spaces.

As a result, it might seem as though the only alternative to phallogentric space is to forge a reading and identity founded on instability and discomfort – and perhaps it is the only choice – but there is encouragement in this too, because it suggests that women can encounter a politics of change, where a creative performance negotiates a resistant space: removed from the reassuring and supporting structures of the symbolic.

In spite of this, there is an obstacle with the semiotic *chora* and that is its acultural and boundaryless range. In order to have a more inclusive representability of space, therefore, Foucault’s formulation will provide a more inclusive representation as the shaping he devises serves to illuminate how space is again anterior and how it is utilised in culture as a structuring of power. In

the next two chapters I will explore the Foucauldian idea of a heterotopic space and the way in which space is produced from out of the cultural grid of power and discourse. Moreover, I will argue that, although they achieve it in dissimilar ways, Foucault and Kristeva's theories both have in common practices of resistance.

Chapter Six

Exotic Space

1. Introduction

Chapter One argued that a theory without borders provides a revolutionary potential in politics and language, and further that the feminine is the locus of this revolutionary potential to explode patriarchal discourse for social and linguistic change. In order to continue the process of articulating a critique of the spaces from where women speak, I will now arrange Barnes and Lorde together in an effort to elaborate on a theory without borders and to explore how it extends to include Foucault's spatial analysis. That means looking at how the concept of space has spread across time from the 1930s novel that Barnes wrote to the contemporary work of Lorde. In these two final chapters a Foucauldian methodology of reading will be constructed to consider space from a wider perspective. To justify my arranging together of Barnes and Lorde, I will start by questioning the notion of the author in the work of Foucault. I shall then explore Lorde's writings in terms of their positioning between the connective points of past and present: her work will be examined to locate a conjoining of real space and utopian space which occurs specifically in writing. This will address the question of whether Lorde functions as a resistant writer under the conditions in which she is placed, and whether she negotiates an independent position, placing herself in the configuration of both spaces.

1.2 The figure of the author considered

In a radical envisioning of the 'figure' of the author and its use of and relation to authorship, Foucault poses the question "What Is an Author?"¹ and begins by analysing the presupposing idea of the

¹ M. Foucault, "What Is an Author?", trans. J. V. Harari. *The Foucault Reader*, ed. P. Rabinow (London: Penguin, 1991) 101–121.

writer's "individualisation" and how the effects of the wider cultural setting sustain or denigrate the power of the author: "Even today, when we reconstruct the history of a concept, literary genre, or school of philosophy, such categories seem relatively weak, secondary, and superimposed scansions in comparison with the solid and fundamental unit of the author and the work" (101). The identity of the author, Foucault argues, sustains a degree of fixity and privilege that other modes of enquiry do not generate; therefore the discourse of the author must in some way be different from other discursive arrangements. That being so, the next question to follow is: "In our culture, how does one characterise a discourse containing the author function?" (108). If this mode of inquiry is limited to individual authors of discourse, the answer is that it operates on four levels which are characterised in the following way: (1) Because literary anonymity is not tolerated by Western society, the writer is automatically held responsible for an 'act' of writing which if for example is transgressive, is subject to the judgement of the legitimising discourses it juxtaposes. (2) The author function is not fixed, inasmuch as it changes or is viewed differently by different epochs or cultures. (3) Society plays a complex role in the construction of the author function. (4) The term does not distinguish individuals, since authors can engage in many positions.

Taking these four characteristics into consideration, we might demonstrate a reasonable connection in the author function between Barnes and Lorde as writers of resistant texts whose themes dis-impound them from their places of enclosure. *Nightwood* has always been recognised as a text that maps sexual differences against stereotypical notions of sexuality, and early critics commonly accepted it as an experimental lesbian novel. Thus, Barnes and those who patronised her literary output had to face the social controversy that was attached to the publication of her radical, experimental novels.² Superficially then, such discourses against the fabric of a predominantly heterosexual culture will attract notice to those who search around for fragments of difference in society's whole. Lorde, it might be supposed, as a lesbian writer and avid reader, familiarised herself

² Natalie Barney provided the financial means for the publication of *Ryder*, Barnes' first novel, which became an instant bestseller in 1928, and T. S. Eliot supported the interests of *Nightwood* by writing an eight page preface which signified his "admiration for the book." "Preface", *Nightwood* 8.

with the work of Barnes and so the gap that separates them through class, culture, race, and time is lessened by the fact that the lesbian genre, in itself is modest and, more to the point, indiscriminately lumped together.³

However, if I were to construct a lesbian literary genre from the works of Barnes and Lorde it would be at a great sacrifice.⁴ Certainly it is worth examining how both authors present similar ideas, recapitulate themes, explore contingent similarities, locating in them individual style and gesture, but it requires an accurate reading in which the author function is not placed under one edifice and called by the same name. Owing to this, Foucault's term "transdiscursive"⁵ textuality allows a reading of Barnes and Lorde in which a certain number of analogies can be made, opening up a reading of the writers that is much more inclusive and sensitive to their literary broadness.

Still, there are differences in their work and they are noticeable ones. In the case of Barnes, although she stands outside the standard literary histories of Modernism, she constructs a novel which emphasises the nuances and differences of the Modernist tradition and her experience as a woman within the powerful discourses of 1930 s Europe. On a personal level, she moved in the privileged circles of the upper-class literary elite and worked as a successful journalist long before it was common for women to do so. *Nightwood* reflects some of those attitudes in that it displays the

³ Bonnie Zimmerman uncovers what she calls "heterosexist assumptions" (120) amongst literary critics and writers and argues that their undefined arranging of texts serves only to "neutralise" the effect of good and bad literature. In "What Has Never Been", *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, eds. R. R. Warhol and D. Price Herndl (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1991) 117-137.

⁴ Shari Benstock takes Barnes from a potentially ghettoised literary sub-genre and writes: "Barnes's examination of internalised sexual difference, common both to the text that addressed a heterosexual audience and to those written for other women, becomes the primary subject matter of her writing." In *Women of the Left Bank* (Texas: Texas UP, 1986) 247. Lorde, herself, was aware that she wanted to write across the boundaries of sexual identity and orientation, and aptly writes in *Sister Outsider*: "The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessen the threat of their difference." *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg: Crossing Press, 1984) 56.

⁵ Foucault offers an interpretation of "transdiscursiveness" and the need for such a term:

I have discussed the author only in the limited sense of a person to whom the production of a text, a book, or a work can be legitimately attributed. It is easy to see that in the sphere of discourse one can be the author of much more than a book – one can be the author of a theory, tradition, or discipline in which other books and authors will in their turn find a place. These authors are in a position which we shall call 'transdiscursive' ("What Is an Author" 113).

psychological ruminations of a *laissez faire* group within the social sub-culture of aesthetic life. In the case of Lorde, her narratives reflect the struggle with poverty, identity, and balancing a writing career with much needed paid employment as a librarian.

In contrast, the similarity and transformations that exist between the authors are valid and pertinent. This is not to give the texts Barnes and Lorde write a formal generality, but to suppose that the rules underpinning any cohesive society are still prevalent and powerful. A certain number of divergences have taken place, such as white, middle-class women being more empowered, but the shift has been protracted and slow, and for Lorde that change has not always filtered through:

Heterosexual privilege is usually the only privilege that Black women have. None of us have racial or sexual privilege, almost none of us have class privilege, maintaining 'straightness' is our last resort... I am convinced that it is our lack of privilege and power in every other sphere that allows so few Black women to make the leap that many white women, particularly writers, have been able to make this decade.⁶

Although Barnes may have had what Lorde describes as the privilege of race, both writers work for the concomitant utilisation and reciprocal explication of women's position in society, out of which come expressions of deep-seated estrangement and displacement. Therefore to expand a type of transdiscursivity enables us to locate formal structures, objects of discourse and the relationship that authors have with their surroundings and the way similar problems are treated differently. The problematic areas contained in both writers' work include position, estrangement, and difference which, of course, are diachronic metaphors of the one issue relating to patriarchy's connection to women. Therefore, these areas will be examined.

2. The positioning of Barnes and Lorde

In the movement from *Nightwood* to Lorde's writings there has been a development of motifs for trying out different standards of womanhood.⁷ For example, a sense of mobility has changed from

⁶ A. Lorde, "Towards a Black Feminist Criticism," *Conditions Two* 1.14 (October 1977) 35-42.

⁷ Barbara Christian explores a number of black women writers which include Lorde and writes:

inner psychological spaces which open up resistance and offer freedom under any circumstance, to outer, more 'corporeal' movement where the writer shapes her surrounds to fit her own constructions of difference.⁸ So, there is a movement from inside to outside which is carried through metaphors of interiority and exteriority. Specifically, *Nightwood* puts into question the authority of presence by *not* naming it: it offers simple symmetrical opposites of objectivity with absence, lack, deferral, and trace:

The doctor, nodding, straightened his tie with two fingers. 'The number of our days is not check rein enough to look upon the death of our love, while living we knew her too well, and never understood, for then our next gesture permitted our next misunderstanding. But death is intimacy walking backward. We are crazed with grief when she, who once permitted us, leaves to us the only recollection. We shed tears of bankruptcy then (*Nightwood* 183).

The structure of Matthew's account is allegorical in quality and uses the emotive terms of "death, grief, and recollection"; the book is mainly about the interior feelings of its characters in a bid to evoke elusion and evocation rather than objective specificity. Clearly, the crisis here is the one that naming brings with it. To name the outside world means to locate one's difference from it, and as *Nightwood* is not a novel that reinstates a dichotomy of good and bad, difference cannot automatically instate a public morality. Instead, Barnes' oppositional activity is thematically and

What is particularly interesting about these novelists' use of African elements in relation to the concept of woman is their sense of concreteness rather than abstraction. All of these major characters in the books ... moved from one place to another and have encountered other worlds distinctly different from their own. Mobility of black women is a new quality in these books of the early eighties, for black women, in much of the previous literature, were restricted in space by their condition. This mobility is not cosmetic.

To support this confident statement Christian offers a number of examples from a variety of texts from black women writers, but a degree of assumption takes place as Christian makes no reference to her argument beyond characters in the novels. No support is drawn from sociological or historical references. This is a problem, particularly when she writes about the condition from where these writers came. (In "Trajectories of Self-Definition," *Feminisms: an anthology of literary theory and criticism*, ed. R. R. Warhol and D. Price Herndl (New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1991) 325.)

⁸ Caroline Merchant takes corporeality as a theme and traces its changing motif over time as a way of understanding the gendered geo-political effects of particular epistemes, and although she makes many historical overgeneralisations, it is a useful way of teasing out ideas that have become foundational to contemporary social relations. In *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper, 1983).

stylistically psychological: the tone of fiction which erases the boundaries of closure and opens up spatialisation to the interiorised mind's eye.

In Lorde's case, she concentrates on the very practical needs of survival and employs food, for example, as a metaphor to accommodate the multiplicity of fear, hunger, and love. Her poem "A Litany For Survival" exemplifies the way in which hunger works on more than one figurative level:

And when the sun rises we are afraid
 it might not remain
 when the sun sets we are afraid
 it might not rise in the morning
 when our stomachs are full we are afraid
 of indigestion
 when our stomachs are empty we are afraid
 we may never eat again
 when we are loved we are afraid
 love will vanish
 when we are alone we are afraid
 love will never return
 and when we speak we are afraid
 our words will not be heard
 nor welcomed
 but when we are silent
 we are still afraid.

So it is better to speak
 remembering
 we were never meant to survive.⁹

Survival, which is not mentioned in the body of the poem, plays a central role in that it places emphasis on the culture and the spaces women occupy in society so that constructions of anteriority are foregrounded and made politically valid. Survival is equivocal to the space women are afraid to speak from or maintain silence in, yet although there is a sense of consternation in the fuller stanza, the last three lines provide a more epigrammatic verse form which is optimistic in its ironic fatalism.

⁹ A. Lorde, *The Black Unicorn: Poems* (London: Norton, 1978) 32.

Between the two ends of the spectrum of fatalism and optimism there lies a pathway for those who are affected by their interrelationship with society and sexism.

Although Barnes and Lorde modify space in their own way, the author function performs on a much more definitive level in relation to the writers' basic design. It seems, for example, that putting Barnes and Lorde together addresses the definition of women's writing in a literary space and the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of literature itself. For it is easy to see the similar problems and obstacles encountered by both writers inasmuch as the author function enables one to understand how different discourses and authors perform in similar ways. Of course, there is another reason for placing Barnes' and Lorde together, and it is that their reception encounters the *same* overriding dilemma of where to place them. Shari Benstock writes of the former:

All of Djuna Barnes' writing can be read as a critique of woman's place in Western society. But until recently, her work has been placed against the Modernist tradition, where it has suffered a neglectful misreading. Both her prose and poetry have been seen as eccentric, almost inverted, forms of the Modernist aesthetic. They have been read as private and highly peculiar writing that addresses itself to a select audience, drawing its subject matter from Barnes' life and in form and imagery composing a pastiche of earlier literatures. But it is precisely Barnes' relation to literary tradition that so troubles assessments of her work: readers do not know where to 'place' her (*Women of the Left Bank* 242).

Even Benstock admits that it is difficult to find a literary space for Barnes that fits cohesively alongside other writers: that is why, perhaps, she claims that Barnes' most significant contribution is to the "abandoned traditions" of women's culture, which is better aligned to Gertrude Stein (another unplaceable writer) than to Joyce. Likewise, Lorde's work illuminates the ongoing discussion with spatial territories and where to take up residence, as examined by Chinosole:

Lorde characterises herself as a kind of maroon, a 'sister outsider' and 'journeywoman', like the runaway Cuban slave. True, her parents were dispossessed workers and not ex-slaves, and they came to the United States from the Caribbean, not directly from Africa. Yet she is part of the same historical continuum as the runaway slave, a recent by-product of the Atlantic slave trade. Like the slave narrator, she, too, through her mother in *Zami*, voices the motif of home

and displacement.... And with equal defiance of Western linear logic reminiscent of the Cuban slave narrator, she [writes] 'there is no place that cannot be home nor is'.¹⁰

If there is no place that cannot be home nor is, then the physical design of place suggests that these writers are estranged for some particular reason. An explanation might be that the boundaries that regulate discipline and behaviour cannot accommodate them; this would give a structural explanation for the individual pattern of attack on the spatial and discursive boundaries that both writers mount. Perhaps in response to their personal marginalisation they write novels that criticise their positioning, but this, of course, leads to a further estrangement within the literary field.

2.1 Estrangement in Barnes and Lorde

If estrangement depicts the fragments of society's fabric then it also illustrates, conversely, the notion that culture is strange to some of those who live within it. In citing perhaps some of the most well-known words Barnes uttered, we get a sense of a writer who inhabited a world she felt misunderstood by: "I am the most famous unknown of the century! I can't account for it, unless it is that my talent is my character, my character is my talent, and both an estrangement."¹¹ Indeed, *Nightwood* works in collusion with its author so that one equates with the other, and neither stand independently. In *Strangers* Kristeva integrates Hegel's study of cultural estrangement with her work on individuality and universal representation, and writes: "individuality becomes stable only by giving up the self for the universal" (*Strangers* 144). In positive terms, by not giving up the self one should logically maintain a semblance of individuality, but the strings attached add a severe proviso: instability plays a pivotal role. In literature, the main symptom of this is the errancy of writing and the violation of speech: it is embodied in Barnes as a transgression of law, an irruption of discourse, and a reinstatement of myth within reality. Kristeva describes it as the "distraught utterance ... the major representation of cultural estrangement" (*Strangers* 145).

¹⁰ Chinosole, "Audre Lorde and the Matrilinial Diaspora," in *Wild Women in the Whirlwind*, ed. J. M. Braxton (London: Serpent's Tail, 1990) 383.

¹¹ Barnes' letter to Natalie Barney, 31 May 1963.

This is fully represented in the ending of *Nightwood* when the dislocation and disruption of the sign is most exaggerated: Robin howls like a dog, and barks in a fit of laughter; each are manifestations of the tragic effect of estrangement from her own self. The most extreme displays of an even more radical manifestation of language usurping its own operation takes place when an image of human and beast is strangely put together in the image of Robin and the dog fighting it out for supremacy and territory.

If Barnes' estranging technique places itself at a purposively oblique angle to the mores of society's codes, then Lorde, already obliquely positioned, writes from the content of her own experience. Rooted in the historical past of her mother, tenuously connected to an often hostile American tradition, Lorde oscillates between abstraction and realism, legend and history: "I, moving back and forth flowing in either or both directions as needed."¹² The terms that outline identity are minimalist and succinct in themselves, yet they betray a fluid and complex self-definition that arises from the need of any estranged person to acquire, and that is a chameleon-like persona: flowing as needed, as required by the logic of the Western culture she seeks to defy. Therefore, Lorde's work reinforces the technique of sameness under the guise of difference; in her discussion of Lorde Chinosole observes: "Based on the historical continuum of survival through change, a premium is placed on the emotional immediacy of creative irreconcilability, which is a non-static, and non-threatening affirmation of difference" (392). That survival strategy for Lorde is through the word which enables her to appropriate the dominant codes of discourse and valorise her own position. In *The Black Unicorn* she writes:

Imprisoned in the pews of memory
beneath the scarlet velvet is a smile. My mother
weeping
gouts of bloody wisdom
pewed oracular and seminal as rape
pursues me through the nightmares
of this wonderland of early learning

¹² A. Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (London: Harper Collins, 1996) 67.

where I wander cryptic as a saint
 tightmouthed as cuttlefish
 darting beneath and over
 vital flaws unstitched like crazy patchwork
 until analysed and useless I
 crest in a shoal of missing mothers
 paid and made in beds of consecration
 worshipped by rituals in which
 I do not believe
 nor find a place to kneel and rest
 out of the storm of strangers and demands
 drowning in flooded churches
 thick with rot and swollen with confusion
 lashed to a raft of grins aligned in an enemy reason
 I refuse to learn again

(“Pathways: From Mother to Mother” 71).

The creative irreconcilability expresses the principles and mode of Lorde’s use of estrangement and the chameleon guise that obliterates while affirming the alien: beneath the smile is weeping; wisdom is as seminal as rape; and the metaphor “cryptic as a saint” hides the mouth as tight “as cuttlefish.” The “enemy reason” that pervades the mind of she who refuses to learn again signifies the clamour of voices that vie for control and partition. However, side-stepping “the storm of strangers and demands” the “distraught utterance” (of Kristeva) proclaims a personal narrative against the elaborate lie of the “universal.”

2.2 Difference in Barnes and Lorde

The metaphoric ‘splits’ in *Nightwood* such as “savage and refined”; “two instincts, recoil and advance”; “the converging halves of a broken fate”, and the “child and desperado” eschew synthesis, since, as Benstock comments, “the oppositions that inhabit the moral structure of the novel are artificially produced in society by the very effort to suppress one component in the series of doubles” (*Women of the Left Bank* 265). This being so, *Nightwood* works against the operations of a binary logic and illuminates the ongoing feminist discussion with polarism and essentialism by installing its

own rationalism, a poetic weaving of nonpolarised duality.¹³ The juxtaposition of imagery and the defiance of cultural differences affirm a style of writing that pulls down and reconstructs creative irreconcilability.

Likewise, Lorde recapitulates similar themes of difference, and it seems to me she does this by calling attention to a quality of life that escapes the matrix of historical category. Within that life, she searches for a self-expression in which emphasis is placed on the emotional irreconcilability that has been suitably described as a non-static, and non-threatening, affirmation of difference:

Every one of the women in our group took for granted, and would have said if asked, that we were all on the side of right. But the nature of that right everyone was presumed to be on the side of was always unnamed. It was just another way of silently avoiding having to examine what our living positions were.... We were too afraid those differences might in fact be irreconcilable, for we had never been taught any tools for dealing with them. Our individuality was very precious to each one of us, but so was the group, and the other outsiders whom we had found to share some more social aspects of our loneliness (*Zami* 178).

The inability to name admits Lorde's own limitations, extracts inquiry from her difference, and suggests complementarity rather than conflict. However, those living positions and differences, by their very character, create intractable dilemmas whereby the cohesiveness of the group remains so only as long as it remains *outside* of a nameable space and chooses not to define its position too overtly.

Despite the fact that Lorde lives in an abstract *and* concrete space, there is nothing very wrong with this if we are expecting her to either conform or flout rules and regulations, but she does not. Instead, she formulates writing at the connective points of resistance in the configuration of spaces that define her inside of a group or outside of society's mainstream. By positioning herself between

¹³ Bonnie Kime Scott notably provides a useful summary of Barnes's use of binaries:

She constructs a blurred middle ground between the bestial and the human. Disrupting these categories and the very practice of categorisation. This blurring of distinctions between the animal and the human is part of her general tendency to focus on intermediate grounds that lie between accepted, overdetermined categories, and interfere with neat progressions. Similarly, she develops a vast intermediate ground of gender, diversified by racial, homosexual, lesbian, and bisexual identifications and by species and mythic composite animals (*Refiguring Modernism* vol. 2 73).

an inexhaustible world of possibility, she can proliferate meaning by choosing to name or not name her experience. In saying this, we can discover the author's mode of functioning and systems of contingency, and, in doing so, grasp Lorde's points of insertion in a discursive literary space (including the space she occupies).

Up to this point, I have limited my subject to the author function as a means of exploring the links between Lorde and Barnes; consequently the following sections will further examine Lorde's writing in the ways I have outlined and concentrate on spaces of resistance with a critical application of Foucault's heterotopia.

3. A Foucauldian theory of space

A heterotopia is a space that is socially constituted, emerging from the specific needs of the populace. In an interview (1982) Foucault is asked about the importance of space as an analysis of power, and answers: "Space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power."¹⁴ Foucault reaches this conclusion by charting a social production of space and mapping it geographically in order to de-peripheralise it and expose its non-neutrality. Since space in this sense is a utilised commodity it is distributed by authority as a structure of power, suppression, and normalisation.¹⁵ The heterotopia, however, is more than an ideological tool for suppression: it arises from a self-conscious debate with other discourses, it is a performance of resistance in multiple spaces – a heterogeneous space which is abstract and concrete, individual and public, and formulated at the connective points of resistance. Therefore, space is described as a universal commodity, but at the same time, it is an accessible and personal utility.¹⁶ In addition, because space is a strongly

¹⁴ M. Foucault, "Space, Knowledge, and Power," *Foucault Reader* 245.

¹⁵ Foucault's shift from time to space as the paradigm guiding his approach is explored in Thomas Flynn's essay "Foucault's Mapping of History," *The Cambridge Guide to Foucault*, ed. G. Gutting (Cambridge: CUP, 1994) 128-146.

¹⁶ Foucault constitutes his ideas by drawing specifically from his own experiences: "Each time I have attempted to do theoretical work, it has been on the basis of elements from my experience – always in relation to processes I saw taking place around me." M. Foucault, "Est-il donc important le penser?" Cited in J. Rajckman, *The Freedom of Philosophy* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985) 35-36.

implied social construction, it is embedded in discourse and social practice. Still, more specifically, heterotopic change comes about through the innovation of the human imagination in relation to the external surroundings that impinge upon it. In his most definitive summing up of space Foucault prosaically suggests that “in civilisations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates” (“Spaces” 27). Thus, we can begin to understand the unique importance of Foucault’s study: although space is policed, we have the skill and freedom¹⁷ to change and challenge events. In other words, we must practice resistance from within the place in which we find ourselves positioned.

Foucault’s study of space began as early as 1961 with *Madness and Civilisation*, where he explored madness as it was contained in carceral institutions. Typically for Foucault, he linked the points of contact between ‘lunatic space’ and ‘normal space’ as a way of indicating how both (pathologised spaces) served to define each other – spaces of normalisation are recognised as such because there exist spaces of incarceration. He set about disrupting what is viewed as ‘normal’ and offered new connections between spaces. As a historian of culture, most of Foucault’s work has been ground-breaking. *The Order of Things* (1966), *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), *Discipline and Punish* (1975), and *The Birth of the Prison* (1977) all deal with location: as a historian of culture, his focus on space has produced a rich analysis of the distribution of authority and its influences in space. Bentham’s Panopticism became the focal point whereby Foucault used the symbol of the Panoptical prison as a metonym for the way in which the subject exists in space generally. His historical-cultural claim of the role of self-policing in prison is designed to highlight how we integrate generally in society; self-policing is a component of every culture’s broad and limitless ways of living.¹⁸ However, the important Foucauldian proposition I wish to establish here is that

¹⁷ Christopher Norris gives a constructive account of freedom and suggests, in the main, that freedom has been neglected by critical theory, which has become too theoretical. He makes a case for the human sciences in his essay “The Undefined Work of Freedom: On Foucault and Philosophy”. However, Norris struggles with the division between ‘science’ and art (in the way he defines them) and fails to fix the limits of freedom beyond the conceptual reckoning of metaphor. In *Constructive Criticism*, ed. M. Kreiswirth and T. Carmichael (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1995) 15-22.

¹⁸ See R. Rosaldo-Zimbalist, *Women, Culture and Society* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1974) 17, 42.

within any regulated system there exists an element of subversion. It is only a small part of his extensive scrutiny of culture, yet I want to show how it has major implications for literature; especially when we consider writing within the connective boundaries of history. Foucault writes: “No matter how terrifying a given system may be, there always remain the possibilities of resistance, disobedience, and oppositional groupings. On the other hand, I don’t think that there is anything that is functionally – by its very nature – absolutely liberating. *Liberty is a practice....* Liberty is what must be exercised” (“Space, Knowledge, and Power” 245). Therefore writing can become a practice of liberty.¹⁹

To illustrate this, I extend Foucault in two ways: in the first place, my argument draws out the literary aspect of his methodological performance and demonstrates in the work of Audre Lorde the function of writing between spaces in culture as acts of resistance. It is not difficult to explain her work within the cultural milieu from which it extends, and to translate it into the political enterprise it deserves. Lorde’s work voices a politically-inclined and self-conscious debate with other social discourses. She responds entirely, and defiantly, to the structures in society that make her poor and “outside,” as here in “Production”:

100,000 bees make a sturdy hive
 ready three days after the moon is full
 we cut honey.

Our hot knives slice the caps of wax
 from each heavy frame
 dark pollen richness drips
 from the laden combs.

Sadiq loads the extractor
 Curtis levelling the spin.
 Sweet creeps like bees
 through each crack of hot air.

¹⁹ An interesting in-depth study is offered by Deborah Cook in *The Subject Finds a Voice: Foucault’s Turn Toward Subjectivity* (New York: Lang, 1993).

Outside the honey house
 hungry drones cluster
 low-voiced and steady
 we strain the flow laughing
 drunk with honey.

Before twilight
 long rows of bottles stand
 labelled and waiting.
 Tomorrow we make a living
 two dollars at a time.²⁰

Two dollars and honey are a bitter-sweet experience: the fruit of the labour for both bees and workers is priced at two dollars. However, the hive is not unlike the community of casual labourers who, although “outside the honey house,” “make a living” from collecting honey amid the “long rows of bottles.” Lorde’s poetry can be examined as a real event and this leads to the second point – Foucault’s heterotopias are a definition of actually lived and socially created spaces in which experience and political resistance come together.

3.1 A literary heterotopia

Lorde’s work sets out to transform the gap between the discourses of mythical and real space as a means of identifying what is written across history’s trajectories. Paying attention simultaneously to language and voice yields the form of narrative space that defines Lorde’s work. This leads to a fresh way of examining a writer who self-consciously practises the possibilities of resistance, “disobedience” and “revolution” across “real spaces” (“Spaces” 27). A Foucauldian reading of Lorde also helps us to locate a writer who performs the kind of clearing Foucault describes as a heterotopic practice:

[Heterotopias] have a function in relation to all the space that remains. This function unfolds between two extreme poles. Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every

²⁰ A. Lorde, “Production,” *The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance: Poems 1987-1992* (London: Norton, 1993) 27.

real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory.... Or else, on the contrary, their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. The latter type would be the heterotopia, not of illusion, but of compensation ("Spaces" 27).

"Hetero" describes space as other; "topia" links etymologically to the Greek word for place. For purposes of literary criticism, heterotopia is less important as a determinant of historical space than as the forming of imaginary space as a challenging or compensatory response to place. Lorde's writing constitutes what one might term a literary heterotopia. Foucault's depiction of space as a contingent event between two dominant forces possesses special critical value because it provides the means by which to locate Lorde's literary response to her sense of place as a writer.

Foucault's study of authorship reflects the critical "*individualisation* in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy, and the sciences" ("What Is an Author?" 141). Not entirely rejecting the idea of authorial presence, he acknowledges authorial subjectivity and the means used to deviate from 'language'.²¹ This instrumental positioning of author between language and voice means that the writer stays in relation to the institution he or she sets out to destabilise (or compensate for).

Even so, it must be asked how the forms of relations between contiguous sites are negotiated. Moreover, if all this translates into living "inside a set of relations that delineates sites" ("Spaces" 23), then what does this mean for literature? In answer, the narrative space Lorde carves for herself and others is unconditionally marked by marginalisation and positioning. Almost all of her texts – *Sister Outsider*, *Zami: A New Spelling of my Name*, and *The Black Unicorn* – project a conscious awareness of being placed outside of systems of normalisation; even the titles of her books are a recognition of being outside. It is a separateness that displaces and juxtaposes her relation to the white American state. Therefore, I confer the status of heterotopic writer upon Lorde because she

²¹ Simon During considers some of the many aspects of authorship and literature from a Foucauldian perspective. He offers a cultural reading in which the role of the reader and its context is privileged. There is no mention, however, of writing from within a heterotopic space. In *Foucault and Literature: Towards a Genealogy of Writing* (London: Routledge, 1992).

writes between the layers of social and literary spaces to produce a “writing across gaps.”²² The outcome is ruptured sites – heterotopic spaces that can never be defined as events in themselves. Consequently, we can begin to see that Lorde’s texts are heterotopic in that they refuse to function on a purely literary and autonomous basis: they include all of the social dimensions she encounters as a Black woman writing herself out of a confined and rigid position. In an essay entitled “I Am Your Sister,” Lorde names the divisions that exist between her and others and attempts through her self delivery to bridge those differences: “It is not easy for me to speak here with you as a Black lesbian feminist, recognising that some of the ways in which I identify myself make it difficult for you to hear me” (*Burst of Light* 11). “When I say I am a Black feminist, I mean I recognise that my power as well as my primary oppressions come as a result of my Blackness as well as my womanness, and therefore my struggles on both of these fronts are inseparable” (*Burst of Light* 20-21).

It seems that Lorde’s writing not only undertakes an examination of women’s place in the patriarchal construct, but that it addresses exclusion within a female paradigm. The same can be said of Barnes’ *Nightwood* in which established paradigms of gender are subverted to include an assessment of desire and (pro)creation in the androgynous world of the invert. As a result, both writers define their position in relation to an external cultural code, but one should also note another process which is more exacting, and that is whether their words are strategies to signify self-alienation through separatism, or if, in fact, their experiences of estrangement stem from a (dis)approving system. There are certain critics who would take the first approach, claiming that writers of lesbian texts uphold the desire for a separate space. For example, in “Toward a definition of the lesbian literary imagination” Mary Farwell holds that “lesbian narrative space [is] a disruptive space of sameness as opposed to difference which has structured most Western narratives.”²³ Neither writers set out to find gaps in Western narratives in which to place an analysis based wholly on either separatism and/or lesbianism. That being said, it remains difficult to place them.

²² A. Lorde, *The Cancer Journals* (London: Sheba, 1980) 44.

²³ M. R. Farwell, “Toward a definition of the lesbian literary imagination,” *Signs* 100.14 (1989) 93-118.

In her essay "Lorde and the African-American Tradition," Anna Wilson nevertheless does position Lorde: "By virtue of her self-identification as a Black lesbian, [she] is always only with difficulty to be accommodated within a communal or literary structure ..." (in Munt 79). Wilson assigns Lorde to a "Black lesbian space" (78) and concludes her argument by stating: "Audre goes out to refigure the Black family of Harlem as including her; but the reconstruction that happens in the street is as crucial as that conducted in the mythical bed" (76). For Wilson, Lorde can only be understood if her sexuality or ethnicity is foregrounded. Taking a wider perspective, it is not my aim to confine her work and read it as an adaptation of either locality or sexual orientation. Lorde exists across boundaries in order to locate an alternative space to the one she exists in. It is not a separatist, utopian space, but a real 'second-generation' space – planted in the domestic locale of Lorde's household and one that Lorde herself feels duty-bound to nurture.

Here it is not a matter of offering support to a particularly marginalised writer, but of how to raise awareness of those writers who produce a *type* of discourse that can be called resistant. In short, both Barnes and Lorde create spaces of resistance which go against the dominant matrix of society by demonstrating the disparity between boundaries and the ordering lines of our culture.

3.2 Juxtaposing bio/mytho/graphical space

A Foucauldian methodology enables us to locate several of the spaces that influence Lorde's work. The heterotopic space shows us ways in which Lorde connects the unfolding of new ideas in space as they set out to challenge spaces, or compensate for idealised absent spaces. The role of the heterotopia thus works in two ways: firstly, it is incompatible with other spaces and, secondly, it compensates for a desired utopian space as that which "always presupposes a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable" ("Spaces" 26). In other words, alienating and 'different' spaces are linked to an 'other' space or polarity, and so we are frequently locating the subversive destabilising aspect of the spatial other. In addition, heterotopias are "inside ... human life" ("Spaces" 26). Foucault's heterotopias describe a socially lived space that is, at the same time,

concrete and abstract, individual and public. It is a heterogeneous arrangement that describes the social production of narrative spaces alongside the hegemonic discourses that define them. More specifically, "*The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible*" ("Spaces" 25; my emphasis).

Foucault recognises, as I want to insist, the significance of claiming that space is embedded in discourse and social practice, that there can never be a space that is positioned separately from language and social practice because it cannot exist independently.²⁴ Foucault's study of a utopian space is a good example of a space that attempts to forge a self-representation, but fails realistically because any act of signification co-exists alongside other signifying practices. As I see it, with the heterotopia space cannot be described as outside of language, because there is always a link between established and new spaces. That being so, there is a comprehensive intertwining between heterogeneous spaces.

With this thought, we can consider the question posed earlier concerning Lorde's voluntary or involuntary taking of a position inside or outside normative culture. In doing so we can address the two significant factors of her work relating to the coining of her own term, the "biomythographical" (*Zami* vi). It is an act of writing which classifies her particular form of narrative composition and validates her position. Her biomythographical writing envisages a utopian space in which it becomes possible to dismantle the representational images of a second-generation black emigrant. This is supported by the title of her book and the renaming of herself (even if only for the biomythographical purposes of the book) as 'Zami'. The act of renaming signifies a desire to move from an Anglo-American convention, which involves moving away from a 'Christian' and, by association, 'civilised' location. Lorde is attempting to work against the system of differences that Sally Robinson, in her essay on cultural mythology and race, outlines. Robinson states that it is possible to work against the identity politics that Lorde experiences:

²⁴ This idea is not very different from that of plural and play in later developments of Barthes' work. See *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. R. Miller (London: Cape, 1975).

[The writer oscillates] between inside and outside, writing in the margins of hegemonic discourses in order to forge a self-representation of the Black woman as wholly 'other.' This double movement inscribes identity as a process by which the Black woman as subjective agent resists becoming 'naturalised' into a singular and essential position. [Writers show] the production of the Black woman within hegemonic discourses to be a colonialist strategy for containing the 'other' in a space constructed according to the desires and needs of the hegemonic 'self.'²⁵

Robinson is arguing that the writer should engage with inside and outside spaces in order to dislocate the hegemonic locutions of black or white, male or female. In an effort to destabilise the representative markings of gender and race she argues that a move from the defining social group into heterogeneous spaces is essential. Robinson shapes an ethical reflection as much as a critical argument in that she tries to find a way out of hegemonies. Regrettably, however, her argument is impaired by the fact that the non-unitary notion of space is ignored and the links formed between hegemonic and heterogeneous space fail to be considered in a developed sense. Furthermore, she sets up an opposition between same and other with the ethical implications of good and bad, so that the practice of positioning opposites as irreconcilable events is based on a structuralist argument sustained by the Western cultural binarism she seeks to subvert.

• In contrast, defining the author as the discursive effect of multiple structuration, rather than a positive or negative fact, means that we can view the writer as a "multiple form" constituted at the "interstices of fragmented language" (*Order* 386). It is the very idea of viewing Lorde between these movements that interests me. In the break with hegemonic discourses, links are made with other spaces to expand infinite technologies of power and writing.²⁶ Foucault's account of history as process suggests that knowledge is located at the splitting of established thought.

²⁵ S. Robinson, *Engendering the Subject* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991) 136.

²⁶ A more 'serious' ideological thinker like Edward Said has great difficulty with Foucault's reading of history in this way. Objection to Foucault is based on Said's seeking of emancipation where Foucault subjects history to a scrutiny for the sake of a cultural methodology. See "Foucault and the Imagination of Power," *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. D. Couzens Hoy (London: Blackwell, 1986) 149-156.

The notion of ‘splitting’²⁷ is important because it locates the continuous “interaction” of movements between meanings.²⁸ There is transmission and exchange within the breach and fissure of structures, and therefore binarisms cannot develop into the dominant orders we imagine. In *The Order of Things* Foucault extends his level of reasoning further and shows that alongside division there is unity in “a non distinction between observation and relation – which results in the constitution of a single, unbroken surface in which observation and language intersect to infinity” (39). The task as Foucault defines it is to disclose the connections and relations between spaces, rather than to analyse splitting in an attempt to break down and interrogate atomised spaces. What is being suggested here is eloquently expressed by Fritjof Capra, discussing the notion of historic events and their connections, and is worth repeating:

The universe is no longer seen as a machine, made up of a multitude of objects, but has to be pictured as one indivisible, dynamic whole whose parts are essentially inter-related and can be understood only as patterns of a cosmic process.... In quantum theory you never end up with “things;” you always deal with interconnections.... It shows that we cannot decompose the world into independently existing smallest units.... The world thus appears as a complicated tissue of events, in which connections of different kinds alternate or overlap or combine and thereby determine the texture of the whole.²⁹

Dealing with interconnections does not reduce ideas to microcosmic ‘soundbites’; rather, as Capra is careful to point out, interconnections include the “texture of the whole.” In the same way Foucault includes a sense of cohesive space established on a basis of connection.³⁰ This does not imply a ‘solidarity’ between structures – this would be impossible since Foucault is Nietzschean and bases his

²⁷ Kristeva writes about a “schizoid splitting” (*Black Sun* 18).

²⁸ A modern conception of the metaphor, suggested by I. A. Richards (“Poetic Process and Literary Analysis,” in *Style in Language*, ed. T. A. Sebeok (Cambridge [MA]: MIT Press, 1960) 9-23), is an interaction between ideas so that there is a transmission of new meanings.

²⁹ F. Capra, “Russian Precursors,” *Deconstruction Omnibus Volume*, ed. A. Papadakis, C. Cooke and A. Benjamin (New York: Rizzoli, 1989) 11-17.

³⁰ The heterotopia emphasises the fragile link between spaces; for example, the fine connection between madness and sanity.

argument on the will to power;³¹ rather, there is a sense of functional reduction between spaces. Therefore space is both connective and disconnective.

In order to accept the notion of a literary heterotopia, language must function as a linguistic order which ruptures at many of its textual sites. This is not to say that discourses inherently produce heterotopias, as this would deny personal intervention. To formulate a new literary heterotopia we must contest the space that we ourselves identify as real in order to effect counter-sites according to our needs as they arise. The key notion here is that although space is ambiguous, it is also locatable. In terms of language, and irrespective of its fluidity, space is a mode of production, and because of this there is an inevitable implied social construction. Therefore although dimensions of history are apparently organised, they are not fixed. We can demonstrate this through the ways in which Foucault petitions uncertain and uncounted spaces-in-history in *Discipline and Punish*:

Were I to fix the date of completion of the carceral system I would choose not 1810 and the penal code, nor even 1844, when the law laying down the principle of cellular internment was passed; I might not even choose 1838, when books on prison reform by Charles Lucas, Moreau-Christophe, and Fautier were published. The date I would choose would be January 22, 1840, the date of the official opening of Mettray. Or better still, perhaps, the glorious day, unremarked and unrecorded, when a child in Mettray remarked as he lay dying: "What a pity I left the colony so soon." This marked the death of the first penitentiary saint. Many of the blessed no doubt went to join him when, in singing the praises of the new punitive policies of the body, they remarked: "We preferred the blows, but the cell suits us better."³²

Probing the paradigmatic significance of the carceral system, Foucault announces himself clearly as a commentator on history who is not bound by any of the traditional signifying dimensions deciding history's facts.³³ In order to define the completion date of the carceral system, he begins the passage with an arrangement of histories that layer and interact with each other: "I would not choose 1810 ...

³¹ This is the basis of Foucault's technologies of power.

³² M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. A. Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977) 293.

³³ Deleuze suggests that "If Foucault is a great philosopher, this is because he uses history for the sake of something beyond it: as Nietzsche said: acting against time, and thus on time, for the sake of a time one hopes will come." *Foucault*, trans. and ed. S. Hand (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1988) 71.

nor even 1844.... I might not even choose 1838....” Decidedly, the date he chooses is “January 22, 1840.” His citation of events is firmly rooted in the annals of history. Yet he shifts from this statement and cites the passing mood of a child at the same event: “Or better still, perhaps, that *glorious day*, unremarked and unrecorded” (239). It is a passage that triumphantly links (and records!) officially locatable history with personal history: choosing official dates and connecting them to an otherwise unrecorded time and place in history articulated from the voice of an unknown child.³⁴

3.3 Spaces of design

Foucault’s historical outline is a practised accomplishment executed to highlight the archaeology of history (archaeology as an exposure of the different scaffolds that uphold history). Alternatively, it can be seen as a search for a date in public historical records as an illusory and mythologised pursuit. Either way, Foucault’s options, as well as our own, seem to be limitless. The importance of objectifying public and personal systematisation in this way highlights the need to view the texture of history as a whole – history as a ‘cohesive’, though splintered, space. Whether or not the practices Foucault uses to locate histories are orthodox is not the point – it is not conformity which is the issue: what Foucault enables us to see is the social obligation we need for verifying accuracy as long as that accuracy depends on a valorising authority. More than any other modern theorist, Foucault highlights the discourses of power in play; but he also succeeds in keeping sight of personal histories that might usually go unremarked. The voice of the child is one such example of his unconventional locating of histories. It might be that we can view the voice of the child as a metaphor for what is irrecoverable in the imputed structure of history (the child here makes the full internalisation). If language, like all knowledge, depends on metaphor Foucault’s work seems to be grounded in this conviction.

³⁴ Roland Barthes’ well known analysis highlights in any textuality the newly-felt absence of the voice of inscription: “As institution, the author is dead: his civil status, his biographical person have disappeared; dispossessed, they no longer exercise over his work the formidable paternity whose account literary history, teaching and public opinion had the responsibility of establishing and renewing.” In *Pleasure of the Text* 27. Where Barthes views the text as a product of systems of codification (language), Foucault includes the process (voice).

On the basis of this, Lorde forges a metaphoricity between spaces to disclose the connections and relations between events. She is concerned with the space between the black mother and daughter, which I argue culminates in the dynamic combination of exotic space and familiar space.³⁵ Metaphorically this is borne out, as each space is connected to suggest that there can be no opposition between the metaphoric and the literal. Thus, if we say that all language is metaphoric, the concept of space, by definition, is the metaphor of all things.

In Marilyn Edelstein's suggestive phrase, "the very space of metaphoric shifting"³⁶ exists in the poetry of Lorde in the intertextual space between mother and daughter, exotic and local space. Indeed, the very condition of language is that it is always in the process of shifting. Therefore, if this study is based on a writing-in-history, rather than writing as an event, we must accept that spaces and their discourses shift to represent new processes of articulation.

That all language is metaphoric is a claim first made by Nietzsche, and it is based on the underlying premise that "it is the incessantly reawakened drive of play that calls new worlds to life."³⁷ What Nietzsche is suggesting here is that language is a dynamic phenomenon in which words, and their trace meanings, can support infinite³⁸ movement and rearrangement so that there is always a re-awakening of meaning. In relation to Lorde, it implies that her voice is not only situated between the constructions of generational spaces, but that the processes of writing can be progressively

³⁵ The dynamics that come into play between mother and daughter are considered by Neus Carbonell as an interplay of love and sorrow. "In the Name of the Mother and the Daughter," *The Garden Across the Border: Merce Rodoreda's Fiction*, ed. N. Vosburg (London: Susquehanna UP, 1994) 17-30.

³⁶ M. Edelstein, "Metaphor, Meta-Narrative, and Mater-Narrative in Kristeva's 'Stabat Mater,'" in *Crownfield* 41.

³⁷ F. Nietzsche, cited in *Derrida: A Critical Reader*, ed. D. Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) 64.

³⁸ Thomas Dumm argues that if we view space as infinite there is also a general requirement to establish a mark or gauge of our time in our infinite but short history:

The heterotopia thus operates to compensate for the opening of space into infinity, one that becomes necessary as subjects come to realise that with both time and space made infinitely open there needs to be the establishment of a format through which the connection of time to space can lead to a renegotiation of the limits of space through a creative reorganisation of the effects of time and place.

See T. Dumm, *Foucault and the Politics of Freedom* (London: Sage, 1996) 40.

stripped to locate through an archaeology of knowledge a connective trace between spaces. Here stands the person who writes “Prologue”:

I speak without concern for the accusations
 that I am too much or too little woman
 that I am too Black or too white
 or too much myself
 and through my lips come the voices
 of the ghosts of our ancestors
 living and moving among us....

Somewhere in the landscape past noon
 I shall leave a dark print of the me that I am
 and who I am not
 etched in a shadow
 of angry and remembered loving
 and their ghosts will move
 whispering through them
 with me none the wiser
 for they will have buried me
 either in shame
 or in peace

(*Undersong*, 110, 113)

In this poem the weave of influences tracks through Lorde’s words and images as “ghosts of her ancestors”, and leaves the mark of their experience upon her lips. In return, she too will bequeath to her remembering friends “the dark print of me that I am”, so that her text itself becomes a weaving across time and generations. Its power lies, however, in the tropes describing ambivalence and uncertainty, through such phrases as “I am too much or too little woman”, “Somewhere in the landscape past noon”, or “etched in a shadow”; and the ghostly shadows of her ancestors each bring to mind a hazy distant past where a strong lineage that might have been has long since been lost.

4. Spatial lineage

Returning once again to the perceived wide scale of “Lorde and the African-American Tradition,” Wilson analyses the construction of generational relationships between black mothers and daughters in literature, and declares:

Women’s autobiography identifies the speaker of female autobiography as ‘the outraged mother’: the outrage will be memorialised and arrested by reiteration of the mother’s speech – a process that depends on knowledge that is passed down through the female line. Her literary tradition hinges on a changeless model of transmission, in daughters’ recapitulation of their mother’s words. [This] ... is a dominant critical trend: the celebration of an African-American women’s tradition that is both familial and gloriously affirming (in Munt 79).

Wilson’s reading of history, particularly the tradition out of which Lorde writes, discovers that it hinges on a “changeless model of transmission” where history is supported by the mother’s speech. With any passing on of history through an oral tradition a sense of history is captured, but one cannot contemplate a changeless model that has as its medium language and literature. In addition Lorde, or any woman writing from a similar history, would not want to promote the idea of a literary tradition which hinges on a generational discourse that is both fixed and unchanging.

Joanne Braxton, in her essay “The Outraged Mother Figure,” writes that she can locate a “timeless quality of the ancestral figure”³⁹ in the eclectic range of the black literature she reads. She fails to make the subtle distinction between one voice miming the reiterating voice of the mother and the voice of a later generation that, while incorporating the new, legitimates the past.⁴⁰ It is important to stress the difference between authorising the mother’s voice and validating the mother’s voice via

³⁹ J. M. Braxton, “The Outraged Mother Figure,” in *Wild Women* 302.

⁴⁰ Homi Bhabha explores ideas of past and present and argues that the past is increasingly creeping in on the present; he calls it a condition of the age: “Circumstances compel us to regard our own contemporaneity in the language and imagery of a ‘past’ that turns tradition into a turbulent reality.” “Anxious Nations, Nervous States,” in Copjec (ed.) 201. I would add that this is especially true for writers who, like Lorde, feel forced to incorporate into the present a past negated by governing histories. However, Lorde, as it is argued, undertakes a critical writing that successfully manages to write about the present without turning past influences into “a turbulent reality” where past transgressions might, as it were, continue to sabotage contemporary experience.

the daughter of another period in time.⁴¹ If we are to represent new productions of articulation, then we must include the multiplicity of voice and writing in both history and language. We can do this only if we widen our boundaries and spatial paradigm, as this enables us to examine the black, maternal discourses of power,⁴² which are not immutable, but are characterised by a social production of space. If this is the case, it is useful to interrogate the tradition that Henry Louis Gates calls “learning to speak in the voice of the black mother;”⁴³ Lorde carried out such an interrogation.

Lorde alters the scales of representation as Gates and Braxton perceive it. They fix identity according to colour and gender, whereas Lorde opens up narrative space to include resistance to the subtlety of boundaries that exist within all social paradigms. She shows that representation is not tied to the mother through the equation of a matriarchal black struggle which must be passed down. Identity cannot be viewed in isolation as a black female monologue; it is mapped out as much by location and place as it is by the mother’s longing. The cultural symbolism of space in Lorde’s poetry is characteristic of a writer who includes the longing of a contemporary generation as well as that of a past generation – and this is no easy accomplishment.

Lorde’s poetry exposes the gaps in a continuing struggle to negotiate the time shift between voice and place; past and present. The poem “Vietnam Addenda,” describes the close proximity between countries and draws a disturbing parallel between America and Jamaica’s street life domestic violence and the genocidal warfare in Vietnam: “A small difference in time and space / names that war” (*Undersong* 156). Indeed, when we think that aggression ‘on the street’ is implanted into ‘aggression on the battle field’, the divide is marginal: both serve to destroy morale and lives. Yet a gap there is: “the ruptured stomach / of someone else’s pubescent child” in Vietnam, as the poem describes it, is not the same as “the nightmare of idleness” in Jamaica (*Undersong* 156). There is a

⁴¹ Another writer who falls short of making this distinction is Lisa Myers in her essay on Edna Saint Vincent Millay: “Her Mother’s Voice,” *Millay at 100: A Critical Reappraisal*, ed. D. Freedman (Carbondale: South Illinois UP, 1995) 66-82.

⁴² For a study of women’s technologies of power see “Technologising the self: Foucault and ‘le souci du soi,’” in Probyn 108-137.

⁴³ H. L. Gates, “Whose Canon is it, anyway?,” *New York Times Book Review*, 26 February 1989: 1, 44-45.

parallel between two forms of aggression that serve to undermine each other; the idea of a simple equation between reality and its two-fold representation is problematised by the very fact that the relations between 'the battle field' and 'the street' are exposed as a play between alternative simulacra: they are the same, but they are different. We have the same play between exotic space and familiar space: the voice of the mother is the same as Lorde's, but it is also uniquely her own.

At this moment, the unremarkable spaces that validate Audre Lorde's history should be kept in view. Domesticity, food, desire and consciousness all feature in her work. Nonetheless, the image she sustains is of discourses that move between her mother's expression of longing and her own; therefore, it should not be passed off as a mythical unreclaimable space. By indicating the value of dialogue between the exotic space and the familiar space, Lorde makes the same cohesive link between spaces that Foucault does. The mother's exotic space and the cultural space Lorde grew up in are irreducible to one another as they repeatedly instate and inscribe each other in their discourse. That being so, there are also infinite possibilities for examining the ways in which the mother's 'language' and Lorde's observation and voice intersect. Lorde says, "My mother had a special relationship with words, taken for granted as language because it was always there" (*Zami* 21). The exotic space in Lorde's work acts as a metaphor for what is unobtainable yet attainable, linked by the process of an intervening past, and once-removed reality. In her poem "Story books on a kitchen table" (1970), the title captures the two-fold combination of mythology and pragmatism. The poem itself deceptively works on many levels where the "Fairy books" and the kitchen table are joined disconcertingly together. The interesting aspect of this poem is the fairy story as it consorts with the story of her mother's past to befuddle Lorde's childhood:

Out of her womb of pain my mother spat me
 into her ill-fitting harness of despair
 into her deceits....
 Going away
 she left me in her place
 iron maidens to protect me
 and for food
 the wrinkled milk of legend

where I wandered
 through lonely rooms of afternoon
 wrapped in nightmare
 from the Orange Red Yellow
 Purple Blue Green
 Fairy books
 where white witches ruled
 over the kitchen table
 (*Undersong 71*)

The mother's language of legend rests uneasily with the wondering child who seeks an identity. The poem's multilayered quality invokes the colours of the Jamaican flag that are signified on the outer covers of the fairy tale narratives. The lost child seeks confirmation of her existence beyond the language of her mother's despair, recrimination, and harness, but as a black child identification is absent from the stories. The poem additionally brings attention to the artificiality of writing. The kind of fiction that is fairy-tale-like reveals the reflexivity of all fiction – it exposes the artifice of the poem so that meta-narrative transcribes into metafiction. The doubling of voices provides a method and a theory, just as it provides a message. Ultimately, it expresses the despair of the black child who is fixed between the exotic space of her mother and the mocking space of the “ill fitting harness of despair.”

Ironically, what seems a layered text is also fixed and unmodifiable in its message, as there is not much space for personal vision or independence. There is a sense of despair as the focaliser is physically delivered through her mother's mouth to be subsequently nurtured by her mother's speech. The act of utterance, as it is bequeathed by the maternal figure, is furthermore a lie because the stories she tells – both of her past and the stories she has learned to mimic from her present – do not hold true for either the “vanished mother” or the “Black girl.” The fairy tales – “wrapped in nightmare,” wrapped in the colours of the Jamaican flag – contain only the exclusive master discourses of the ruling white witches; while the stories of exotic space contain only the words of a vanishing and increasingly alien world. Although the contents of the poem express a limitation of spatial diversion or protest against legend or lineage, the sense of space that is felt between the black

girl and the white witch and between mother and daughter is immense. Lorde's understanding of space is distinct, as it provides the tool with which to manage the uncertainty of identity and offers, in the extended terms of location, nationalism and history, an emblematic set of ideational and actual connections.⁴⁴

This is a result of a complex operation of mapping which constructs a genealogy of the official history that Foucault also subverts, and replaces it with a lineage of immediate truth. In much the same way, *Nightwood* disrupts what seems a rather defunct metaphysical lineage which is sanctioned by God and appropriates it with the fragmented narratives of "ancient actors" "and nothing more" (19, 20).⁴⁵

4.1 A distant space

In the final collection of her poems, entitled *The Marvellous Arithmetics Of Distance* (1987-1992), the arrangement begins with the poem "Smelling The Wind," in which the final stanza ends, "No reckoning allowed / save the marvellous arithmetics / of distance." Lorde is aware more than many of her contemporary writers that space creates its own distance, and it is only through her words that she can chart her steps. In a poem from an earlier collection, "On my way I passed over you and the Verrazano River," she writes:

I am writing these words as a route map
 an artefact for survival
 a chronicle of buried treasure
 a mourning⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Foucault states that space "unfolds between two extreme poles" ("Spaces" 24). Ideation and empiricism would be reliable examples of extreme polarism.

⁴⁵ Felix is described as someone who "has come from some place – no matter from what place he has come – some country that he has devoured rather than resided in, some secret land that he has been nourished on but cannot inherit" (*Nightwood* 20).

⁴⁶ A. Lorde, *Our Dead Behind Us: Collected Poems* (London: Sheba, 1987) 57.

“Writing these words as a route map” means that space is gauged and mapped by generation, culture, ethnicity, colour, and poverty, translating into distance and limits. But her work does not set out to chart the different atomised spaces that forge a separate space, nor does she summon those limits to transcribe experience into difference; rather her work is that of a writer who recognises that between those distances there is room for the narrative voice to express her encounters, and thus forge a space that links experiences. Space and the words used to chart those differences become the “artefact for survival.” It is as if words act as a bridge.

The metaphor of the bridge is extended in the poem, which charts the relationship the daughter has with her father and the span of distance that needs to be charted between them. In the poem “Inheritance – His,” it is the daughter of a later generation who is able to articulate the silent aspiration and defeat of her parents:

My mother’s Grenville tales
 spin through early summer evenings.
 But you refused to speak of home
 of stepping proud Black and penniless
 into this land where only white men
 ruled by money. How you laboured
 in the docks of the Hotel Astor
 your bright wife a chamber maid upstairs
 welded love and survival to ambition
 as the land of promise withered
 crashed the hotel closed
 and you peddle dawn-bought apples
 from a pushcart on Broadway.
 Does an image of return
 wealthy and triumphant
 warm your chilblained fingers
 as you count coins in the Manhattan snow
 or is it only Linda
 who dreams of home?

(Arithmetics 16.)

“Inheritance” releases a familial sense of connection that the daughter, because of her own valid experience, can recognise and voice. Interestingly, the discernible ongoing complicity between parent and child is not perceived here as destructive or demoralising. The stanza sets up a series of rhetorical questions that the focaliser does not attempt to answer; instead, the space of illusion that the father steps into from Grenville unmask a later space as it endlessly unfolds for another generation.⁴⁷ One paradigmatic space questions supplementary paradigms. The bright wife who was the chambermaid in the Hotel Astor is now, a generation later, the daughter who can make choices about positioning, but who can also write because of the spatial difference between now and the father’s longings and let-downs of the past.

Indeed, Foucault questions the place of the author who is inserted into a system of discourse from where a writing can be formulated, and asks: “How, under what conditions, and in what forms can something like a subject appear in the order of discourse? What place can it occupy in each type of discourse, what functions can it assume, and by obeying what rules?” (“What Is an Author? 118). In short, Lorde functions as an author by working within the paradigmatic shifts of the order of discourse and finding loops of resistance.

The generational relationships show difference, but they also prove that the endless unfolding of space flows from the social experiences of cultural production, location, and political change. The characteristic heterotopia, as actually lived and socially created space, emphasises spaces of extension and connection as they are laid bare in the poem. The strategy enables Lorde’s readers to see how she, as writer and daughter, is versed through the father’s language to resist the ubiquitous uncivic space her father encountered. By revealing the linkages and their source between generations, we can see how heterotopias of resistance work.

⁴⁷ Place has long ceased to provide straightforward support for identity. *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location* offers an interesting collection of essays in which each explores identity and place. Eds. E. Carter, J. Donald and J. Squires (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1993). First and foremost, the essays examine the importance of specificity and explore ways in which to do justice to all its instances. A number of the essays successfully put into place a workable theoretical language to develop space and place as a theoretical tool.

With this in mind, Ross King in *Emancipating Space* suggests that in our post-modern culture there is a need for a cohesive space. Society is characterised by a model of pastiche, collage, and acceptance of indeterminate meanings that we need to get away from towards a spatial cohesion.⁴⁸ Without diverting from his own post-structuralist position, King deals honestly with problems of division, and inspired by heterotopias offers instructive insight. In a discussion of history as a multi-layered system, he argues:

The levels of meaning at which it functioned (as a heterotopia?) could be progressively stripped away, and there would be some common sharing of those meanings, and their evolution traceable. A similar deconstructive project characterised Foucault's archaeology of the spatial masking of power in other typical spaces of early modernity – prison, asylum, other sites of incarceration and the “bounding of space and time.” But the present, by contrast, is characterised by a social production of space where meanings are not shared (What are the heterotopias of suburbia, for they are certainly there? How do they vary for men and women?) and where the projection of multilayered, ambiguous meanings onto the actual physical spaces of the city (“spaces of dispersion”) would seem both frenetic and unstable (124).

Meanings that are not shared is an issue in any discussion of feminism. Because of the character of a social production of space, women, even if they wanted to, would find it difficult to define their culture, identity, or creativity according to a ‘cohesive’ tenet. Spatial identity is formed from what is at hand. The *bricolages* available to Lorde are words and imagination and the legend of both her exotic space and American space. We do not need to deal with difference as such; interconnectedness forges its own spatial difference. Therefore, Lorde's poetry comes from an altered perspective – not from an ideological feminist *knowledge*, but from a *knowing* in process.

Taking an altered perspective does not provide a narrative of mastery, but a sequential dialogue with a distinct variance. Lorde arranges the differences that mark her own life and those of an earlier and later generation so that they extend across generations and along ancestral lines. “Prologue” witnesses the influence of the mother on the daughter's life, but it is one that is not conferred on subsequent children. The daughter of a later generation does not want herself, as mother figure, to act

⁴⁸ See his chart on modes of representation between the Modern and Post-Modern period; in King (ed.) 135.

as the same prologue in her own children's lives – as her mother was for her. Clearly, Lorde is not comfortable with “the voice of the Black mother.” Nor, interestingly, is the mother satisfied with the voice of the daughter:

My mother survives
 through more than chance or token.
 Although she will read what I write
 with embarrassment or anger
 and a small understanding
 my children do not need to relive my past
 in strength nor in confusion
 nor care that their holy fires
 may destroy
 more than my failures
 (*Undersong* 112.)

However, rather than just expressing dissatisfaction, the poem informs us that the mother survives through sheer strength of will: a strength and stubbornness she passes onto the writer. Therefore, although one pattern of behaviour is broken, another is sustained. Nevertheless, the legacy is not sustained without first interrogating the construction of lineage. The poem reveals the need to reject the approval of the mother's beliefs and visions. The daughter's achievements tell us that if she is to carve a narrative space she must acknowledge and then disregard her mother's influences. The daughter claims that she will not influence the tutelage of her own children. However, this raises the problem of exclusion and disparity. Lorde's words hinge on the relation of exotic space, but she sets about problematising the matriarchal lineage between herself, her mother and her own children. In *Zami*, she writes: “When the strongest words for what I have to offer come out of me sounding like words I remember from my mother's mouth, then I either have to reassess the meaning of everything I have to say now, or re-examine the worth of her old words” (31).

Lorde's work bears witness to a writer who does not unconditionally set out to calculate “the voice of the Black mother.” She exposes the conditions she sets for herself that depend upon notions of personal resistance: there is a clear juxtaposition between what Lorde has to say “now” and the

“old words” of her mother. What the statement tells us is that the positioning of identity should not depend on lineage. She reappraises the subjective mother-image of herself and replaces it with her own objective definition.

Therefore, out of the voice of her mother Lorde creates her own language. In an early poem entitled the “Movement Song” (1972), she writes: “Do not remember me as a bridge nor a roof / as the maker of legends” (*Undersong* 119). Eighteen years later, she prologues a collection of black women writing with the statement “Black women’s words are ... bridges through one another’s realities” (*Wild Women* xxi). It is a writing that clearly arises from a self-conscious debate with other discourses. In *Nightwood*, meanwhile, this junctive commentary functions as a multiplicity of signification which act as bridges between orthodoxy and aberration. In the description of the lioness’ identification with Robin there is an unholy union that links opposing conventional standards: “Ponderous and furred they came, their tails laid down across the floor, dragging and heavy, making the air seem full of withheld strength. Then as one powerful lioness came to the turn of the bars, exactly opposite the girl, as if a river were falling behind impassioned heat, her eyes flowed in tears that never reached the surface” (83). This (mis)connection under scrutiny becomes a central trope in the novel and a feature of the narrative method in which strong opposites are parodied.

While in contrast, the bridges that Lorde utilises are more orthodox than Barnes’ in that they are generational. In the Prologue to *Wild Women in the Wilderness*,⁴⁹ Lorde writes her own creation narrative and sets herself up as a figure that carries on a long line of traditions – some of whom are absent and others who are not. Clearly, she is also more comfortable with the idea of prologue:

It’s not that we haven’t always been here, since there was a here. It is that the letters of our names have been scrambled when they were not totally erased, and our fingerprints upon the handles of history have been called the random brushings of birds.... But our words have been there. And they have been, in Cheryl Clarke’s words, “a necessary bread.” That bread has been too often uneaten because it came cloaked in other people’s prejudgements – that nothing we said or did had any resonance at all.... And the children of the children who never saw a firefly

⁴⁹A more in-depth investigation of the African-American tradition can be found in *Wild Women*, in the two essays by J. M. Braxton: “Afro-American Culture and the Contemporary Literary Renaissance,” xxi-xxxii; and “Ancestral Presence,” 299-316.

nor dreamed a moon, or who cowered in earth dugouts in the outback bush while their mothers tried to lead the government agents away from kidnapping them to servant school....

These daughters' daughters did survive, and how is our blessing, our vision, and our world. Black women's words are testament that we were there, bridges through one another's realities, tough and tender. Intricate and nourishing. And no matter where we find ourselves to be, we can plot each other's words like roadmaps toward the future.... For most of all, Black women who are our inheritors will need to know why so many of these facts about their Black women's history have been so hard to come by (*Wild Women* xxi).

Interacting voices emphasise the complex power structures that exist as they are dispersed within language. It is possible to give all sorts of meaning to the position of the voice and the history of such a position. While it is true to say that certain features characterise the voice of the oppressed, there is a notable mark about the voice that works as "road maps towards the future."

This is true of Lorde, who elevates the word so that rather than a structure of meaning manifesting itself through the position of the speaker, there is a contiguity, a continuous web of signification passing from women to women.⁵⁰ The word is, then, ongoing, and, like poetry, has no fixed meaning but provides the condition for meaning itself. The voice of the black woman can never therefore be irreducibly autonomous and stable: she must write her history and, in so doing, must resist homogenisation from a culture that oppresses her. Therefore, she remains a sort of linguistic foreigner in a land where the dominant voice is also the repressive voice. The same can be said for all who seek to forge resistant narrative spaces.

4.2 Traditional spaces

In Lorde's biomythography, she chronicles a struggle with poverty and identity. However, the narratives incorporate the inheritance of both the mother and the father's words to transcribe, via myth and imagination, "the possibilities of resistance" (as Foucault describes it) in narrative and

⁵⁰ See Rosaldo-Zimbalist, *Women, Culture and Society* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1974) 17, 42.

poetic form. Lorde's achievement is an effect of writing-in-history: recounting experience, keeping an eye on the past, and commemorating a black community's memory through personal endeavour.⁵¹

Once *home* was a far way off, a place I had never been to but knew well out of my mother's mouth. She breathed exuded hummed the fruit smell of Noel's hill morning fresh and noon hot, and I spun visions of sapidilla and mango as a net over my Harlem tenement cot in the snoring darkness rank with nightmare sweat. Made bearable because it was not all. This now, here, was a space, some temporary abode, never to be considered forever nor totally binding nor defining, no matter how much it commanded in energy and attention. For if we lived correctly and with frugality, looked both ways before crossing the street, then someday we would arrive back in the sweet place, back *home* (*Zami* 4-5).

The paragraph begins and ends with the words *home*. They are words which double in meaning and act as a yardstick between the exotic and the familiar space, yet the passage is explicit in that it does not call Harlem *home*; it is a place described "with nightmare sweat" and it is held in contrast with "back *home*" ... "in the sweet place." The biomythography describes how the family physically live in America, but imaginatively live in the space between America and Grenada. We should take note that Lorde's real sense of home, not the temporary abode she exists in now, is made known to her through her mother's mouth. What it indicates is that home exists as a mythological and twofold space. Firstly, the mother articulates her own reminiscent space; secondly, the daughter reiterates the longed-for space of the mother. Romantic perceptions are passed down and replanted into the soil of the young vivid imagination of the child.⁵² So the extended family secures the ground of the self by dividing itself between two spaces.

In her autobiography, Lorde suggests she is spat from her parents' mouths and nourished on the words of their longing and desire for the future. Therefore, the voice of the black woman helps to destabilise the specificity and limits of the black family *and* the socio-cultural spaces they inhabit.

⁵¹ Linda Hutcheon calls memory "a critical revisiting" of the past; in *A Poetics of Post-Modernism* (London: Routledge, 1988) 4. She argues that it is one of the most significant features of the late twentieth century, in which, mainly owing to Freudian thought, memory, or in Freudian terms, recollection, has permeated the Western socioculture. Moreover, for Carl Plasa, memory becomes an "act of revisioning characterised by collectivity rather than absolute consensus." C. Plasa, *The Discourse of Slavery* (London: Routledge, 1994) 193.

⁵² Dumm sustains an insightful and sensitive evocation of imagination and heterotopic space in *Foucault and Freedom* 56-63.

Voicing “Black women’s words” means that spatial boundaries are expanded and not fixed, so that “daughters of daughters” can transmit the tradition of writing from within a shared but widening cultural space.

Now it might seem here that writing is an “effect of power,” rather than an “instrument of power,”⁵³ which, in turn, could be looked upon as an ineffectual protest against the fallacies of illusory space. Yet as a trope, the “effect of power” expresses a way in which the ‘alien’ can speak using the voice of mother (or oppressor), while at the same time speaking through a language that represents the interests and position of the self. It is a strategy that disrupts an autonomous and transcendent certainty enabling one to link articulation to a genealogical structure of disclosure.

It is an effect of power where contiguous heterotopias negotiate the terms and conditions from where writing takes place. Lorde’s relation to the external organisation of society’s space enables her to construct a voice as an effect of power that emanates from traditions of black women’s words. In addition, heterotopic space, by its very form and function, forms the space where it is possible for incompatible sites to perform alongside each other. For example, in the poem “Now,” there is a sense of the hard beat and measured rhythm of the music on the streets such as rap and reggae in the precise technique of poetry:

Woman power
is
Black power
is human power
is
always feeling
my heart beats
as my eyes open
as my hands move
as my mouth speaks

I am

⁵³ M. Foucault, *A History of Sexuality* vol. 3, trans. R. Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988) 133.

are you

Ready?

(Undersong 162.)

Lorde acknowledges the traditions that formed and informed her and they are as multiple and diverse as any rich mixture. In a more extravagant way, she writes in the Prologue to *Zami*:

I have always wanted to be both man and woman, to incorporate the strongest and richest parts of my mother and father within/into me – to share valleys and mountains upon my body the way the earth does in hills and peaks.... I have felt the age-old triangle of mother father and child, with the ‘I’ at its eternal core, elongate and flatten out into the elegantly strong triad of grand mother daughter, with the ‘I’ moving back and forth flowing in either or both directions as needed.... Woman forever. My body, a living representation of other life older longer wiser. The mountains and valleys, trees, rocks. Sand and flowers and water and stone. Made in earth (xvi).

We witness the forced juxtapositions between spaces. Desire to be both woman and man forces the possibility of the arrangement of new transgressive contingency. The sequence of the opening and closure of heterotopic space means that issues raised by Lorde concerning heritage and identity are “something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, the other real sites that can be found within a culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted” (“Spaces” 24). In acknowledging the fundamental aspect of influences, the writings carve a space between language and voice: the effect of a patriarchal discourse in language is joined to the resistant voice of the mother. Symbolically and figuratively, the father figure lends his voice to the words of the daughter. “I have felt the age-old triangle of mother father and child, with the ‘I’ at its eternal core”. Therefore, if we disclose the connections between spaces, Lorde’s writing is a literary production of man and woman, language and voice, exotic and local space. Despite differences, her work authenticates the disparate spaces to form, from within her own archaeology of knowledge, a new heterotopia.

5. Liberty as a practice

Returning to Foucault, we can locate examples of heterotopic construction. In the essay “Spaces,” Foucault describes the heterotopia in metaphoric terms and draws upon his familiar fascination with ships. As in his early reference to boats in *Madness and Civilisation*, the memorable “Ship of Fools” symbolises the “other world” of the madman⁵⁴ paralleled and defined by the ‘normal man’ who has his feet on the ground. The “rigorous division” (11) indicates the demarcated spatial arrangement of fools who exist on a boat that is easily perceived as a floating signifier. What I wish to draw attention to, however, is the imaginative force that exists here.

For Foucault, the potential of the heterotopia is brought into play by the transgressive intuition of those who imagine other possible spaces. In the delineation of heterotopias, the sixth principle states that imagination plays a central role. Heterotopias “create a space of *illusion* that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more *illusory* (“Spaces” 26). The mark of any heterotopic change depends upon the innovation of the human imagination in relation to the external surroundings that impinge upon the mind; otherwise, as Foucault argues: “dreams dry up” and “espionage takes the place of adventure” (“Spaces” 27).

Therefore, if Lorde mixes traditions, it is because the literary heterotopia cannot exist autonomously (24): it depends upon infrastructure, another space as fragile as the imagination. The heterotopia *par excellence* is the floating ship: never anchored for long, and always in transit. But more importantly, functioning as a link between other spaces, the ship connects spaces; likewise, Lorde’s work connects the possible spaces between past and present continents.

6. Conclusion

We live in an era in which we define space as a “form of relations among sites” (“Spaces” 23). It would be pure fiction, however, if we believed that any sort of totality could be forged between boundaries. Lorde’s bid to position herself stems from her mother’s powers of imagination, but it

⁵⁴ M. Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, trans R. Howard (London: Tavistock, 1967) 11.

does not always convey the cultural contours of the family lineage, therefore there needs to be a certain visible cultural specificity asserting identity as a relational form which might act as a political base for Lorde. This is represented in a figure that inverts a mother's forfeiture: "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.... My days are a thirsty atonal combination of the mundane and the apocalyptic" (131). Indeed, mapping the contrasting images of a mundane space and an apocalyptic space is a powerful contrivance and finds resolve when Lorde adds, "I've worked very hard for that approach to living inside myself" (61-62). Ultimately, if resistance is to be named, there needs to be a point at which to locate the potential for feeling positioned. Although I think that the sense of being at home with oneself might not be a strong enough political device to employ external signification, it acts as a comforting metaphor for being positioned. Here Lorde's work shows the importance of finding a home, otherwise one would remain perennially landless existing on board the ship of fools.⁵⁵

In saying this, opportunities for resistance are based not only on metaphor but also on action: skilfully, Lorde remarks, "we don't get *there* from *here* by ignoring the mud in between those two positions" (*Burst of Light* 64). What any act of resistance depends upon is how new connections are made *between* spaces. Granted this, the literary heterotopia is not a new space as such, but a gap in an already developed shifting network of power structures. Given the historical modifications that are taking place, spaces merge together forging individual credence where the voice of the author resonates between the gaps.

In fact, if the author functions as an imaginative thinker and creator of resistant spaces, then a clear account of imagining those possibilities operates in Lorde's biomythography: "Ginger by night now seemed so different from the Ginger I knew in the day. Had some beautiful and mythic creature created by my own need suddenly taken the place of my jovial and matter-of-fact buddy?" (*Zami* 119). The illusory exotic space is that which is taken out of an ordinary mundane existence and infused with desire and (re)vision; indeed, the author is a genial creator where exotic space is not

⁵⁵ In Said's discussion on Orientalist structures, he makes an equivalent remark to Foucault's ship of fools which dramatises the general features of the myth of distance and homeland with his term "the free floating

some distant fantasy, but is made real by the presence of those contingent spaces in which to forge resistance and change. Lorde's literary heterotopias are the product of her human innovation and imagination in relation to the place in which she finds herself positioned.

Chapter Seven

Body Space

"Cancer is not so much a disease of time as a discourse or pathology of space" (Susan Sontag)

1. Introduction

In order to recognise the themes of resistance, positioning, and contingency between spaces developed in ways that build upon and develop Foucault's undertaking, we must include his analysis of the body. Foucault examines the body as a construct determined by culture and power and its position in history. In this chapter I will form a reading of Lorde's work taking a Foucauldian perspective and will focus mainly on the *Cancer Journals* to determine how the body, positioned in history, acts as a locus of change. In addition, I will include some aspects of *Nightwood* which, I believe, attempt in the way Lorde does to subvert normative and ideological narratives of the body form. Both Lorde and Barnes, it will be argued, construct spaces of resistance in which to shift bodily and writerly boundaries.

1.1 Constructing a resistant narrative

Audre Lorde was first diagnosed as having breast cancer in 1978. After a courageous fifteen-year battle she died in November 1992 with metastases in the liver. The obituary in the *Independent* newspaper, written in memory of her courage as much as her literary output, announced:

At a recent naming ceremony in her adopted home, St Croix in the Virgin Islands, she was given the African name Gamba Adisa-Warrior: 'She who makes meaning known'. To anyone who listened her meaning was clear. The idea that it is important and necessary to cross

boundaries and break down barriers constructed around racism, sexism, and class exploitation were abiding themes in Audre Lorde's work.¹

One might agree that Lorde's message was clear; using spare, forceful language, imagery pared to the bone, and bell-clear syntax she characteristically made her point with little room for misinterpretation. In another way, the motivation, as well as the direct assertiveness of her writing, is also discernible in the restorative powers of writing itself. Recording her account of cancer repeatedly restored in Lorde a self-belief against powerlessness. It was an objective reaffirming that, whether sick or healthy, women should not "surrender to namelessness, formlessness, voicelessness, and silence" (*Journals* 6). Thus, accessing the power of the written word became a way of mapping out an identity enabling her to share with many other female writers a commitment to defining their own authorial spatiality.

Lorde's journals, essays, and poems connect a personal history with the predicament of all women suffering from breast cancer – as her body undergoes alteration, she locates those areas in medical practice and discourse that need to undergo an alteration of their own. I will explore ways in which she comes to terms with her own illness through the act of writing, focusing on its challenge to the received clinical model of recovery expressed in her work. Throughout her life Lorde, never wishing to hide her differences, encountered as a result marginalisation and exclusion. However, at a time when she perhaps expected that disease could do no less than allow her to claim fellow-citizenship with other cancer sufferers, she discovered that she was once again peripheralised; the agency now being the medical gaze. In the third chapter of *The Cancer Journals*, Lorde uses the title "Breast Cancer: Power vs. Prosthesis" to recall a true event involving the disapproving gaze of the medical profession as encountered when Lorde refused to wear her prosthetic 'breast':

The emphasis upon physical pretence at this crucial point in a woman's reclaiming of her self and her body has two negative effects: 1. It encourages women to dwell in the past rather than a future. This prevents woman from assessing herself in the present, and from coming to terms

¹ Obituary Column, the *Independent*, 23 November 1992.

with the changed planes of her own body.... 2. It encourages a woman to focus her energies upon the mastectomy as a cosmetic occurrence, to the exclusion of other factors (*Journals* 49).

Lorde does not fit the clinical model of post-surgery woman because she continues to signify disease: she draws attention to her one-sided flat-chestedness instead of hiding it cosmetically. What interests me, however, is the spatial metaphor that operates here; although the landscape of her body has in fact changed, she is forced to challenge the ideological construct of the medical profession that encourages her to dwell in the past and mask her empty frontage with a cosmetic full-bosomed signifier.² The event and its recollection foreground the configuration of space produced by breast cancer and its treatment, and women's relative position to it.

Many other factors point out that the body is a markedly spatialised elaboration. Foucault's theory of power and the body is a study of the ways in which it has been colonised by certain properties and inserted into regimes of truth. Owing to these power structures, the body is potentially positioned by hegemonic standards. Foucault provides a way of looking beyond the fixed self by way of positioning the body in discourse and arguing that it can disrupt socially and culturally produced constructions of bodily organisation. For example, Lorde is positioned as a writer who fulfils her role as a black artist, yet she is also positioned as a woman who rejects reliance on common experience, and works across the boundaries of disciplines in that quest. Therefore, Foucault's theory appears to offer an explanation which can incorporate the notions of resistance and contradiction that sometimes prove problematic when undertaking an exposition of a complex writer. According to Foucault, wherever there is discourse there is resistance: for instance, Lorde might be positioned as powerless in one discourse, but she finds strategies of resistance in which to position herself as powerful via an alternative discourse. As one Foucauldian critic observes, "every exercise of power is accompanied by or gives rise to resistance [and] opens a space for possibility and freedom in any context" (Gutting

² Susan Bordo contests various ideas of the body in her essay "Feminism, Foucault and the Politics of the Body," in Ramazanoglu 179-202. She examines Foucault's ethics and argues that while it advocates a textual inscription of the body which is helpful to feminism, it does not take into account the power structures which are particular to the feminist struggle.

35). The point here is that powerlessness must be experienced before it can be effectively resisted. Thus, the writer is an agent for finding ways to develop critical alternatives.

To be sure, what is remarkable about Barnes' and Lorde's writerly effort is their willingness to respond to the challenge of things beyond the categories and practices of their discursive boundaries. Each, in their own positions, can be read in part as a response to the spaces they confine. For example, Barnes upsets the categories of the essential body with her depiction of Jenny Petherbridge: "She had a beaked head and the body, small, feeble, and ferocious, that somehow made one associate her with Judy; they did not go together. Only severed could any part of her have been called 'right'. There was a trembling ardour in her wrists and fingers as if she were suffering from some elaborate denial" (*Nightwood* 98). Embedded in the description is the difference between the social category of woman and the biological 'real' woman. Although Jenny is an ironic conflation of womanhood, she maintains the ability to punctuate the notion of woman with a question. Is the female body the essence of femininity and naturalness, or is it culturally and elaborately shaped? In my view, it may seem that Barnes is offering us an impoverished account of woman in the character of Petherbridge, but it should be read as an attempt to overcome the conception of the body in essentialist terms.³ Barnes intersects the body-form and cuts through it in order to install a theory of a constructed identity.⁴ For both writers, then, there is an aesthetic exploration of the body whereby it is shaped according to the spatial dimensions it occupies.

³ Contrary to my own argument, Shari Benstock describes Barnes' perception and use of the female body as an image and her manipulation of it in her personal life: "Barnes reinforced the metonymic economy of the heterosexual world in which women's value for men is measured by certain parts of their bodies (breasts, buttocks, legs, hair), reducing the complete woman to her sexual parts." In *Women of the Left Bank* 254. As I see it, Barnes, never working in an economical way, undermines the inscribed values of governing discourses and deftly employs metonymy to break down essentialist notions.

⁴ In a more enlightened discussion, Rosie Braidotti considers the notion of the body in both essentialist and social terms and argues that woman lies at the interface of the two:

The 'body' is rather to be thought of as the point of intersection, as the interface between the biological and the social, that is to say between the socio-political field of the microphysics of power and the subjective dimension.... This vision implies that the subject is subjected to her/his unconscious; the driving notion of 'desire' is precisely that which relays the self to the many 'others' that constitute her/his 'external' reality.

(In "The politics of ontological difference," *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, ed. R. Braidotti (London: Routledge, 1989) 97.)

2. The category of the spatial body

Foucault first employs a notion of the body in the essay “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” where he examines the irrelation between history and genealogy from a Nietzschean perspective. He illustrates their difference by tracing two major themes which are simply explained in the following way: history evolves from a traceable line of descent, a point of origin, which is linear and stable; whereas genealogy has multiple sources (“numberless beginnings” 81), and is often difficult to unravel due to its complexity. I want to deal solely, however, with the relationship between history and genealogy and the way in which they conflate upon the body:

The body – and everything that touches it: diet, climate, and soil – is the domain of the *Herkunft* [descent]. The body manifests the stigmata of past experience and also gives rise to desires, failings, and errors. These elements may join in a body where they achieve a sudden expression, but as often, their encounter is an engagement in which they efface each other, where the body becomes the pretext of their insurmountable conflict (“Nietzsche, Genealogy” 83).

Foucault takes the body as a starting point and describes its position in history as part of a series of struggles that resist and reflect the forces that surround it. This means that the body is conceived of in anti-essentialist terms: rather than its being part of a cohesive whole attached to something larger, it is a relational construct emerging out of conflict. The structuring of the body is added to when Foucault describes it as set against itself:

The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration. Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history’s destruction of the body (83).

If the body is part of an inscribed textual surface, consequently it is not a coherent entity but is positioned, in multiple, shifting discourses that articulate it and shift depending on the interactive environment. This being so, the ways in which dominant discourses sketch the body can be

appropriated so that bodily identities can resist potentially destructive processes of history's powerful narratives.

It is interesting to note that Foucault allows himself a rapid excursion between history, genealogy and the body; in fact one is struck by the motion between the terms. It might be that Foucault is trying to dissolve the monumental effect of each referent, but also, I would argue, it serves to underscore the non-neutrality that exists between structures. A conflation of terms is most apparent when he describes the role of the genealogist:

The genealogist needs history to dispel the chimeras of the origin, somewhat in the manner of the pious philosopher who needs a doctor to exorcise the shadow of his soul. He must be able to recognise the events of history, its jolts, its surprises, its unsteady victories and unpalatable defeats – the basis of all beginnings, atavisms, and heredities. Similarly, he must be able to diagnose the illnesses of the body, its conditions of weakness and strength, its breakdowns and resistances, to be in a position to judge philosophical discourse. History is the concrete body of a development, with its moments of intensity, its lapses, its extended periods of feverish agitation, its fainting spells; and only a metaphysician would seek its soul in the distant ideality of the origin (80).

History transmogrifies into a body where its conditions are translated by the genealogist. The reason for metaphorising history as a bodily figure is to draw attention to the role of the genealogist who, in much the same way as a surgeon, makes incisions into the body with clinical expertise. Moreover, an examination of history marks a transference of thought from where history contains a metaphysical 'inner' basis for truth (the "soul") to an outer reality whereby the perception of history plays a role. History, then, is like the body: it is an "inscribed surface of events" that is spatialised and broadened.

Viewing a spatialised history from the clinical position of the genealogist does not open it up to an empirical or phenomenological view; rather, it enables a reading that locates *perspective*:⁵ as Foucault explains, "it establishes that we are difference, that our reason is the difference of

⁵ Foucault describes an operative genealogy: "The final trait of effective history is its affirmation of knowledge as perspective" (in "Nietzsche, Genealogy" 90). Gutting notes that the shift from time to space positions Foucault as a spatial thinker and suggests that within Foucault's spatial organisation "sight is *strategic*, not just descriptive; the contours inscribe the relations of control, not just forms of intelligibility. The space has become genealogical" (42).

discourses, our history the difference of times, ourselves the difference of masks". That difference, he determines, "far from being the forgotten and recovered origin, is this dispersion that we are and make" (*Archaeology* 131). Foucault is making an essential distinction between difference and dispersion; this provides the all-important approach for reading Lorde who maps ideas across spatial boundaries rather than distinguishing only differences. Gutting offers the following helpful observation: "A condition of the existence of this dispersion is spatialised language that dissolves the unity of the self, dissipates projects by chance events and multiplies rationalities" (Gutting 45). I would agree with this comment and add that, because there an implicit appeal to space through dispersion, there is a reflexive undermining of history's powerful narratives; explanation replaces fixity and is recounted from a more personal perspective.

In saying this, one can see how an earlier question is reiterated and modified: "what place a subject occupies in each type of discourse" becomes not only a literary inquiry, but a historical one; for we begin to see how the genealogist is that individual who locates and analyses the variable and 'trivial' aspects of historical discourse. History, then, is a multiple articulation of chronologies that Foucault calls "the great carnival of time where masks are constantly reappearing" ("Nietzsche, Genealogy" 94). This is nowhere truer than in the parodic words of the genealogist *per se* Matthew O'Connor, who, interestingly enough, masquerades as both medical purveyor and philosopher; in one of *Nightwood's* much-used tropes he questions the notion of truth and duplicity:

'We say that someone is pretty for instance, whereas, if the truth were known, they are probably as ugly as Smith going backward, but by our lie we have made that very party powerful, such is the power of the charlatan, the great strong! They drop on anything at any moment, and that sort of thing makes the mystic in the end, and', he added, 'it makes the great doctor.... the great doctor, he's a divine idiot and a wise man. He closes one eye, the eye that he studied with, and putting his fingers on the arteries of the body says: 'God, whose roadway this is, has given me permission to travel on it also,' which, heaven help the patient, is true; in this manner he comes on great cures, and sometimes upon that road is disconcerted by that Little Man....'

The Baron remarked that this sounded like dogma.

The doctor grinned. 'Does it? Well, when you see that Little Man you know you will be shouldered from the path' (*Nightwood* 52).

The idea that hegemonic discourses play a powerful role in history is a repeated theme in *Nightwood*, and their clearing away is done by the master genealogist, the overseer of all things, the doctor.⁶ Moreover, it seems to me that many of the stylistic devices are comparable to the rhetoric of Foucault's genealogy essay: the high points in history – the “great, powerful truths” are usurped by Little Man. For example, Foucault claims that “‘monumental history’ is itself a parody” (“Nietzsche, Genealogy” 94), and we witness this through the doctor's metanarrative and entangled aphorism. Similarly, and also guided by genealogy, Lorde, too, dissolves the unity of history's narratives; in repeated Lordean rhetoric she resists the inherited diagnosis of bodily configuration and works across spatial paradigms to include a more comprehensive notion of the body-in-history.

2.1 A pathology of space

In *The Birth of the Clinic* Foucault describes the construction of space underlying the medical treatment of the body as follows: “The exact superposition of the ‘body’ of the disease and the body of the sick man is no more than a historical, temporary datum.”⁷ Foucault formulates a study of medicine tracing its evolution from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, during which period, he argues, “a grammar of signs ... replaced a botany of symptoms” (xviii). Sickness, he claims, is from this time forth located and treated through a unified system of signs. The “superposition of the body” and “grammar of signs” pathologically ‘places’ both the sickness and the individual. In Lorde's case, or in the case of women with breast cancer generally, the disease sums up women as a sign system. Such positioning can be understood when we see that Lorde, whose body signifies a very local configuration of disease, encounters hostility and reproach: “we are allowed no psychic time or space to examine what our true feelings are, to make them our own. With quick cosmetic reassurance, we

⁶ Benstock also recognises that perception plays a significant role in the work of Barnes, and writes: “This vulnerability under scrutiny by the human eye becomes a central trope in *Nightwood* and a feature of the narrative method, which operates by indirection, as though the characters were seen at a double remove.” In *Women of the Left Bank* 254.

⁷ M. Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock, 1973) 3-4.

are told that our feelings are not important, our appearance is all, the sum total of self" (*Journals* 49). The empty space of the body signifies surface division and acts as a rebuttal against biomedical and surgical achievement. Lorde discovers it is not allowed.

Lorde's response to her experience as a retort against the medical profession develops into a poetic and political form through her writings. Her later poetry and prose directly interpret the discrimination of the body/form that she encounters in a clinical space. In other words, Lorde responds to finding her body is positioned out before and after surgery, given that she is not invited to say how her body should perform (owing, only partly, to the cancer), and how it should signify. Her writings accordingly create a space in which it becomes possible to interrogate the dominant forms of cultural and medical knowledge. The form and content of Lorde's work is, circuitously, at the same time a response to received connections of narrative. Even though her poetry and writings are formalistically and contextually declarative, they balance a rhetorical and persuasive message with a strong literary perception.

Lorde writes a "rhetorics of the self"⁸ dictated in the first place by the clinical management and control she encountered both in and out of hospital. Through her work, she sets out to claim back her own individuality by signifying her signs of sickness through her bodily dissymmetry. She presents a highly charged political agenda and establishes it in literature. It is a strategic and textual bequest that she leaves us. In a poem entitled "The Night-Blooming Jasmine," Lorde blurs the distinction between body and place: scar and land borders are aligned; their outline offers an image of the lady of the night who patrols and defends her morphological/geographical borders:

Lady of the Night star-breathed
blooms along the searoad
between my house and the tasks before me
calls down a flute
carved from the legbone of the gull.

I still patrol that line

⁸ J. Stacey, *Teratologies* (London: Routledge, 1997) 24.

sword drawn
 lighting red-glazed candles of petition
 along the scar
 the surest way of knowing
 death is a fractured border
 through the centre of my days.

(*Arithmetics* 52)

The variation of images between body, fracture, and scar counterpoint the border between the house and the searoad. Body and land imitate each other making the poem highly flexible, but also complex and dense. It is only the presence of death which brings some sort of resolution to the poem in which “the surest way of knowing” provides an emphatic completeness where death runs “through the centre of my days.” The recognition of death is confirmed through the senses: the smell of the night blooming jasmine, the glow of the candle light, and the tracing of the scar/border all confirm the fine line between life and death.

Yet the poem is not just wearily centring on an understanding of mortality; it makes the experience political to formulate a distinction between inner and outer identity and the grammatical form that both endeavours take. The poem makes a distinction between the inner experience and an outer changed geomorphological shape of “fractured borders.” In the same way that scarred landscapes and sea roads alter, the body undergoes change, so that how one looks becomes a politically charged concept when it signifies the basis of one’s importance. “This emphasis upon the cosmetic after surgery reinforces this society’s stereotype of women, that we are only what we look or appear, so this is the only aspect of our existence we need to address” (*Journals* 37). A woman has to look a certain way to fit the parameters of coded lifestyle, image, class, and occupation: she is measured in a variety of ways according to her appearance, which circumscribes her identity.

2.2 Body spaces

Luce Irigaray has successfully contributed to feminism a composite theory of the body, without which we would not have such easy access into the body politic. Her work serves as an academic and

social study, and offers women a way of critiquing their own bodies against a backdrop of patriarchy. Schematically, Irigaray's ambitious study has achieved an emancipatory politics, consolidating a feminine subjectivity with a spatial reasoning and promoting critical concern for the specificity of the female body.⁹ Within the limits of 'the body' her work examines the category of woman as a sign system while, at the same time, addressing the discourses enlisted by patriarchy to position women. Irigaray's return to the body is a highly theorised practice often positing a bodily existence anterior to that of the sign, hence, this means that for Irigaray to establish her position she must disband the vagueness of the body's boundaries and replace it within the framework of a general objective.

Thus Irigaray offers a construction of women and language in relation to women's morphology and natural body contours.¹⁰ For Irigaray, the category of the female body is an extension of clearly defined corporeal terms. (Female corporeality, and her mapping, contextualises the female.) Of women, she claims: "Their distinguishing feature is one of contiguity. They touch (*upon*). Then they wander too far from this nearness, she stops and begins again from 'zero': her body-sex organs" ("This Sex" 144). This, now well celebrated, assertion perceives the spatial boundaries of women as contiguous in an effort to position woman in relation to herself so that female identity is assured, not so much as a single 'design', but as a multiple regulation of the self. Despite this, there is an implicit appeal to female aesthetics which potentially places a greater burden on the body than those images rendered by patriarchal discourse.¹¹ I suggest the reason for this is that Irigaray does not adequately address the social implications of the 'unhealthy' body. Conversely, Lorde enables an ethics of

⁹ Wendy Harcourt considers Irigaray's contribution to feminism, and the future of gender as a means of classification, in her essay "Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Future of Gender," *Feminism, Body, Self: Third Generation Feminism*, ed. J. Smith and A. Mafouz (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1994) 70-90.

¹⁰ "Geomorphology" is Irigaray's term for the symbolic significance of anatomy, a term which emphasises the cultural encoding of the bodily. For a fuller description see M. Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1991) 59.

¹¹ It has long been acknowledged that language and the body intersect, and much feminist criticism has attempted to map the relationship between the female body and language. However, if such studies exclude the implications of society and its demands then issues relating to power will remain largely ignored. As Ann Jones argues: "Feminists may still doubt the efficacy of privileging changes in subjectivity over changes in economic and political systems; is this not dangling a semiotic carrot in front of a mare still harnessed into phallogocentric social practice?" (In "Inscribing Femininity: French theories of the feminine," *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1985) 107.)

personal 'good health' to be articulated: the imperative of health and its social and political implications are negotiated so that a return to the body does not have to exclude dis-ease; she refers in particular to the image of a double-breasted woman and unsettles the essentialist mechanism of health and the body.

Taking a longer perspective, then, Irigaray might have too unproblematic a notion of the body. Her influential account of the human bodily *Gestalt* imaginatively includes the parts that set about constructing woman; but we can see that those components are parts of the same body. Therefore, I would argue that her account is underpinned by the assumption of a normative construction of the body. Woman enters into dialogue with herself precisely because she is a coherent construct of many parts; moreover, she determines how she speaks according to the dictates of her body. It is an essentialist account with many attractions, particularly if we are determined to find strategies of resistance against hegemonic regimes of power. However, how do we converse if our body is no longer linked in contiguity?

In her book *Sexes and Genealogies*, Irigaray traces the development of gender differences through language and subjectivity. She states quite emphatically that we must, as part of the female gender, return to our organic "roots," to our subjectivity. In return, we will become "*subjects of speech*" (my emphasis),¹² instead of the objects of speech we presently know in which women are objectified through an (en)gendered gaze. Throughout the text she offers unequivocal ways of achieving this, and argues, in an essay entitled "The Notion of Gender", that

Gender is index and mark of the *subjectivity* and the ethical responsibility of the speaker, in fact gender is not just a question of biology and physiology, a matter of private life, of animal habits or veal fertility. It constitutes the irreducible differentiation that occurs *on the inside* of 'the human race'. Gender stands for the unsubstitutable position of the *I* and the *you (le tu)* and of their modes of expression (*Sexes* 170).

While gender is biological, it is also irreducibly and anatomically divided into the two linguistic gender constituents of male and female. Irigaray's argument intrinsically suggests that modes of

¹² L. Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogy*, trans. G. Gill (New York: Columbia, 1993) 203.

expression, the ability to name one's identity, stem from the subjective, biological self. Therefore, the morphological identity of the female is indisputably linked to her ability to speak. Furthermore, Irigaray is proposing that in order for woman to gain greater female autonomy she must engage more fully with herself (for example, by touching), to establish the space between *I* and *you*. Although Irigaray assumes a normative contiguity, she is also producing a break with present constructions of bodily reality.

In the same way, Lorde offers us insight into the status of her newly altered body in the hope to claim some empowerment for women who are no longer 'symmetrical'. It is therefore necessary to include a perspective on materiality,¹³ so that we see how language changes as we ourselves change. Although Lorde herself believes that she is still the same person 'on the inside', she is not naïve enough to ignore the fact that a different set of signifiers classifies her. Thus female appendage will not make a notable significance to her self-perception: "Prosthesis offers the empty comfort of 'Nobody will know the difference'. But it is that very difference which I wish to affirm, because I have lived it, and survived it, and wish to share that strength with other women" (*Journals* 53). On the basis of such a determined enquiry, we can begin to ascertain how new spaces are formed in response to the challenge of ingrained or pre-conceived ideas. Lorde writes out of a need: "The status of *untouchable* is a very unreal and lonely one, although it does keep everyone at arm's length, and protects as it insulates" (my emphasis; *Journals* 41). If we consider Lorde's position from an Irigarayan perspective, although touch is used figuratively, still Irigaray falls short of recognising that when bodily surface events undergo change, language must also.

Irigaray is using the idea of touch as a metaphor but, at the same time, she is imbricating women in language without acknowledging its far-reaching effects. Lorde connects the body to language also; but rather than perceive a body that exists as an anatomical entity, she retains its links with a social space that interprets codification. In saying this, she gives the body the same metaphoric

¹³ As Monique Plaza states: "The notion of 'Woman' is imbricated in the materiality of existence" (26). Her argument is that there is no simple route of escape from such 'imbrication'. In "'Phallic power' and the psychology of 'woman,'" *Ideology and Consciousness* 4 (autumn 1978) 4-36.

proportions as Irigaray; equally, for both writers, their metaphors add to the complexity of the body, but Lorde's contribution ultimately retains a connection with a shifting reality, where Irigaray's does not.

2.3 The body as a grammar of signs

For Lorde the codes of representation are external forces requiring challenge: "I must also separate those external demands about how I look and feel to others" (*Journals* 57). Perhaps the need to retrieve the body from that external categorisation of phallogentrism and a traditionally male utilisation of medical discourse is what motivates Lorde to write. Irigaray, in the well-known essay "This sex which is not one," writes with controlled irony: "Contradictory words seem a little crazy to the logic of reason, and inaudible for him who listens with ready-made grids, a code prepared in advance. In her statements – at least when she dares to speak out – woman retouches herself constantly. Moreover, her statements are never identical to anything."¹⁴ Lorde, however, is doubly challenged since she not only encounters the rigours of male discourse, but also meets with the configuration of a sign system which fails to describe her bodily signification and instead positions her through "a grammar of signs." Maybe it is this positioning that incites Lorde to speak through her body in a language that directly evokes the subtlety of the female form. Either way, it seems to me, the important point is that when the female form undergoes change, language has to alter also.

Lorde's distinctive perception of the body's geomorphological significance enables her to achieve this by cutting across entrenched discourses in the following ways: first, she redefines her incised body from the position of the female as a scarred landscape; second, she attempts to repudiate the processes of discourse within the medical profession that make disease an exploration, investigation, and inscription in male terms; third, she summons women from silence and invisibility

¹⁴ L. Irigaray, "This sex which is not one," in *New French Feminisms*, trans. C. Reeder, ed. E. Marks and I. de Courtivron (Brighton: Harvester, 1980) 103.

in order to *signify* their position. Lorde prefaces a chapter of *The Cancer Journals*¹⁵ with the following poem (which is also in *The Black Unicorn* (52)):

Nobody wants to die on the way
 caught between ghosts of whiteness
 and the real water
 none of us wanted to leave
 our bones
 on the way to salvation
 three planets to the left
 a century of light years ago
 our spices are separate and particular
 but our skins sing in complementary keys
 at a quarter to eight mean time
 we were telling the same stories
 over and over and over.
 Broken down gods survive
 in the crevasses and mudpots
 of every beleaguered city
 where it is obvious
 there are too many bodies
 to cart to the ovens
 or gallows
 and our uses have become
 more important than our silence
 after the fall
 too many empty cases of blood to bury or burn
 there will be no body left
 to listen and our labour
 has become more important than our silence.
 Our labour has become
 more important
 than our silence
 (“A Song for Many Movements”).

¹⁵ Chapter One, “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action,” 10.

I suggest that with the help of this poem we can locate a very definite space-in-process formed from the actions of a writer who is “caught between ghosts of whiteness / and the real water”: an imaginative structure or place. It is an ironic poem in that the focaliser is set up as an authoritative voice for all people: “Nobody” and “none of us” is a (dis)claimer for everyone. The poem ties in different political agendas that cross the boundaries from a personal experience to one that includes other political schemes. The bodily landscape signified in the poem as spaces separate and particular is exchanged for voices “telling the same stories”. The boundaries between self and other are broken and the poem opens up to the multiplication of narrative possibility. But there is also certainty: the poem’s political agenda informs us that it is impossible to adopt a ‘movement’ song in silence, and that therefore we must force ourselves to verbalise an alternative to silence.

Lorde works hard to rectify silence by refusing to occupy a space in which she cannot signify her own change.¹⁶ The space that is linked to silence is language, but however contradictory or impugning silence might be there are always conditions that allow for freer ways to exist. Indeed, it is this expression of freedom that enables us to begin to understand the significance of the literary heterotopia. Such development results in the production of new transgressive textualities:¹⁷ the literary heterotopia is the point at which one can no longer accept silence.

3. Genealogical space

In part, the task of the genealogist is not to record monumental history, but the “exteriority of accidents” (“Nietzsche, Genealogy” 81) that comprise dominant narratives. To discover and make an examination of those chance events, the genealogist has to locate the disruptions and entanglement of those very displays that lie across both space and time. It is similar to saying that “effective history” (89) is heterotopic. The intersection of the similarity between these two terms means, essentially, that

¹⁶ The idea of women writing to signify their own position of self-representation is taken up by Pam Smiley in “The Unspeakable: Mary Gordon and the Angry Mother’s Voice,” *Violence, Silence, and Anger: Women’s Writing as Transgression*, ed. D. Lashgari (Charlottesville: Virginia UP, 1995) 124-34.

¹⁷ As Thomas Dumm suggests, “The heterotopia is distinguished from other spaces in that it is the very expression of transgression” (44).

they have the positive effect of effacing dominant narratives. Given that, genealogy corresponds to a heterotopic process of development which disintegrates unity and fixity; added to this, historical meaning for the genealogist becomes a dimension of the scattered meanings and dispersions that constitute heterotopic evolution. History does not, as Foucault emphasises, emerge from a stable metaphysical origin, but from “the emergence of different interpretations” (86). Thus genealogy shows how the concept of ‘history’ functions in society as a way of consoling and confining those within its strictures. Foucault’s aim, therefore, is to replace a history that relies upon the value of an instinctual ‘hereditary’ life with an elemental life of chance events. It may seem that this somewhat removes the personal choices and strategies of empowerment that we reasonably feel are available against history’s norms, but Foucault is offering resistance based on interpretative tactics of displacement.

The notion of historical meaning as a tool that limits freedom and forms of expression is evident above all in the constant assumption of an instinctual life and history’s depiction of the body; this is why Foucault employs the body as a firm example of history’s power. He argues

that the body is moulded by a great many distinct regimes; it is broken down by the rhythms of work, rest, and holidays; it is poisoned by food or values, through eating habits or moral laws; it constructs resistances. ‘Effective’ history differs from traditional history in being without constants. Nothing in man – not even his body – is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men. The traditional devices for constructing a comprehensive view of history and for retracing the past as a patient and continuous development must be systematically dismantled (87-88).

It is apparent that Foucault is applying Nietzsche’s approach to an interpretative reading of history, and it serves, clearly, to remain inconclusive. However, Foucault goes further in the discipleship of his mentor and places the corporeal body under scrutiny at the risk of drawing upon essentialisms. Nietzsche, on the other hand, operates from a more ‘prosaic’ position in that he scrutinises the conceptual notions of narrative and chronology, always stressing the metaphoric implications of language and its constructions. As I see it, Foucault provides a more systematic way of viewing the body, and to convince us of this, he adds: “‘Effective’ history deprives the self of the reassuring

stability of life and nature.... It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting” (88). In taking this evaluative stance, rather than a descriptive one, Foucault provides a way of approaching writers like Lorde who, deprived of the reassuring stability of identity, interpret and give expression to the ways in which they cut through history and transgress its assumed continuity.

In challenging the adequacy of received inherited opinion, these moments of resistance serve to shape and establish new terms of expression. The important factor here is that transgression is not rebellion on a large scale, but one voiced at the grass roots level of personal interpretation: spaces at the “founding of ... society” (“Spaces” 23). As I understand it, the idea of a heterotopic infringement provides an alternative to the representations of change as the product of an extrinsic force. In other words, the positional logic of exchange between events, of representing one thing by another, means that ideas are challenged at a local level whereby *liberty is a practice and not an event*. As a result, we do not find historical spaces in which new ideologies are established, but displays of interactive dialogues that open up interpretation to debate.

The interplay between the spaces Lorde encounters and her response to them is supplied in the following passage, where she transforms fear and silence into action and language and positions herself in a group of women within which she can offer a testimony of her own events; it is a practice that is not easy: “And, of course, I am afraid – you can hear it in my voice – because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation and that always seems fraught with danger” (*Journals* 13). Lorde moves out of her own conventional space and encounters the plural and empty spaces she fills with her own experience. Therefore, heterogeneous movement across a textual network becomes characteristic of a writer who vacates the safety of a familiar space, to enter the fearful space where she might provide a consensual discourse for women who share her fears and hopes of overcoming them. She encroaches upon hegemonic boundaries in order to operate from a position that expresses her visible and personalised experience; this puts her in conflict with a monumental ‘historical’ discourse that speaks on behalf of the female body.

Lorde provides through her work a general theory of writerly production that is at first sight situated in a kind of nowhere place. This implies a space that is not characterised by analytical focus or desire; it is a space that carries no accolade or sense of history, the nowhere genealogical space is one that pushes the boundaries of hegemonic discourse as a means of challenging practical definitions of monumental space. Even so, Lorde prevails over these powerful narratives by refusing to be silent; she retains the force of conviction to become the discordant voice opposing the lawful language of a socially hegemonic environment. In Foucauldian terms, Lorde's contribution is to formulate a space that is shaped from real places – “places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of our society” (“Spaces” 23).

Considered as a literary heterotopia, Lorde's writings are the performance of someone who writes from an ordinary, almost common experience, and responds in a way which raises the profile of potentially all women; the consequence is whatever position is assumed, resistance can be part of it. We are looking at the process of transformation of an ‘ordinary’ history into a rich mosaic of essays, poems and speeches that expose the body imprinted by history's processes. In the year Lorde had her breast cancer diagnosed, a collection of her poetry was published. The poem entitled “125th Street and Abomey” lyrically describes Seboulisa,¹⁸ the mythical one-breasted woman who acknowledges her sorrow, but who also laughs into her pain so that “all the world shall remember.” It is a courageous poem written in the face of conflict:

Half earth and time splits us apart
 like struck rock.
 A piece lives elegant stories
 too simply put
 while a dream on the edge of summer
 of brown rain in nim trees
 snail shells from the dooryard
 of King Toffah
 bring me where my blood moves

¹⁸ Seboulisa: “The goddess of Abomey – ‘The Mother of us all.’ A local representation of Mawulisa, she is sometimes known as Sogbo, creator of the world.” Glossary, *The Black Unicorn* 121.

Seboulisa mother goddess with one breast
 eaten away by worms or sorrow and loss
 see me now
 your severed daughter
 laughing our name into echo
 all the world shall remember
 (*Black Unicorn* 12).

Lorde engages directly with what may be the greatest difficulty involved in framing a feminist discourse: how to write from shared common experience to highlight the generic goals of feminism, while at the same time acknowledging personal resistance. Seboulisa is a mythical character who combines political revolution and fantasy; she is an unfamiliar figure transformed by the narrative variation of Lorde to signify transgressive endeavour. What is most appealing about the poem is that Lorde takes her source from African mythology and transplants it into modern-day poetry so that sequentially one tale of political heroism runs into another. If we consider the poem from a Foucauldian perspective, Lorde writes from “inside a set of relations that delineates sites” (“Spaces” 23), but provides the links with other spaces of feminist dialogue. Foucault characterised the heterotopia, the potential realm of space in its public, transgressive, and contingent function, as the space that takes for us the forms of relations among sites.¹⁹ For present purposes, the concept enables us to locate the spatial differences and links between women and feminist discourse. Through a shared discourse Lorde names her own space while, at the same time, providing a space for others to move in and out of. Her own positionality creates a textual spatiality where she ‘places’ herself, with the full knowledge of possible marginalisation. Moreover, Lorde’s textual space means that she is linked to a cultural and political place, but it is one that she cultivates and transplants into her own space.

¹⁹ Foucault distinguishes usefully between ‘utopian’ and ‘real’ space which can exist in overlap. There are utopian spaces which have their own reality, if only to serve as a conceptual space of consolation, and, like mythology, they exist as a narrative event. Although the terms “real” and “utopian” tend to negate each other, neither one could exist independently.

3.1 A cultural space

For Foucault there are two types of clearly defined heterotopias: utopian space and real space. “First there are utopias. Utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of society. Moreover, heterotopic utopias present social space in a perfected form, or else turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces” (“Spaces” 24). This argument is outlined from a ‘local’ perspective, but Foucault’s aim is far more global. He attempts to provide an alternative premise to the historically outlined practices of Marxism, though one which is still based on the fundamental aspiration of a culture which seeks freedom from repression and domination. Therefore Foucault’s labour *within* discursive structures strives to demonstrate the ostensible difficulties with the type of Marxism that seeks to break up one world order and replace it with another.

Even so, substitution of one paradigm for another implies an imperative clearing away; the consequence is apparent with phenomena such as ethnic cleansing in recent wars. In today’s climate it is (sadly) inconceivable that contemporary Marxism might rekindle the classical Marxist devotion to the overthrowing of capitalist states. Instead, the current conditions of counteraction and opposition are based upon a more fragmented ideological position. Marxism has characteristically refused to include in its politics the contingent forces that may have shaped the very terms of subjecthood. In contrast, heterotopias can address the materialist terms through which revolutionary action might be realised. The heterotopia accommodates the means to work with existing forces and produce new space.

Yet, how effective this may be as a political practice is still open to question, as any ideology or heterotopia is contingent on the same structures it resists. Both Foucauldian and Marxian speculations are political, but where a Marxist practice strives for absence from oppression, Foucault is arguing for a practice in which oppression is challenged between events.²⁰ His theory of space

²⁰ Andrew Cutrofellow argues that Foucault “rejects the juridical model of *power*, not because it links power with judgement, but rather because of the way in which it interprets the link between the two”. He emphasises the way in which Foucault ignores power structures which form part of the main stratification of power, showing that Foucault conceives power and knowledge as primarily discursive and dispersed strata with hidden agendas.

provides the means, lacking in his early work, to understand other writers' work as events that create new viable modes of discursive thought from what is at hand.

This being the case, theorising a Foucauldian heterotopic space enables us to establish that, while familiar spaces endure, there is the potential to form and valorise alternative spaces; it is just that we can never rename the effects of history and it is this that leads critics to declare Foucault's politics ineffectual.²¹ Charles Taylor, in his essay "Foucault on Freedom and Truth", claims that

the reality of history is mixed and messy. The problem is that Foucault tidies it up too much, makes it into a series of hermetically sealed, monolithic truth-regimes, a picture which is as far from reality as the blandest Whig perspective of smoothly broadening freedom. Monolithism and relativism are two sides of the same coin. One is as necessary as the other to create this total incomparability across the changes of history.²²

While Taylor's account of Foucault is valid in relation to Foucault's early work, the criticism does not do justice to later developments. Taylor's reading lacks the complexity that is in accord with Foucault's wide-ranging projects. Although some of his early work on history deals solely with the idea of an archaeology of knowledge, the notion of heterotopias problematises the categorical logic of archaeologies as rigid narratives. The inclusion of space rightly endorses the fact that history is disordered. If society is a constitution of this network of events then clearly the discursive realm in which we live is almost impossible to perforate: we embody the fluidity of our own language. Our only way out of the transparent labyrinth is to contest the space that we ourselves identify as real and to occupy counter-sites according to our needs as they arise. The key notion here is that although space is ambiguous, it is also locatable. Space, no matter how aporetic, is a mode of production and

Cutrofellow has difficulty accepting that Foucault's study observes the self-conscious debate that occurs *between* discourses, which are often at the margins of main discourses of power. However, I would argue that in order for Foucault to reach the conclusion that 'substratas' function because of the dominant models of power, which serve to classify, organise, and arrange, he must be able to show that they operate because they are concealed or secret. See A. Cutrofellow, *Discipline and Critique* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994) 22.

²¹ According to Michael Cranston, "Foucault's boldest statements about the past [are not] backed up with any evidence. His method is too often that of argument by assertion." In Michael Cranston, *Michel Foucault, Critical Thought: Series 2*, ed. P. Burke (Aldershot: Scolar, 1992) 19.

²² C. Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. D. Couzens Hoy (London: Blackwell, 1986) 98.

because of this there is an inevitable implied social construction. This suggests that although we wander into the disordered spatial dimensions of history, we keep in mind the idea that the relations of cultural production are both space-forming and space-contingent.

Creating a literary heterotopia, however, depends on our ability to use language. In his Preface to *The Order of Things*, wherein Foucault first discusses the idea of the heterotopia, he links it quite firmly to language. In contrast to the utopian space he describes, which acts as a metaphor for a cohesive solid order, the heterotopia here is a source of power in everyday life that is both disruptive and transgressive, but one which necessarily finds stability in the structure of language:

Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy "syntax" in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and opposite each other) to "hold together." This is why utopias permit fables and discourse: they run with the very grain of language and are part of the fundamental dimension of the *fabula*; heterotopias ... desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilise the lyricism of our sentences (*Order x*).

The concluding statement might be taken to suggest that heterotopias separate themselves from language; but that would be an incorrect inference. Heterotopias serve to highlight the fragile connections between narratives, the disruptive possibilities that occur in textuality to produce new literary heterotopias. As we are interested in the connections between the historical formations of both space and sign systems (in our case, the blatant signifier is the one-breasted woman), the literary heterotopia signifies how dominant and confining thought can be challenged when we loosen the connections that hold ideas in place. This translates into the capacity to effect change and understand language within history and not outside it.²³ It constitutes the sites where a strategic link occurs in which to form difference.

²³ In contrast to my argument, Jana Sawicki writes: "Foucault's is a radical philosophy without a theory of history. He does not utilise history as a means of locating a single revolutionary subject, nor does he locate power in a single material base." In *Disciplining Foucault* 20. This bold statement is, of course, quite wrong.

In Lorde's case, she acts as a semiotic agent whereby the way we perceive and make connections is disclosed. For example, in a poem entitled "Kitchen Linoleum," she uses images that build on each other at constitutive sites in order to make known the pathetic fallacy that exists between human and insect life. The poem culminates in a figuration of images that are economically assembled to accentuate through a construction of space the horizontal and vertical relations between the insect and the woman. This use of making connections is a formulation capable of shifting its referents so that a personal formation of space can be made: the woman's comprehension of space allows social relations to prevail over hierarchical, power relations.

The cockroach
 who is dying
 and the woman
 who is blind
 agree
 not to notice
 each other's shame
 (*Arithmetics* 36).

The poem, quoted in its entirety, presents the dislocation of parts and remote components that is characteristic of modern poetry. Yet, the infinite distance between the cockroach and the woman is bridged by an agreement in which each chooses to ignore each other's shame, so that there is a surprising production of contiguity. It is this stylistic device which makes Lorde's contribution to literature distinctive. Her poetry is often very personal, yet her ideas extend to issues with much wider implications. The tenuous connection of images that Lorde brings about implicates ideas and readers alike. It is this characteristic that attracts us to her poetry and cancer journals: the struggle with cancer and politics circuitously connects with other issues to deliver a dense performance. Her unique semiotic skills mean that her poetry operates from signs and sign relations and not from what might be taken to be a direct experience of reality.

Foucault works with many of the best ideas in Marxism, and proffers an analysis of culture whereby power resides at the centre of his argument which is both material and historical.

3.2 A metaphoric space

Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* shows how heterotopias serve to highlight fragile connections within language. It begins with a gory outline of Damiens the regicide's death by torture. The chapter demonstrates the ability to record the events of an absolutist public judicial system minutely, but it does not appear to do much more. It takes a skilled reader to understand what Foucault's point might be, especially when he goes on to correlate Damiens' death with the story of the sovereign king in the organisation of geneses. What is important is the way in which these two stories (histories) emphasise the other's purpose. By placing the narratives alongside each other we can see how sign structures influence perception. The greater significance lies not with the narratives themselves but with their organisation and the strategic linking of the carceral heterotopia alongside a sovereign heterotopia: as a type of metaphor both serve to validate each other's reality.²⁴ I should like to use Foucault's tactical position, however, for my own purposes and show how the visualisation of the two narratives is important: they not only act as signifiers of control, but the coupling of history's monumental and marginal histories are positioned together to highlight the interpretative role of the genealogist. The two narratives are arranged in relation to each other in order to heighten their referential and emotional function. Both iconographical images perform for society in a certain way: the semiotic operator at play is one of good and evil in which the sovereign king marks the site of morality, while Damiens the regicide signifies corruption and its penalty as imposed by a moral order.

Yet, it is important to point out a more salient feature, and state that both narratives use space as a major structuring agent: they go beyond real space and perform alongside each other in a space that is iconic in character; they incorporate into their personae the trace of good and evil that is played out in art, drama, and other powerful systems of meaning. Therefore, iconographic figures that occupy

²⁴ Dumm refigures the image of the sovereign king, but it is in relation to the spectacle of kingship and its many arrangements. He, like me, arranges his argument around two converging spaces: one defined by sovereignty and the other by discipline. His main concern is with disciplinary spaces and he concludes that within any sovereign society, the transgressive link is formed from between the spaces of immaterial corporeality and the social body (*Foucault and Freedom* 40ff).

space are far more effective as controllers of behaviour than language, as agents of moral order or warning, because they signify a physical existence in space that language does not have.

However, Foucault himself describes space in social rather than literary terms. The narrative on kingship in *Discipline and Punish* is a good example of how different spaces converge on the subject and the ways in which we operate in them. His example of the sovereign king clearly exhibits the two main features of the heterotopia as real space and utopian space. As housing a ruling monarch, the palace signifies a heterotopia where the king resides in a utopian space; as the body politic, he lives in a real space. The king figures also as a utopian and real heterotopia as iconographical image and human reality. As shifting cultural spaces they constantly disrupt one another.

Now the rupturing effect of the heterotopia is best understood when viewed in terms of diachrony and synchrony. The diachronic king operates as a bearer of unmitigated absolutist power, which links directly to a sovereign and transcendent order. The synchronic king is held in play as an iconoclastic 'human' alternative. The first body functions for the people as a godly political figure with conferred moral and judicial powers; the second body signifies unique benevolence, temperamentality and even fallibility. What we get is an instability that seemingly allows the king to occupy a double space linked by an iconographical utopian space and a 'real', or social, space. More specifically, it enables us as readers to locate a two-fold narrative that formulates stable and resistant histories. If we consider this idea in connection to Audre Lorde, what her writing presents is a figure who textually weaves body literacy and poetic literacy to bring attention to the life sentences that constitute her work. The result is a series of linguistic heterotopias in which the morphological landscape of Lorde's body enables her to name and rename her own bodily position. She breaks down the certainty and reductionism of female iconography by politicising her own body, and projects its scarred landscape so that her body itself becomes a textual endeavour alongside her literary output.

3.4 Life sentences

The fibre of Lorde's life is reflected in the *Cancer Journals* as a human expression of change that takes place as a process over time. As a result of the spatialised codes of representation that Lorde herself had unconsciously lived by for many years, she is shocked to discover how much she had relied upon them: "I think perhaps I was afraid to continue being myself.... My beloved breast had suddenly departed from the rules we had agreed upon to function by all these years" (*Journals* 25). Clearly, she must discover just what "being myself" really means.

In order to do this she is forced to come to terms with images of female iconography previously taken for granted, and must begin to challenge them. What she discovers is that "being myself" cannot depend on the body images in society. What is more, Lorde can no longer trust even the images she had created within her own real space as a woman. Nevertheless, she provides remedies against this situation by continuing to work within the central premise of feminism in its struggle to identify the female form, but identity is left open as a transient form. Unable to comprehend the body as anything other than a shifting construct, Lorde positions her personal narrative alongside normative discourses.

In much the same way, Barnes records her interpretation of history through *Nightwood* and interrogates the formation of the female body and the laws that govern it through fantastic displacement: this is seen in the parodic modification of the doctor, who, once adorned, nightgowned, and rouged, inadvertently becomes a figure of the grandmother in drag, and serves as an extravagant impersonation of womanhood. It is clear that the transgression of boundaries shifts the division of space so that the gendered body and the signifiers that adorn it disconnect and stand in isolation to one another. Essentially, this too is the case for Lorde: she distances herself from the false breast and exposes its ornamental value. Likewise Barnes recognises the effect that surface image places on the female body and draws attention to the decorative role played out in society. However, once these images are broken down they become absurd and imitatory. Nora enters Matthew's room and encounters the following vision: "On the maple dresser ... lay ... half a dozen odd instruments that she

could not place, a catheter, some twenty perfume bottles, almost empty, pomades, creams, rouges, powder boxes and puffs. From the half-open drawers of this chiffonier hung laces, ribands, stockings, ladies' underclothing and an abdominal brace" (*Nightwood* 116). They are difficult "to place" precisely because the objects are not a 'natural' metonym of male adornment, but are integral to women's space. So it is with Lorde's subject matter: she exposes the codes and signs that manufacture female space and opens it up to a revised narrative: "I carry tattooed upon my heart a list of names of women who did not survive, and there is always a space left for one more, my own. That is to remind me that even survival is only part of the task. The other part is teaching. I had been in training for a long time" (*Journals* 32). Therefore, body image goes far beyond the reaches of mastectomy; it permeates all aspects of female identity.

The claims of the medical profession as defining and controlling spaces are held in place by a double complicity in the space that we as patients occupy, and clinicians as specialists advocate. Yet, behind the show of clinical professionalism lies a discourse that maintains an exclusive esotericism that serves only to preserve power and elitism. The medical heterotopia supposedly stands to make known the unknown and to interpret what our bodies are feeling. Lorde, in a less circumspect way, uses the medium of prose and poetry to interpret her own bodily positioning and discloses the effects of her body as a spectacle. She takes the female form and locates the points of similarity between medical investigation and literary exposure: art and science are not too different as both make connections with anatomy and exploration; the female body becomes a site of discovery and scrutiny and we learn that 'knowledge' and entertainment go hand in hand. Moreover, once the body has been dissected and taken apart for scrutiny, it can be constructed in a different way. Citing the feminist theorist of medicine Giuliana Bruno, we might confirm that "on the ashes of anatomy a female body is engraved" (*Teratologies* 153).

Extending this, Lorde disrupts the invasive exploration that meets many women who have faced breast cancer to interrogate society's generally held images of the female body;²⁵ she tells her audience of the experience she recalls on her first return visit to the clinic for post-surgery check-up, and the extent to which that control extended itself:

When I walked into the doctor's office, I was really rather pleased with myself, all things considered, pleased with the way I felt, with my own flair, with my own style. The doctor's nurse, a charmingly bright and steady woman of about my own age who had always given me a feeling of quiet no-nonsense support on my other visits, called me into the examining room. On the way, she asked me how I was feeling. "Pretty good," I said, half-expecting her to make some comment about how good I looked. "You're not wearing a prosthesis," she said, a little anxiously, and not at all like a question. "No," I said, thrown off my guard for a minute. "It really doesn't feel right," referring to the lambswool puff given me by the Reach for Recovery volunteer in the hospital. Usually supportive and understanding, the nurse now looked at me urgently and disapprovingly as she told me that even if it didn't look exactly right, it was "better than nothing," and that as soon as my stitches were out I could be fitted for a "real form." "You will feel so much better with it on," she said. "And besides, we really like you to wear something, at least when you come in. Otherwise it's bad for the morale of the office." I could hardly believe my ears! I was too outraged to speak then, but this was to be only the first such assault on my right to define and to claim my own body (*Journals* 51).

The language of the nurse – "Better than nothing" – is a quirky off-the-cuff phrase, but it is also a dangerous sentence that highlights the dominant discourses women are forced to contend with. In choosing her position, Lorde absorbs the imagery and the rhetoric and re-directs it into another spatial context to view the implications of statements that belie a stark political and normative agenda. "Better than nothing" clearly defines the predicament of the mastectomised woman: once her breast is removed, there is nothing to replace that space below her shoulders and above her diaphragm. Therefore, how can a puff of lambswool plug an empty space?

In a study of the complicity between power and forms of understanding in the study of the body, it is interesting to include the insight of Catherine Nash, a geographer who explores the control of

²⁵ Withholding information from patients is no longer encouraged in American medicine. A culture of litigation has enforced huge change so that patients are informed of their illnesses, especially life-threatening disorders.

territory and the control of the female body and notes the similar emblematic features of invasion on both the body and property. She claims that the role of bio/geography, which names and defines women's bodies, is part of a tradition of representation that negates or suppresses 'alternative' images of the body. Nash believes that an effective way of confronting this is to delineate a body of ambiguity, which she describes thus:

The familiarity of the connection between colonial control of other lands and the control of female sexuality and the use of gender in the discourse of discovery is displaced by the powerful subtlety of these images.... Both the colonial mapping of subject lands and the representation of women within patriarchy are forms of representation that seek to reinforce the stability of the controlling viewpoint and to negate or suppress alternative views.²⁶

From what Nash is saying, it would appear that once the body has been mapped, the function of inscription and re-inscription is finished. Lorde and Nash both realise that the manifestation of the body is a fluid and unchartable space that cannot be managed by stable images. Idealisation is merely another form of restraint, in which the body is catalogued, appropriated and controlled.

The construction of experience defines the *Cancer Journals*, as its writer moves from a medical heterotopia into a space shared by women in which to speak her experience. Lorde forces us to consider the practical implications of bodily identity (in a way that Irigaray does not) and calls us to an awareness of what it means to live in the shadows of an idealised female body. In a poem entitled "A Small Slaughter," Lorde draws a keen comparison between her own life and the invisible existence of those on street corners. The idea of idealisation sits somewhere in between the folds of meaning; an idealised utopian space is made visible by its very absence:

I am scarred and marketed
 like a street corner in Harlem
 a woman
 whose face in the tiles
 your feet have not yet regarded
 I am the stream

²⁶ C. Nash, "Remapping the Body/Land," in Rose and Blunt 234.

past which you will never step
 the woman you can not deal with
 I am the mouth
 of your scorn

(*Black Unicorn* 100)

The poem works on two very different levels in that it emphasises both visible and invisible images of female identity. The triple declaration – “I am scarred,” “I am the stream,” “I am the mouth” in some way resonates conversely with the Biblical proclamation in John’s Gospel of “I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life.” The poem makes a bold statement by which to focus on the visible world of female experience that will not go away. On the other hand, the words detail the “scarred and marketed woman” which takes into account the different velocities and curves of incompleteness and imbalance in a world where signification is everything.²⁷ The woman who sits on the street corner, whose signifiers do not reach us, and whom we are likely to pass every day on our way to work – the same “woman” we “cannot deal with” – is, in some way, connected to a shared experience. Yet the comprehensive difference between us and Lorde is that she, as a poet, names the woman on the street corner – and she writes on her behalf.

In the same vein, interpretation of poetry involves decoding the work; but codes are recognised as signs about, rather than experiences of. Therefore we need to read Lorde’s work as more than a system of signification. The idea of the poem as a verbal object is a commonplace idea, and one that we assume means taking the linguistic structures of rhetoric, style and structure and positioning it contextually; we cannot read the poem merely as the verbal commodity called literature – to arrive at such an understanding means to subtract the writer from the written. It is impossible to do this with Lorde’s writing because her work inscribes itself as a result of specific and social encounters. Her

²⁷ Although she does not consider the idea of the body itself as a system of signification, even from the perspective of the palimpsest, Linda Alcoff offers an interesting essay on writing to get well, in “Survivor Discourse: Transgression or Recuperation,” *Getting a Life: Everyday Uses of Recuperation*, ed. S. Smith and J. Watson (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1996) 198-225. Lorde offers the same idea when she writes: “I am writing this now in a new year, trying to piece together that chunk of my recent past, so that I, or anyone else ... can dip into it at will if necessary to find the ingredients with which to build a wider construct. That is the important function of the telling of experience” (*Journals* 45).

writings exceed the boundaries of a verbal object as they set about implicating personal issues of gender, sexuality, colour, and stigma in order to undermine, subvert and transplant those discourses.

In “A Litany For Survival” Lorde displays and displaces various boundaries in which she finds herself. It is an autobiographical poem about lifestyle, and choice. The poem, however, finds itself taking a stand *between* the boundaries of choice:

For those of us who live at the shoreline
 standing upon the constant edges of decision
 crucial and alone
 for those of us who cannot indulge
 the passing dreams of choice
 who love in doorways coming and going
 in the hours between dawns
 looking inward and outward
 at once before and after
 seeking a now that can breed
 futures
 like bread in our children’s mouths
 so their dreams will not reflect
 the death of ours....
 For all of us
 this instant and this triumph
 We were never meant to survive
 (*Black Unicorn* 32).

Verse here grows from the ground up: it is cultivated from a common soil and transformed into an extraordinary oasis. Thus, Lorde (positioned as a genealogist) writes about everyday things and transforms them with her writing: “for those of us who cannot indulge / the passing dreams of choice / who love in doorways coming and going / in the hours between dawns / looking inward and outward....” are the record of a battle to make connections between a mediocre, silent experience and the authority of a literary tradition. The abandoned, unseen word/thing is rescued from obscurity and forgetfulness and returned to life.

Lorde cultivates ideas by giving substance to the void of fear, hunger, and longing. Her poetry is more than an arrangement of words, it is a composition of words and the blank spaces between them. “A Litany For Survival” alludes to, suggests and evokes an empty space; it allows the reader to enter the spaces between dawns, doors, and dreams freely and respond with personal association. Let me propose that the creative use to which ordinary or empty space is put is an extraordinary achievement. Lorde writes across the cusp of everyday experiences and illustrates through her lean words the fact that there is no ordinary experience – the space she occupies is not neutral, because her writing makes the difference.

4. Biographical space

Lorde’s many essays and poems, in spite of their divergent arguments and contexts, constantly return to the multiplicity of identity, and as a trope it remains the central matrix of her work. In her autobiography *Zami*, Lorde outlines the instability of biographical identity and the need both to generate and contain its fluidity. Regardless of the definition of the term, its context, or even its evaluation, the pattern of mythobiography resists dismantling. In the way it is used, it is a term that, rather than setting up an oppositional alterity, constantly defers meaning so that one can never find sameness because there is always a degree of difference:

For some of us there was no particular place, and we grabbed whatever we could from wherever we found space, comfort, quiet, a smile, non-judgement.... Each of us had our own needs and pursuits, and many different alliances. Self-preservation warned some of us that we could not afford to settle for one easy definition, one narrow individuation of self.... It was a while before we came to realise that our place was the very house of difference rather than the security of any one particular difference. (And often, we were cowards in our learning.) (*Zami* 197).

We can say that the space, from where Lorde writes, conceived in terms of language, is a literary heterotopia in which her work is placed as a political and artistic response to the geographical space she embodies.

In his study of geographical space, Edward Soja argues that a Foucauldian inquiry has opened up a debate that previous studies of history, such as those started by Kant and Marx,²⁸ had ignored; they centred on epochs of time and human endeavour at the expense of spatiality. Although Soja does not link the heterotopia to language in quite the way I have, he skilfully claims that newly-fashioned spaces are the connection between the imagination and historicism;²⁹ in other words, that the individual imagination forges new space at a social level. For him space is contingent, being based on connections grounded in “history, *biography*, and society” (my emphasis; “Post-Modern Geographies” 130).

Soja’s effort to come to grips with spatial *praxis* is evident in his reading of Foucault where he maintains that the heterotopia does indeed offer a new way in which to view space, based on social intervention. He does not view the heterotopia as merely an aspect of the rupturing effects of language. For Soja, space is a product of history, born of the contingent spaces between ourselves and our social world. Heterotopias describe “people ‘making history’” (130). In some aspects, Soja reflects the later ideas of Dumm, who believes firmly that imagination is part of what constitutes change; it is this that makes the heterotopia so compulsively appealing because history is not just taken for granted, it is challenged at the grass roots level:

The persistence of historicism of theoretical consciousness has blocked the development of an equivalent sensibility to the *spatiality* of social life, a practical theoretical consciousness that sees the live world of being creatively located not only in the making of history but also in the construction of human geographies, the social production of space, the restless formation and

²⁸ Foucault wants to “discover power in its material play” (“Afterword” 221), as a form invested in society from the very force existing within men and women: the force to imagine, conceive, wish, create, and so on; and the relationship that one force, or power, has with another. These power relations are by no means straightforward. For example, power and freedom must necessarily engage with one another if both are to exist: “When one defines the exercise of power as a mode of action upon the actions of others, when one characterises these actions by the government of men – in the broadest sense of the term – one includes an important element: freedom” (“Afterword” 221). Therefore, when power is exercised, the possibility for freedom and choice is present. This is consequently the point at which Foucault is most removed from the position of Nietzsche, Marx and Freud. See “Afterword” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, trans. C. Gordon et al., ed. C. Gordon (London: Harvester, 1980) 229-260.

²⁹ E. Soja, “Post-Modern Geographies,” in *Nowhere: Space, Time and Modernity*, ed. R. Friedland and D. Boden (London: California, 1994) 130.

reformation of geographical landscapes: social being actively emplaced in time *and* space, in an explicitly historical *and* geographical contextualisation (128).

The heterotopia is linked to history and human geography. In addition, language, in its protracted vibrant debate, is named by Jonathan Culler a “product of events” (*On Deconstruction* 95). Therefore, if language is a product of events and the heterotopia is viewed in the same way, could we say that they are a constitution of one and the same thing? If not, what alternative understanding of the literary heterotopia might we derive from our analysis, and how would it affect the possibilities of a more effective comprehension of Lorde’s writings?

In answer, Foucault takes an integrative route, rather than a deconstructive path, in which he balances history alongside discursive spatiality. If the heterotopia could be merely a point of rupture within a textual ‘product of events’, then we would witness a deconstruction of history. As Foucault states: “The spatialising description of discursive realities gives on to the analysis of related effects of power.”³⁰ Consequently, heterotopias are truly spatial arenas related to surrounding contingent events.

The “related effects of power” that inform Lorde’s writing, considered as a literary heterotopia, must surely be the endless process of monitoring, dialoguing, evaluating and encountering identity and its differences. However, in relation to her cancer, I do not wish to designate the task of relationality to writing: Lorde looks back as a person with cancer and states how she recognises her changed position; cancer changes her, but a retrospective understanding tells her that she was always writing about identity. Lorde’s words are life sentences which characterise with forcefulness the artistic response of a writer who allows herself to be directly affected by the powerful signifiers that constitute her. Her words are not about anger or survival, they do not set out to blame or contrive; rather, her life sentences are filled with an activism that informs us that we must enter the contingent and nowhere place from where we signify an identity that is never neutral.

³⁰ M. Foucault, “Questions on Geography,” in *Power/Knowledge* 77.

In all events, the space referred to here is very much linked to the one from which the writer is connected. Firstly, she does not envisage a utopian 'alternative' space; nor is the space that Lorde carves a reconstruction of a deconstructed discourse. Therefore, she constructs a personal narrative from between other spaces. Secondly, she remains within a real spatial environment in order to criticise it. However, there is no doubt at all that the most profound aspect of Lorde's work is her power to call forth in her audience a whole gamut of responses testifying not so much to a model persona, but to alternative, equally legitimate, acts of expression not suppressed by her work, but stimulated and enlivened by it.³¹ From her non-neutral resistant space, *Lorde shows that her texts not only translate conflict, but that her writing is that for which the struggle itself is conducted:*

What are the words you do not yet have? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence? Perhaps for some of you here today, I am the face of one of your fears. Because I am woman, because I am Black, because I am lesbian, because I am myself, a Black woman warrior poet doing my work, come to ask you are you doing yours? (*Journals* 13).

5. Conclusion

Lorde's image of the warrior is an apt emblem for a Foucauldian spatial hypothesis in which the body and conflict are the pre-text of change and resistance. Changes in the formation of space come about through resistance to place. The warrior woman might be seen as encoding the discontented space in which the woman wages an internal war with her own psychic division. Warrior-like she emblematises her acts of self-disclosure and confrontation through poetry and prose. Moreover, her antagonism provides a shifting ground for ideas that are fixed in relation to external surroundings and images. There is surely a recognition, then, that by applying the notion of an authorial spatiality we can construct the means to read from a different and less bound perspective. Thus, space is never neutral, and we cannot escape narrative form in the hope of operating within a utopian unsullied

³¹ Foucault claims that at the root of naming lies a power in which one's method of defining and analysing creates what he calls "the incitement to discourse" (in "Questions" 98). It is a rigorous method of codifying and authorising that is articulated into a strict definable discourse, and it "is already one of the prime effects of power that certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals" (98).

place. Rather, through the truly destabilising method of space, we encounter a non-neutral authorial spatiality that enables the critical reader to locate the resistant text and to go beyond master and discursive boundaries. Finally, Lorde rehearsed many times the narrative of closure (a sort of pre-posthumous narrative) – confronting prohibited space, space of exile, and the ultimate cessation, impending knowledge of death – and generated a political narrative that includes the reader.

It might also be added that Lorde's endeavour to confront material and historical conditions, in turn, translates into life sentences. Perhaps this is why exotic and body spaces are so different from the Kristevan representations of space I analyse in the preceding chapters. Heterotopias exclude the notion of the psyche, and consequently, in a resonance with what is 'out there', space is formulated through cultural friction to advance and revise practices. Furthermore, the heterotopia offers a sense of access to utopianism, as distinct from one of privation. Kristeva's theory of the semiotic *chora* concentrates on internal conflict and expresses the inner wrangling and self doubt brought on by a recognition of loss. Exotic and body spaces are sites of celebration rather than of "psychic splitting." This is most likely an effect of the utopian element in heterotopic thinking, which looks towards possibilities of resistance and transformation. Kristeva's theory of space, meanwhile, draws attention to the underpinning of artistic endeavour in the psychic emptiness of the semiotic *chora*. Even so, in whatever terms the processes are described, the semiotic *chora* and the heterotopia outline an act of resistance by which spaces are contested and renewed.

Conclusion

In "What Is an Author?" Foucault speaks of the "founders of discursivity" (114). Specifically, he mentions Marx and Freud: thinkers who are rare in their provision of a way for future discourses and social transformations to continue debating the varied material or psychological determinants of social reality. It is a fact that Marx and Freud are individually responsible for having had an unprecedented impact on the way we view the subject and society in contemporary historical analysis. That is not to say either one wrote their own canonical terms or invented the definitive narrative. But they did "expand a type of discursivity" (115) into structures and tenets of social-scientific methods that opened up to certain supplementary applications.

Although in relation to Kristeva and Foucault we are looking at radically different methods of inquiry for research, and while not claiming that they are founders of 'monumental' thought, they do offer a profoundly contending contribution to late twentieth-century postmodern opinion, which is to say, they provide the means by which to reflect upon the founding of discourses. As we remarked above, Kristeva declares that this is done "through the work and play of signs, a crisis of subjectivity which is the basis for all creation" ("Interview with Kristeva" 131-2), while Foucault asserts: "[Heterotopias] have a function in relation to all the space that remains.... To create a space of illusion that exposes every real space.... Or else ... to create a space that is other, another real space" ("Spaces" 27).¹ Taken together, Kristeva and Foucault are concerned with the creative processes of textuality and the subversion of established discursive boundaries. Therefore, what Kristeva and Foucault have managed simultaneously to theorise is the development of language through the means

¹ As Dumm says, "The heterotopia thus operates to compensate for the opening of space into infinity ... through which the connection of time to space can lead to a renegotiation of the limits of space through a creative reorganisation of the effects of time and place" (Dumm 40).

of spatial inquiry in which a transgression of both syntax and grammar takes place. It is through this means that I have been able to identify how resistant spaces come to be located in the expansion of literature and the fracturing of discursive boundaries.

The phrase “Wherein it [the text] comes to be” was cited in Chapter One where it acted as an important point for this thesis. It is a question Plato seemingly reflected on and one we ourselves, not without a little irony, are still pondering. As modern criticism would have it, it would appear that coming into being is a hazardous prospect in which writing is encased in an endless circulation of meta-narrative, death, and subscription. Kristeva and Foucault, who add to any disruption with their terms *intertextuality* and *transdiscursivity*, do not help the problems of either the causal or authorial subject. Consequently, when looking at their *œuvre* from a broader perspective, in one sense, they ostensibly obstruct the hypothetical entry of ‘the founding of discourse’. Yet, in another sense, a more intense concentration on the development of the author-subject has shown that they do indeed design theories in which to locate literary formation. However, because of their necessary appeal to space they each form strategies which displace any linear project and instill narratives of dispersion. Briefly, space becomes the instrument for the destabilisation of authorship. It must be quickly acknowledged, then, that where the literary formation of resistant space is concerned, Kristeva and Foucault point towards anteriority as a way of locating the possibilities beyond the limits of schematisation.

In concrete terms, Kristeva and Foucault resist, wholeheartedly, the founding of authorship and positioning. What they do do, however, is offer “numberless beginnings” (*Nietzsche, Genealogy* 81). This transformation has considerable consequences. To adopt Foucault’s earlier phrase “founders of discursivity”, the founding of a discursivity by the subject becomes a process in a developmental field of inscription, in which any inaugural initiation as first author is removed. Kristeva, more comfortable with the adoption of textuality, likewise disregards the notion of originality, but that is not to say either theorist in any way diminishes creativity or a subject position.² Indeed, I would argue

² Burke outlines the subject position of the author and argues with some effect how Kristeva describes ways in which the author exceeds his or her own position:

that one of the most important outcomes of this thesis has been to recognise the literary possibilities of using a Kristevan and Foucauldian spatial hypothesis for the purpose of naming the advent of newly created and resistant texts.

In short, the study of resistance and the formation of new literary spaces has tried to stress four considerations: the figurative features and theoretical structure of resistant space; resistance based upon the interpretative tactics of contingency and displacement; the disruptive possibilities that occur by way of semiotic and heterotopic performance; and the methodological possibilities of working with a spatial hypothesis.

How something comes to appear in time and place inadvertently makes reference to the notion of anteriority and the spaces outside of representation. How the structure of language as a stable syntactical and grammatical form shifts to establish new terms of expression and interpretation evokes the same. No doubt fundamentally such evocation concerns my way of approaching the question of resistant spaces and their literary formation. It is true that I have tried to keep in motion a spatiality that has not succumbed to the 'fixity' of discursive terms; yet any spatial hypothesis demands a certain degree of interpretative clarity. Therefore, it has been my aim throughout this thesis to offer an informing and applicatory strategy for reading Barnes and Lorde. Notwithstanding, while my terms may have been refined, the scope of hypothetical conjecture on Kristeva's part means that any stabilisation of terms has always been a challenge. For example, Kristeva is aware of the valuable resource of language as a means of communicating meaning; however, as an arbiter of language she knows that the word tends to replace the thing being described. For that reason she employs an associative rather than a logical argument, and an effective use of metaphor. Moreover, if the semiotic *chora* is a dramatic device used to describe an activity beyond the constraints of symbolic language, then meaning is delimited so that theoretical possibilities open up beyond the fixity of language.

Where identification has entirely abandoned the semiotic flux of the maternal language in favour of the rational linearity of the symbolic order, the writer will take up the position of the epic author or unitary, self present subject, whilst the writer who has retained a strong connection with the maternal *chora* will achieve a fluid and motile insertion in his or her texts (49).

In terms of the Kristevan chapters, then, translating the preconditions of symbolicity into valid signifying terms was not without its problems: how does one successfully describe inflection, loss, tone, whispering, and instability? Moreover, how does one successfully promote a methodology shaped by instability and psychic crisis? Nevertheless, once I discovered that intonation and mood could be translated through the enunciative terms of the semiotic *chora*, raised to the status of signification by the symbolic, it was easier to restate Kristeva's highly interiorising rhetoric into a theory that identified itself with the feminine. I felt I could embark upon a systematic discussion and make recommendations where I observed a questionable proposition.

In *Black Sun* Kristeva asked if mood could be translated into a language, and expressed it as a fantasy of hers as a melancholy theoretician to be able to convey the notion of the Thing through and beyond mourning. Kristeva does not conceive of this image in order to be a great or even effective analyst, rather, as was shown, she follows in the footsteps of those philosophers who equally grappled with the desire to name that which lies beyond meaning. Therefore, as analyst and linguist, Kristeva combined both areas of labour as a means by which to theorise the pre-sign. For the purposes of my study this was taken up in the Chapter entitled "Melancholic Space" in an effort to understand more adequately notions of creativity and the literary formation of resistance in *Nightwood*. This was achieved by taking the crucial formulation of melancholy as a component in the development of art and shifting the ground largely to identify the kinetic rhythmic cadences of the affective novel. It was argued that Robin was the personification of melancholy as a figure who, analogous to space, becomes the subject of a discourse beyond the constraints of the symbolic.

As with the further Kristevan chapters, I opened up the notions of positioning and female identity to an anteriority beyond time and place. Kristeva supported my endeavor in that her theory inculcated the position of the alienated and strange; moreover, it offered a space where the coding of woman determined by culture, class, and social mores was replaced by the pre-sign: the transgressive element in the thetic. I have argued that rather than leaving woman – about whom nothing can be said – outside of language and further removing female identity from self-definition, Kristeva has provided

a return to the maternal and recovered that which was lost – about which something *can* be said. I have shown through *Nightwood* that a transitional moment at the discursive juncture of writing must take place if the literary formation of resistance is to be achieved. Of course, because there is no ‘original’ site as such, the place where writing is wrought is marked by space: the breach in the crossroads, where the intersection of space and time meet, and at which point resistance trespasses upon thethetic. In order to define the characteristic aspects of transgression it was argued that *Nightwood* employed the indices of desire, incest, and absence to interrupt the linearity and fixity of a master discourse and articulate new literary forms.

The theme of embodiment of invention is continued in the final Kristevan Chapter where the notion of reality is contrasted with the multiple possibilities of characterisation, parody, and thematic structure in the novel. It has been said that Barnes, in effect, corrupted the notion of realist fiction with the representation of seeing things differently. To achieve this Barnes wrote over and against a phallogentric tradition. In a more precise and localised fashion, she employed textual strategies which displaced the structuring principles of identity and location, throwing her characters into crisis. Bestiality and nihilism hovered in the margins of nature and culture threatening to usurp the boundaries of normality and positioning. This, it has been argued, was precisely Barnes’ aim, for in order to disrupt the law of the father, one must enter in upon the disturbing range of the semiotic.

At length, what I have argued is that *Nightwood* could be read from a Kristevan perspective producing a feminist reading and locating spaces of resistance. An examination of *Nightwood* as a semiotic text approaches the novel in such a way that the compositional form of *langue* does not ‘overlay’ and determine resistant enunciation; instead the text’s looseness prevails over structural containment. This was an important exercise: striving to maintain a level of fluidity meant that a novel like *Nightwood*, which pitches itself beyond the constraints of the symbolic, is not confined by the processes of language. Furthermore, if, as I have argued, *Nightwood* is a novel of discontent, then its very flexibility means that it is characterised by *decomposition*, and not composition.

In effect, there has been a certain synchronicity at play here, since *Nightwood* as a novel of decomposition is interpreted by a theory whose implicit features contains all the negative associations of abjection.³ Hence, the correlative effects of both a theoretical position and a novel working together against the effects of objectivity means that there is a doubling of uncertainty and taboo. Perhaps, however, as Kristeva herself maintains, this is the power of horror where literature writes its own “version of the apocalypse that seems to [be] rooted, no matter what its socio-historical conditions might be, on the fragile border (borderline cases) where identities (subject/object, etc.) do not exist or only barely so – double, fuzzy, heterogeneous, animal, metamorphosed, altered subject” (207).

Of course, this incompleteness is essentially why I chose to formulate a spatial hypothesis: coming face to face with the unnamable as prohibited incest, mute melancholy, and dis-content, each separately represents the border between the spoken and the unspoken, the symbolic and the semiotic. However, apart from projecting an anteriority at the limits of their structures, there is also a reconciliation in the “*advent of language*” (*Powers* 61) where a new literary formation takes place. This is the ability to name not a pathology, but a new language. One that is learnt and one that welcomes the foreigner.

• It goes without saying that the ‘alien’ who hears the verbalisation, signification or demonstration of his or her own language experiences utter joy and recognizance. Barnes takes the place of the foreigner exiled from her country by writing the unsymbolisable, boundless text that performs at the limits of language, but that also shares a language with the estranged and foreigner.

Finally, the semiotic *chora*, also understood as a catalyst receptacle, secures a place for *Nightwood* as a novel that returns to the maternal, but unlike a return to the father, it does not infiltrate or formalise the novel; rather like gold that has been moulded into shapes, *Nightwood* still

³ To remind us of the excessive properties of the abject, I quote the opening sentence to *Powers of Horror*: “There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable” (1).

remains an unconfined text. Therefore, the novel is a recipient of impressions at which place the semiotic *chora* provides the opening for an articulation of resistance against the fixity of language.

The effect of resistance is similar in relation to the Foucauldian chapters, where it was argued that, like Kristeva, Foucault assigned the cause of resistance to an anterior space. Although Foucault's thinking is based much more upon the randomness of events, any transgressionary moment or design results from resistance to the organisatory structures of a stable discourse.

It seems to me that a theory without borders promotes a revolutionary potential which extends Foucault's spatial analysis and enables us to determine how Lorde functions as a resistant writer under the conditions in which she is placed. As we have learned, Lorde's authorial function is characterised by her ability to define cultural space and name her difference from it. Moreover, the notion of woman as a construction of anteriority in a master discourse was foregrounded and made politically valid. More importantly, the author function permitted an analysis in which a very definite literary design could be examined in relation to Barnes and Lorde. This removed any generalisation within the literary field and allowed a level of inquiry that enabled me to locate the "exercise of power" which Foucault claimed is so fundamental to space. The result was to understand the "possibilities of resistance" achieved by Lorde against the hegemonic social dimensions she repeatedly encountered.

Literary formation is thus the entry of resistance. As Lorde illustrated, her writing is a development of multiple structuration where the interconnections of space are characterised by heterotopic contingency. This was the background that enabled me to demonstrate that inasmuch as language is constituted by sites of textual disruption, it is necessarily resistant to order and containment. Hence, beyond spaces of design and containment there lies a threshold of contradiction, interpretation, and force.

It has been a question, then, of thinking about the relations of these sites and the outcomes of relational form. Accordingly, in Chapter Six it was found that the combination of the "mundane and the apocalyptic", and the real and the utopian, worked as an effective political device with which to

extend new possibilities in a type of transdiscursivity that, besides expressing estrangement and displacement, established new literary formations. In fact, it has been Lorde's authorial function in writing across history's trajectories that exposed her will to power, and underscored Foucault's expectations of the practice of liberty.

The project of a study of the literary formation of resistant spaces was linked to a desire on my part to analyse more closely the notion of anteriority and what, if anything, exists beyond the text. In the Introduction I set out to discover how certain discourses come about and the structuring of resistance. It was also my aim to find out why discourses are arranged in such a way that they transgress the boundaries of language as a stable system. To be sure, what I found was a language that, far from being stable or governing, was as much a motility of dispersion and possibility, where projects were spatialised at every point. However, what is required for any resistance is personal intervention where the author cuts through a phallogentric, or master, narrative, and challenges events beyond "all formal limits of grammar". Therefore, the last chapter examined the personal undermining of culture's potent narratives, by the self-reflexive performance of Lorde's own experience with cancer.

Foucault maintained that any exercise of power depends upon how the body is positioned in history. Moreover, the female body, as we understand it in contemporary theory, is the locus of continuous debate based on the spatial elaboration of positioning: where we more readily recognise that identity is founded on exteriority rather than interiority. Therefore, the question of "what place a subject occupies in each type of discourse" was central to this thesis as it summarised the notion that the conditions for the possibility of new literary formations relied on position and response to the discursive surrounds of any authorial production.

In saying this, the Chapter concentrated on the "superposition of the body" and "a grammar of signs" that interweaved in perpetual recomposition. This was taken up in the most literal sense examining the body politics pertaining to Lorde's personal experience with cancer. She formulated a "rhetorics of the self" from her encounter with the cultural and clinical codes used in the management

of the body. As a supreme act of resistance, Lorde rejected the discursive requests that she should conform to the accepted body symmetry of woman as a sign system. Instead, she responded by questioning the position she should occupy in each type of discourse.

What this achieved was a resistance based upon the interpretative tactics of displacing the position discursive structures forced her to occupy. These moments of resistance served to formulate new terms of expression and open up dialogue with 'real' space. It is the type of writerly production that Foucault recognised as being "formed in the very founding of our society". Therefore, through an analysis of the heterotopia, I was able to examine the contingent functions of new literary formations by a writer who questioned her position from "inside a set of relations".

Whatever their differences, Kristeva and Foucault share the belief that literature is unique among the mimetic arts, in that it is the only one to afford the possibility of escaping representation as such. This is so through the possibility of creating resistant spaces, or spaces which "will ensure a lucid denial", in Foucault's words. This thesis has focussed on those points of convergence between Kristeva and Foucault in order to describe the kind of space that emerges when literature is opened to a form of positive or affirmative denial. Djuna Barnes and Audre Lorde each in their own way demonstrate an alternative means of expressing women's resistance in the face of the patriarchal hierarchies which have dominated Western discourse, means which, in their praxis, do full justice to the theoretical paradigm breached by Kristeva and Foucault.

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