

The world ... as force of separation

— RACHEL BESPALOFF

Time [is] the sword that cuts the soul in two

— SIMONE WEIL

For us, the search for modernity emerges distinctively from separation.

— RENÉ MÉNIL

Abbreviations

<i>BANP</i>	<i>The Book of American Negro Poetry</i>
<i>BANS</i>	<i>The Book of American Negro Spirituals</i>
<i>BR</i>	<i>Black Reconstruction</i>
<i>Cahiers</i>	<i>Cahiers pour une morale</i>
<i>Damnés</i>	<i>Les Damnés de la terre</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>Dictée</i>
<i>DD</i>	<i>Dusk of Dawn</i>
<i>EHT</i>	Jean Wahl, <i>Existence humaine et transcendance</i> (Neuchâtel: Editions de la Baconnière, 1944)
<i>FP</i>	<i>Fleuve profond, sombre rivière: Les "Negro Spirituals", commentaires et traductions</i>
Hegel	G.W.F. Hegel, <i>Phénoménologie de l'esprit</i> , trans. Jean Hyppolite (Paris: Aubier, 1941), vols I and II
Hyppolite	Jean Hyppolite, <i>Genèse et structure de la Phénoménologie de l'esprit de Hegel</i> (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1946), vols I and II
<i>NN</i>	<i>The New Negro</i>
<i>PN</i>	<i>Peau noire, masques blancs</i>
<i>SBF</i>	<i>The Souls of Black Folk</i>

INTRODUCTION

Transcendence and the Work of Separation

The infinite is *not* something in general that is beyond what we know as actual. It is the fact that what is beyond the finite comes back, and accomplishes a return to the finite and keeps on doing this, that makes it a true infinity.¹

— C.L.R. JAMES, *Notes on Dialectics*

This book is a set of studies of separation as a feature of the experience of aesthetic modernity. Though undoubtedly influenced by accounts of the structural dimension of modernity developed by Anthony Giddens and Michel Foucault (the development of the nation-state complex, the monopolization of violence by the governing authority of the nation-state, that modernity understood as the process of modernization, the passage from the *ancien régime*, is underwritten by industrialization of which capitalism is a by-product), the studies in the book are not first and foremost concerned with this structural dimension of modernity, but instead with the aesthetic dimension of experience under modernity and as such, it will be argued, experiences in an aporetic relationship with the structural dimension of modernity. The works studied – Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée*, the Sorrow Songs/Negro Spirituals, W.E.B. Du Bois and Frantz Fanon on the question of splitting and the work of separation – enable an approach that moves between the structural and the aesthetic as a relation marked by incommensurability and aporia. With the concluding essay on Fanon, temporality and the question of man (*l'homme en question*, as

1 C.L.R. James, *Notes on Dialectics: Hegel, Marx, Lenin* (1948) (London: Allison and Busby, 1980), 102.

Fanon's French would put it), beginning with an account of the American and English-language reception of Fanon, this becomes a reflection on the Hegelian conception of separation and *Bildung* in Fanon's thought, before leading to a sustained account of measure and the missed dimension of Fanon's preoccupation with the idea of technical Europe.

Conceptually and methodologically, the essays in the book are situated within a tradition and style of reading represented in the Anglo-American tradition by J.H. Prynne and Stanley Cavell,² and in the French tradition of critical theory and philosophical reflection by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, that is: with early Romanticism a mode of thought and poetic presentation is instituted that makes of the poem and the work of art works of thought, works which pose a challenge to philosophical thought and which cannot but be philosophical even as they are not only philosophy, and to which philosophy must make recourse even as philosophy is not poetry, nor art. Critical theory is that style of thought which has emerged in the attempt to understand, to comprehend Romantic and post-Romantic works which pose such challenges, crossing limits, performativities and genres (of form and experience). Within this tradition of critical theory, the *subject* of critical theory can be society and power and the modes by which society reproduces itself through the management of its subjects thereby making of critical theory an exercise in unmasking, demystification. This is the tradition of Young Hegelian thought as developed by the early members of the Frankfurt School in the late 1920s and 1930s and subsequently Louis Althusser and certain post-structuralists (as they came to be known in Anglo-American intellectual culture): the *subject* of philosophy was the bourgeois subject of modernity which had reached its form in the philosophy of German Idealism.³ In shifting the emphasis of investigation from the internal structures in the formation of the subject – in its Kantian formulation: what are the formal conditions that must be met for there to be experience of an object? – to the histori-

2 Charles Altieri is a figure of more than passing interest here for his concentration on the fabric of works as bearing the philosophical dimension of the work, a conception that Altieri correctly sees as not only post-Romantic but properly post-*symboliste*.

3 Cf. Herbert Marcuse, "Philosophy and Critical Theory" (1937), in *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 134–158.

cal and material conditions for the appearance (or epiphenomenon) of subjecthood – what Althusser would famously characterize as a *process without a subject* – modern critical theory in its materialist mode had fulfilled the Young Hegelian call for a demystification of religious thought through constant *critique*.⁴

At issue, both in its Kantian as well as its materialist critical theoretic formulation, is the role and nature of time and temporality: as inner form of the manifold or as representations of the movement of commodity reification. In this respect, as Jürgen Habermas observed, given the role of time in any discourse of modernity, “We remain contemporaries of the Young Hegelians,”⁵ for the Young Hegelians are the ones who effected the secularization of the Hegelian movement of sublation in such a way as to foreground, emphasize the moments of separation and division as not only historical but quasi-transcendental forms. For this reason there is another approach to the *subject* of critical theory – to be found, for example, in the works of Cavell, Prynne and Lacoue-Labarthe which will inform the approach of *Logics of Separation* – in which poetic works, densely structured, historically layered can be read (always provisionally) as epistemological and, indeed, ontological allegories of the encounters of subjecthood, where the formal procedures of rhetoricity are means for the encoding, not of what a system needs to transmit for its continuance, but of what has not yet achieved form, of what, precisely, is the object of suppression – and may be subsequently *repression* – by system; of what is in tension with system. This other tradition of the critical theory of subjecthood – as developed in Lacoue-Labarthe’s *La Poésie comme expérience* (1986), for example, or his earlier *Le sujet de la philosophie: Typographies I* (1979), Prynne’s *Stars, Tigers and the Shape of Words* (1993) and Charles Altieri’s *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry* (1989) – reads the poetic work as a set of processes of the *emergence and trials* of subjection into subjecthood, of failings and failures, and so approaches the form

4 Cf. David McLellan, “The Transition from Thought to Action,” in *The Young Hegelians* (London: Macmillan, 1978), 9–11.

5 Jürgen Habermas, “Three Perspectives: Left Hegelians, Right Hegelians, and Nietzsche,” in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 53.

of the work not as a formalism exterior to content but as a staging of the mimesis of as yet uncaptured forces and energies, energies and forces always linked to a world: here, for example, will be situated the reading of the Sorrow Songs as poetic experience. In his preface to *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, James Weldon Johnson spoke of “the ‘spirituals,’ or slave songs [through which] the Negro has given America not only its only folksongs, but a mass of noble music.” In 1926 he would edit *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* accompanied with an important preface in which he spoke with great sensitivity of the experience and “pang of separation” (20); yet he would also write:

What can be said about the poetry of the texts of the Spirituals? Naturally, not so much as can be said about the music. In the use of the English language both the bards and the group worked under limitations that might appear to be hopeless. Many of the lines are less than trite, and irrelevant repetition often becomes tiresome. (*The Book of American Negro Spirituals*, 38)

And all the while Johnson acknowledges that there is poetry. In Chapter 3, “Painful Time: A Reading of Poetic Experience in the Sorrow Songs,” following through certain hints and suggestions by Zora Neale Hurston, the sounding and acoustic texture of the sorrow songs, right down to their use of repetition and naïveté (Johnson), are explored in terms of a form of poetic experience made possible in its *reception* by Romanticism and Modernist techniques: the recovery of folk music; the pre-occupation with the archaic within the modern; the understanding of noise as cathartic but also spiritual (cf. Rudolph Otto, “Original Numinous Sounds,” *The Idea of the Holy*, 1923 in the context of Russian Futurist and Dada sound poems); and the semantic and affective comprehension of repetition and texture in the articulation of subjection, one of the significations of sorrow (*‘douleur’*) as psychic pain. To this end, another way of reading the sorrow songs is as a tissue – a weaving – of affective movements against what is readily articulable, as expressive movement of a threshold experience of pain: pain as diremption, as separation and, following Lacoue-Labarthe and Heidegger, pain (sorrow) as *dif-ference* – when I am in pain I am shattered, broken – yet as cry of joy where incommensurables of domains are cleaved together in division, whence the dif-ference of pain. Hurston emphasized this aspect of the songs:

Negro singing and formal speech are breathy. The audible breathing is part of the performance and various devices are resorted to adorn the breath taking. Even the lack of breath is embellished with syllables. This is, of course, the very antithesis of white vocal art. [...] Breathing must be hidden. Negro song ornaments both the song and the mechanics. It is said of a popular preacher, "He's got a good straining voice."⁶

So, too, did St Augustine, in commenting on Psalm 94, saying that there is a kind of joy "that words could in no way express [...]; jubilation is not speaking, it is breathing without words a cry of joy."⁷ It is this liminal space of joy, suffering and sorrow-in-movement that is mimetic yet not wholly a function of the semiotic that will be explored.

Finally, it is within this contexture that we shall situate the broader understanding of *aesthetic*. When the word *aesthetic* is used as part of the expression *aesthetic modernity* – an expression perhaps somewhat more common in German-language and post-Marxist cultural critique (Peter Bürger, Peter Szondi, Eugene Lunn, Fredric Jameson) – it is not a faded aestheticism that is intended; rather, the term aesthetic is being deployed in its etymological sense as this was re-introduced with the origins of Aesthetic Theory in Alexander Baumgarten and Romanticism as developed in Kant's conception of the sublime as unboundedness, that is, to connote *aisthesis*: sensuous experience, a mode of experience at the threshold of form and formlessness, at the moment of immediate experience and mediation, at the juncture of the definite and the indefinite. In the development associated with Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, the term Presentation (*Darstellung*) is the name for the problematic of the aesthetic. As such, the set of studies proposed in *Logics of Separation* valorizes certain forms of experience which foreground the materiality of expression and the fragility of ex-istence and ex-perience, where meaning pivots upon the threshold of immanence and transcendence, where trauma is ever present, where experience is a threshold experience; hence the emphasis, from beginning to end on song and forms of vocalization where questions of mediation, separation and

6 Zora Neale Hurston, "Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals," in Nancy Cunard and Hugh Ford, eds, *Negro: An Anthology* (1932), 224 (abridged reprint).

7 Quoted in Pierre Kaufmann, *L'Expérience émotionnelle de l'espace* (Paris: Vrin, 1967), 82.

the work of the negative are present in what the young American poet of Korean descent Theresa Hak Kung Cha (Chapter 1, “Towards a Reading of the Poetics of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictée*”) characterized in her prose poetic cycle *Dictée* (1982) as the state “suspended between song and speech” (D. 162), where “Our destination is fixed on the perpetual motion of search. Fixed in its perpetual exile” (D. 81).

Cha (born in Pusan, Republic of Korea, 1951, died in New York, 1982) was a poet, film-maker, and performance artist, best known for her posthumously published prose-poetic récit *Dictée* which, after recognition within the avant-garde circles of San Francisco and New York of which she was an integral part, fell into silence before being taken up by a new generation of commentary concerned with issues and questions of Asian-American identity and gender. In the wide-ranging interpretation here proposed of Cha’s poetics, *Dictée* is explored as a powerful poetics born of a fusion of structural film and emerging film theory, French modernist writing, and early post-modern American poetry that provides the young Cha with the language to construct a form of autobiography as récit (narrative) and to articulate affects of exile, pain, madness, sickness along with shamanistic possession and assorted secondary states (*logics of separation*) in the exploration of the materiality of language as a medium at once projective and recursive, hence a conception of poetic language inevitably close to the hermeneutics of religious potency. This leads to an account of the experience underlying *Dictée* as an experience of re-birth in the recovery of the fragility of natality as itself an image for the recovery of the *place and idea* of Korea. In addition to a sustained examination of the role of form, and the concern with the nature of communication, close attention is paid to Cha’s use of sound imagery and imagery of song to articulate forms of identity beyond the socially sanctioned, drawing upon experiences of (Shamanistic) displacement / separation, and the maternal *archaic* in the psychic sense of this term in order to articulate what her models – Beckett, Yourcenar, Duras, and Korean Shamanism – made possible, namely, that exile is something carried always with one: *L’exil n’est point d’hier* (exile is not from/of yesterday).

Throughout, this book explores the role of sounds as archaic, as modes of prepredicative experience, as means by which the texture of a world – a

cultural, psychological and spiritual world – comes to be constructed or de-structured in the elaboration of modes of cultural and psychological potencies – for we *are* potencies and do not *have* identities – something of the kind characterized by Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* as the *underworld of sound*: Zora Neale Hurston emphasized the role of sound texture in the performance of the Sorrow Songs; Cha’s work self-referentially cites itself as a form of Sprechstimme, neither song nor speech, yet speech as song, and song as speech; and the Sorrow Songs in their sounding embody the desire for transcendence as well as the fear of ontological abandonment.⁸

The third sense [of the negative] – which is more difficult to conceive – refers to the state of a thing which, contrary to appearances, continues to exist even when it is no longer perceptible by the senses, not only in the exterior world, but also in the interior world (of consciousness). It refers to the notion of *absence*, of *latence*.⁹

Mind, said Hegel [...] cannot find itself and cannot arrive at the absolute save by division.¹⁰

In its most customary usage Logic is the discipline or mode of thought concerned with relations of inference and the formal inter-relationships within a given structure. In its Hegelian sense, Logic is also concerned with relations of inference and structure, but also with the movement of experience in relation to the emergence and sublation of the concept, though experience is not here first and foremost psychological: historical formation (encompassing the German concept of *Bildung*: that is, formation, development, cultivation, just to give a few of the readily available senses

8 Two studies which were originally intended for this book, dealing with cast sounds in Jorie Graham and the impact of Wallace Stevens’ conception of sounding and music on the poetry of J.H. Prynne, will appear elsewhere. Though the problematic of sounding in each is consistent with this book, the tone was no longer fitting the direction that the book had taken on.

9 André Green, “Aspects du négatif: sémantique, linguistique, psychique,” in *Le Travail du négatif* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1993), 30.

10 Jean Wahl, *Le Malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel* (Paris: Rieder, 1929), 138.

of this complex German term¹¹) as well as the residues that constrain the movement of formation. When, in the *Logic*, Hegel asserts that ordinary logic errs in declaring that reason excludes contradiction from itself, he does little more, in one sense, than to develop certain ideas from the romanticism of his youth, such as Novalis' insistence – but it could also be Blake – that to “Destroy the principle of contradiction is perhaps the highest task of the result contradiction.”¹² As Jules Monnerot develops this argument in an essay on Hegel, Marx and Romanticism, a true logic must include the Platonic notion of the participation of the Same and the Other (thus speaks Monnerot, not Deleuze, but both are Nietzscheans), the One and the Many, the Identical and the Different, whence Monnerot's declaration on the Hegelian – and Marxist – dialectic that would capture this higher logic, that it is a “veritable *intellectual dramaturgy*” (Jules Monnerot, “Marx et le romantisme,” *Cahiers du Sud*, 158). From this, Hegelian thought addresses the dimension of trajectories, and the role of contradictory movement. When emphasis is placed upon the movement of formation, and not, thus, the end product of a movement, then process and emergence become the figures of attention, above all where the *milieu*, the between (or the *entre* in the language of Jean-Bertrand Pontalis) or interval becomes operative, that is, itself an agency.

The Hegelian logic of movement has long been seen to underwrite certain processes of the unconscious: the work of the negative, mediation and separation. Long before André Green's studies on the work of the negative, or Jean Hyppolite's Commentary on (Freudian) negation (*Verneinung*) in Jacques Lacan's *Séminaire*, Jean Wahl, who wrote the first of the modern books in the Hegel revival in the late 1929, went so far as to observe that “The idea of movement cannot be understood in fact except in relation to that of negativity [...], or rather, the two ideas imply each other

11 Cf. W.H. Bruford, *The German Tradition of Self-Cultivation: “Bildung” from Humboldt to Thomas Mann* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

12 Novalis, quoted in Jean Wahl, “Novalis et le Principe de Contradiction.” *Cahiers du Sud*, vol. XVI, May–June 1937, *Le Romantisme allemand*, 192. Cf. the Invisible Man of Ralph Ellison who says of contradiction that “that [...] is how the world moves: Not like an arrow, but a boomerang.” Ralph Ellison, “Prologue,” *Invisible Man* (New York: Random House, 1952), 5.

and ultimately form one: negativity is incompleteness [...], the movement of life, or as Hegel said, the immanent pulsation of the spontaneous movement of vitality.¹³ Movement: as song, as expression, as exile; as negation: and this negation modalized as mediation, as separation, as negativity. The work of the negative is productive of difference, to be sure, but also at the same time, different and differing forms of separation, each capable of a different logic of separation.¹⁴ Exile, the approach of madness, pain, the felt distance between immanence and transcendence (the Sorrow Songs), alienation, the splitting of the self in formation (Frantz Fanon), the self lost in or recovered through music, or, finally, sound (the subject in disoriented shock in Cha's *Dictée*): these are some of the forms of separation which will be studied in relation to exile and transcendence as a distinct moment of the aesthetic experience of modernity.

Separation: Childhood and Symbolization

There is built into the term *separation* both an image of distance – at once affective and physical – and a process of becoming-distance. Originally, comments Pierre Boutang, the word *separation* meant to wean (*sevrer*, in French), to distance the child from the maternal breast.¹⁵ Much work in psycho-analysis – Klein, Lacan, Green, Pontalis – has taken the phenomenon of separation as the terrain for making sense of the Hegelian claim that contradiction cannot be excluded from the powers of the mind at the level of the unconscious, that, indeed, separation builds the mind through contradiction and cognate formations, has built into it such contradiction

- 13 Wahl, "Médiation, négativité et séparation," in *Le Malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel*, 127–128.
- 14 Cf. Wladimir Granoff, "Du dehors et du dedans," *La Pensée et le féminin* (Paris: Minuit, 1976), 225.
- 15 Cf. Pierre Boutang, *Ontologie du secret* (Paris: PUF, 1973), 48.

as the basis for symbolization. Without separation, without the distance built upon separation, there can be no symbolization and thus no thinking. Kierkegaard, no less than Ellison, worked the paradoxes inherent to the processes of separation. Consider that child-rearing recognizes the dangers to the healthy development of the child of excessive proximity and dependence on the parental figure(s). In weaning the child from the breast, there is set in motion a whole complex set of terms based upon separation: the child must gradually learn to accept distance from the breast, learn to be able to sustain the absence of the breast, learn to overcome – learn to suppress – its desire for the breast, and at the same time that these acquisitions are being made, the child must learn that its anger – its fury in the sensuous experience, the sensuality of separation and becoming separatedness – will not be finally, definitively destructive (whether of the bad breast or the mother-figure which withholds itself and its treasures, or even destructive of itself), must learn, that is, to curb its anger and, more powerfully, its narcissism. (Primary narcissism is the first victim of this act of separation.) Separation from the breast, the tolerance for separation and distance from the parental figure(s), is, indeed, a condition for the emergence of autonomy on the part of the child, is also a condition for the quality of the emergence of language (the principal but by no means the only thing meant by symbolization), and the quality, kind and nature of abstract thought that is a function of distance. And yet, we do not need to turn to the conceptualities of a Klein to grasp – to feel – the trauma of separation for the child and parental figure in the processes and experience of separation and the dangers that traces of the traumatic separation will be left – active, resistant, *implanted* – in the unconscious of the child: it is the danger, this paradox, from Kierkegaard to Ellison, to Maurice Blanchot drawing upon Serge Leclair that is recognized in the idea that language, the possibility of language – and the hence introduction into a fully historical community – requires the death of the child as a lived phenomenon in the processes of psychic emergence. Later in this book – in our closing chapter on Fanon – we shall invoke one of the traditional readings of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* to explicate one version of the idea of a suspension of the ethical, but here, let us stay closer to Kierkegaard's words and readily available diction which situate his multiply perspectival reading of the story

of Abraham's being commanded (or tempted?) to sacrifice Isaac from its opening at the level of the child: "Once upon a time." Here is the opening of the "Exordium" by Kierkegaard writing as Johannes de Silentio:

Once upon a time there was a man who as a child had heard that beautiful story of how God tempted [*fristede*] Abraham and of how Abraham withstood temptation [*Fristelsen*], kept the faith, and, contrary to expectation, got a son a second time. When he grew older, he read the same story with even greater admiration, for life had fractured what had been united in the pious simplicity of the child.¹⁶

The diction attunes one to the level of the child – listening – and thereby to the most archaic of faculties, hearing, and so enacts a regression, within which there is evolution ("how Abraham withstood temptation"), separation ("for life had fractured what had been united"), and once more regression. The story is then told from four differing perspectives and each time it ends with a scene of primal separation, the child being weaned from the breast:

A

When the child is to be weaned, the mother blackens her breast. It would be hard to have the breast look inviting when the child must not have it. So the child believes that the breast has changed, but the mother – she is still the same, her gaze is tender and loving as ever. How fortunate the one who did not need more terrible means to wean the child!¹⁷

B

When the child has grown big and is to be weaned, the mother virginally conceals her breast, and then the child no longer has a mother. How fortunate the child who has not lost his mother in some other way!¹⁸

16 Søren Kierkegaard/Johannes de Silentio, "Exordium," in *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 9.

17 Kierkegaard, "Exordium," 11.

18 Kierkegaard, "Exordium," 12.

C

When the child is to be weaned, the mother, too, is not without sorrow, because she and the child are more and more to be separated, because the child who first lay under her heart and later rested upon her breast will never again be so close. So they grieve together the brief sorrow. How fortunate the one who kept the child so close and did not need to grieve anymore.¹⁹

D

When the child is to be weaned, the mother has stronger sustenance at hand so that the child does not perish. How fortunate the one who has this stronger sustenance at hand.²⁰

In one sense, what is given in these four passages – these commentaries – on separation from the breast is not only an allegory of separation but more particularly an allegory of the *childhood of religion*: (A) the blackened breast as the magic signified in the sudden transformation of matter; (B) the disappearance of the mother for the terms of absence; (C) the shared grief, the shared sorrow of separation for two beings bound in love and absence; and finally, (D) the implied presence of sacrifice of the mother who would give of herself (the “stronger sustenance at hand so that the child does not perish”). All are underwritten by the form of separation as re-moval, of separation as ex-pulsion, and thereby the traces of separation become the first mark of exile, the ground and form for all subsequent acts of nostalgia. (In Kierkegaardian terms, there is no repetition, no project of futurity which cannot be marked by nostalgia. Saint-John Perse, in his poem *Anabase* (1924), would express this in the simple declamation that: “L’exil n’est point d’hier! L’exil n’est point d’hier!”) Each moment of the allegory, each moment of the commentary carries forward into the other until we see that the phenomenon of weaning, the phenomenon of separation, is that complex compact of semblance triggered by the need for separation, and thus gives the example of desire defeating desire. The invocation: *How*

19 Kierkegaard, “Exordium,” 13.

20 Kierkegaard, “Exordium,” 14.

fortunate the one who ... may then be construed as pointing to the fragility no less than the violence of the process which may render the child to no thing at any moment that an aspect of the compact of separation may fail or find itself unraveling. The threat of no thing bespeaks, too, the primal void consubstantial with the necessity of separation, whence, finally, the threat of abandonment at the heart of Christian experience as understood by Hegel, Kierkegaard (for whom it is meaningless to say that one could be *born* Christian) no less, as we shall see, than the experience of diremption embodied, re-lived in the experience of what Du Bois characterized as Sorrow Songs, that is, the Negro Spirituals.

Above I had quoted Jules Monnerot on the experience of the dialectic as captured in the Hegelian conception of Logic as a *veritable intellectual dramaturgy* which would encompass movements of contradiction *incorporating* the Same and the Other, the One and the Many, the Identical and the Different; here, in turning to Ralph Ellison, I should like to extend this intellectual dramaturgy to the terms of a *drama of symbolization*, the basis of which, as Wahl has been clear in his Kierkegaard studies, is the conception of *Aufhebung*: that which makes possible operations of cancellation, negation, transformation, without being wholly lost itself in the process. It is my argument here, following on from my account of separation through Kierkegaard's situating of separation in terms of a childhood of religion – in terms of primal void, withdrawal, or radical abandonment – that what psycho-analysis brings to the Hegelian conception of the work of the negative (and relatedly *Aufhebung*) is an account of what is *implanted* into the unconscious, of what in the unconscious is resistant to translation, resistant, that is, to representation, something which in being resistant to representation can thus border on the psychotic – is indeed, on a stronger argument, a necessarily psychotic core or kernel of all human experience – but also something which no less borders on the transcendent as a mirror of what in the object-world is itself also resistant to representation, where, that is, transcendence is both movement and limit of movement that ruptures totality and thus any notion of interior as separate from exteriority. Ellison's posthumously published work *Juneteenth* (1999) gives a remarkable performance of this problem through the death of the child as a condition for the work of symbolization.

A Drama of Symbolization: Ralph Ellison's *Juneteenth*

Psycho-Analytic practice is based upon a putting into play of *the constant work of a death force: that which consists of killing the marvelous (or terrifying) child which, from generation to generation, bears witness to the dreams and desires of parents; there is no life save at the price of the murder of the first, strange image in which is inscribed the birth of every one.* [...] The marvelous child, is at first the nostalgia of the look of the mother which has made of it an extreme splendor [...]; but it is also and already the abandoned one, lost in total dereliction.²¹

I say, Bliss, that all this time I should have been praying for you, back there *all torn up inside* by those women's hands. [...] I prayed the wrong prayer. I left you out, Bliss, and I guess right then and there you started to *wander*. But you, I left you in some of the sisters' hands and you misbehaved. Bliss, you was the one who needed praying for and I neglected you ...²²

[A]ll life is divided and [...] only in division is there true health.²³

There is in Ralph Ellison, from beginning to end, a radical language of separation, which is to say, a language and conceptuality of surprising turns and depth working at the anthropological level, the vehicle of which is a metaphoric of separation as part of a thinking of separation *in terms of the family*. One marked aspect of this language of separation in Ellison is through the persistence in his literary work of the image of being torn, of bodies being dismembered, though what is most telling about this image is that it never records something empirical, but something psychic. We observe it, for example, in the katabasis scene – the passage of descent – in the “Prologue” to *Invisible Man* where, entered into an *état secondaire*, after the preaching interlude on “Black is ... an' black ain't,” *Invisible Man*

21 Serge Leclair, *On tue un enfant* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), 11. All italics in original.

22 Ralph Ellison, *Juneteenth* (New York: Random House, 1999), 172. My emphases.

23 Ralph Ellison, “Epilogue,” *Invisible Man*, 435.

encounters an old woman singing and moaning the spirituals (“Go curse your God, boy, and die”). He learns that she had had many sons by her now dead white master. Her song is, then, grief, indeed, we are to infer, perpetual grief: to the question “*Why do you moan?*” she answers: “*I moan this way ‘cause he’s dead,*” at the same time that her sons from the dead master are upstairs laughing, in which laughter she shares by saying: “*I laughs too, but I moans too.*”²⁴ The Invisible Man rightly sees this as ambivalence – and the scene goes on to establish this ambivalence in love and hate, too – indeed a constitutive ambivalence that incorporates a living death as mark of ordinary loss and emptiness – this language is wholly Ellison’s as we find in an earlier passage the Invisible Man observing (Socratically) that “to be unaware of one’s form is *to live* a death.”²⁵ Even when Invisible Man proposes that freedom, which the dead master had promised but never delivered to his other family, consists in hating, the moaning woman replies with the astonishing image: “*Naw, son, it’s in loving. I loved him and gave him the poison and he withered away like a frost-bit apple. Them boys woulda tore him to pieces with they homemade knives.*”²⁶ The boys did not tear the father-master to pieces, but it was in them to do so psychically and would remain so implanted in them, just as we shall see that the boy-preacher Bliss, in Ellison’s posthumously published (and unfinished) work *Juneteenth*, was not empirically torn to pieces like a Dionysus-Zagreus by his own women flock, but he felt himself to be, and his adopted-Zeus father, Hickman, came to see him as being “all torn up inside by those women’s hands,”²⁷ and that sensation would remain implanted within him, would, indeed,

24 Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 9. Italics in original. We might here compare this old woman moaning the spirituals to the old woman – that is, the ageless woman – on whom the song of the world as weight alights in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*. Cf. Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1925).

25 Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 6. My emphasis.

26 Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 9.

27 Ellison, *Juneteenth*, 172. Of course there are many cases where Zeus will arrange marriages and liaisons without the knowledge of key players, for example Persephone’s being given to Pluto without the knowledge of her mother, Demeter, whose sorrow is then paid for by others.

remain enigmatic to him. This is the terrain of separation, expulsion and symbolization, something made clear in the “Epilogue” to *Invisible Man*, the whole of which may be read as a meditation upon separation – “Weren’t we *part of them* as well as apart from them and subject to die when they die?”²⁸ – marked by the diction of Kierkegaard:

I carried my sickness and though for a long time I tried to place it in the outside world, the attempt to write it down shows me that at least half of it lay within me.²⁹

It is a language marked throughout by a tragic anthropological vision, and in *Juneteenth* it is one of the most stunning performances in modern literature of the role of symbolization, or, to be more precise, of the role of dying, separation and sacrifice in the framework of the family – the family as foundationally marked by division and suspect transmission – as the condition for symbolization. There are three senses of symbolization that will be deployed in this account: (i) symbolization as separation (from the maternal parental presence as discussed above in relation to Kierkegaard); (ii) symbolization as the repression of childhood; and (iii) symbolization as the death of the child, that is, the killing of the primal image or representation of primary narcissism.

The story unfolded in *Juneteenth* is not difficult to relate, and its power in Ellison’s handling in part derives from this fact, its emblematic nature, if you will. A white baby boy, who will be called Bliss, is adopted into the family of a black preacher, Hickman, by whom he is raised as a child preacher, and a very successful one, too. All is well in this world, all is seamless, until the sudden appearance – in chapter eight – of a white woman claiming Bliss as her own child stolen from her by “*gipsy niggers*.” It is through this event that the young Bliss becomes self-aware of his whiteness and not long thereafter he breaks with Daddy Hickman and all aspects of the Black world and *passes* as white, becoming a successful Senator

28 Ellison, “Epilogue,” *Invisible Man*, 434.

29 Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 434. On Ellison’s deployment of Kierkegaard – and Existential thought – cf. Lawrence Jackson, “The Black Kafka and the Fight against Reality: 1951,” in *Ralph Ellison: The Emergence of Genius* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2002), 421–431.

with an especial hatred for Blacks. All the while, Hickman's network of Churches and believers keep track of the Senator – that is, they watch over him – when it is learned that there is a plot by a Negro to assassinate him. They try to reach him to warn him, but fail to do so and he is shot whilst delivering a speech on the Senate floor. He is not killed, but knocked into unconsciousness. Hickman manages to reach him, to be by his side, where he speaks to him as he moves in-and-out of consciousness.

In situating the type of drama that is performed in *Juneteenth*, it is as well to observe, especially from chapter four onward, that (i) the action unfolds in the horizontal plane as (ii) a threshold experience with Bliss “in a region of grays” (*Juneteenth*, 40) dominated by the most archaic of senses: hearing. There is much in the disposition of the horizontal Bliss, fading in-and-out of consciousness, listening to, following the tone, timbre and acoustic geometry of the voice – the materiality of the voice – of Hickman that is redolent of the dying Virgil in Hermann Broch's *The Death of Virgil* (*Der Tod des Virgil*, 1945). Throughout, Bliss is at the point of varying thresholds: acoustic, imaginal, perceptual, phenomenological; below and above awareness; always in-and-out of descent, that is, for Ellison who thinks in mythico-anthropological terms, *katabasis*. As such, Bliss is a figure of division and separation: in existential terms (in flight from ...), in cultural terms (a refusal of prior identities), yet caught in a matrix of fissured identifications shaped by and articulated through national myths in the process of becoming inoperant in conditions of crisis. Before the gunshot that sends the Senator into an extended *état secondaire* – an *état secondaire* like the Virgil of Broch's *The Death of Virgil* – the phenomenological transition is pre-figured by his losing his grasp, his mastery of language, as though there is an oncoming epileptoid attack, or a neurological diminution like a stroke as intention pulses back and forth with unawareness, with moments of deadness, which force him to think “*Am I drunk, going insane?*” (*Juneteenth*, 17):

his voice seemed controlled by the stop-and-go fluctuations of a hyper-sensitive time-delay switch, forcing him to monitor his words seconds after they were uttered and feeding them back to him with a hollow, decaying echo. More puzzling, between the physical sensation of statement and the delayed return his voice was giving expression to ideas the likes of which he had never articulated, not even in his most ambiguous

of rhetorical situations. Words, ideas, phrases were jetting from some chaotic region deep within him and as he strove to regain control it was as though he had been taken over by some mocking ventriloquist orator of opposing views, a trickster of corny philosophical ambition.

“But ... but ... but ... now ... now ... now ...” he heard, “let us consider consider consider, the broader broader implication ... cations of of our our current state [...]” (*Juneteenth*, 14)

When not long after we learn of the Senator being “thrown into a state of dreamlike lucidity” (*Juneteenth*, 25), it becomes clear that we are on the terrain of neurological experience through which modernist experience has found a privileged figure for the crisis of identity as function of the de-structuration of language: this could be the dreamy state of Hughlings Jackson’s description of the onset of epileptoid attacks; or the fascination with aphasia or Ganser syndrome at the source of Surrealist language; it could, too, be Lucky’s inspired speech “from the heights of [...] divine aphasia” in *Waiting for Godot*. Such language is used to register the moment of liminal transition between the culturally given and acts of dissolution as the mark of the onset of another form of agency which may release or permit the accession of larger active patterns and structures. The consequent gaps in memory of the Senator speaking – for the mastery of language comes with a sedimented, racial memory³⁰ – prepare the way for the longer, extended passivity of unconsciousness and unwilled receptivity which permit, are the conditions for, the re-construction of another temporality in Bliss through the implantation of Hickman’s voice into the archaic strata of Bliss’s memory: in his passive states the fragments of memory implanted or evoked by Hickman begin to coalesce, to form chains of associations. For this to happen, the gunshot had to force Bliss away from all that was symbolized by the adopted senatorial framework, had to compel, that is, a *collapse of familiarity*, and it is from the reverie and free-floating attention attendant upon this collapse that emerges the language of radical separation and its association with *the form of the family*, and to this end it is not an accident that one of the final images that he should see before “He lay on his back looking up

30 As he falls, the senator’s speech recovers as object its most archaic accent, that of “the hysterical timbre of a Negro preacher.” Ellison, *Juneteenth*, 26.

through the turbulent space" (*Juneteenth*, 27) was that presenting the form of woman-as-multiple: "And up in the balcony now, an erupting of women's frantic forms" (*Juneteenth*, 25). In the experience of regression and radical passivity undergone, suffered by Bliss, everywhere there is middle-ness, separation, division, dismemberment: "the rending of veils, the grown women thrown into *trances*; screaming, tearing their clothing" (*Juneteenth*, 112, my emphasis) triggered by the *voice* of the boy-preacher, Bliss.

At its core it is an allegory of the inhabitation of the underworld of sounds, a story of listening: the postures of speaking and listening, the intimacies, pauses and silences of listening, drama stripped to its essential: a voice, an ear, the minimal distance of intimacy that allows the acoustic mirror the minimal distance required for action to be more than narcissistic, but without any guarantee of escape from the gravity of narcissism. The scene enacts another minimalism: of activity-passivity, speaker and listener, voicing and hearing, but in a situation where consciousness is not separate from unconsciousness, in which consciousness is made atypical – hence the role of the voice through which is articulated the *question of place* – and so not merely of one location: this permits the movement of the voice (as exteriority) to capture the acoustic traces and memories of another as a means of traversing history: each timbre of the voice heard, each vibration, each inflection, intonation and rhythm, each caesura, each lilt of the voice will bring with it a possible trajectory, a possible historicization of construction and *translation* from affect to word, from image to symbol as Bliss, in a condition of radical passivity, gradually allows himself to be opened to shifting and recovery and possible re-construction, as, from within shifting awareness and growing yet indeterminate attention,

The Senator [that is, Bliss] was first aware of the voice [of Hickman]; then the dry taste of fever filled his mouth and he had the odd sensation that he had been listening to a foreign language that he knew but had neglected, so that now it was necessary to concentrate upon each word in order to translate its meaning. The very effort seemed to reopen his wounds.³¹

31 Ellison, *Juneteenth*, 159. For a more detailed account of the re-organization of the self on the model of translation, see Chapters 1 and 2 on Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée*.

Translation is but a mode, a variant of the sound-world of which Bliss-Hickman are expressive possibilities, for “the voice was still moving around him [...] and now it was as though he had been listening all along, for Hickman did not pause, his voice flowed on with an urgency which compelled him to listen, to make the connections,”³² to provide, we might say, punctuation,³³ or, in the language of the Invisible Man, the “compulsion to put invisibility down in black and white,”³⁴ that is, notation for the music of being as ecstatic being, that is, being in time and out-of-time. The gathering of the acoustic traces and fragmentations working on the model of a world beyond substance and its fall, on the model, then, of a sound-world – a world of the sounding Word of “transcended flesh” (*Juneteenth*, 127) where all had been part of continuity, indeed, of what Hickman will characterize as *unkillable continuity* (*Juneteenth*, 166). For Hickman, this is what will need to be comprehended, this is the social sin par excellence of white folks, the fear or refusal of continuity: “What’s wrong with these folks, Bliss, is they can’t stand continuity” (*Juneteenth*, 162). But it is precisely this *unkillable continuity*, “the true kind that *binds* man to man and to Jesus and to God” (*Juneteenth*, 162, my emphasis) that will need to be killed, that is, paradise, the childhood of religion (*religio*, binding) from which expulsion – exile – is a necessary condition for self-consciousness, symbolization and even, in Hickman’s own terms, redemption. That is the paradox in whose drama Hickman is entailed along with Bliss who lives the death as sacrificial victim for it to be shown to be possible.

When Bliss is able to speak, accusingly, of the child-preacher being trapped amidst the world of grown women, “trapped [...] in the dead-center between flesh and spirit” (*Juneteenth*, 112), he is met with the response from Hickman: “You were born in that trap, Bliss, *just like every one was born in it.*” (*Juneteenth*, 112, my emphasis) To which Bliss replies: “Yes, but *I* couldn’t put the two things together. Not even when you explained about the Word.

32 Ellison, *Juneteenth*, 159.

33 Since the unconscious does not possess its own punctuation, punctuation being a function of secondary-process activity.

34 Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 11.

What could I do with such power?" (*Juneteenth*, 112, my emphasis) Here, then, we have the initial terms of the drama of knowledge of separation with Hickman in tones of wisdom asserting that middlelessness *is* the human fate, the unavoidable condition, whilst Bliss, the agent of a greater power than Hickman, asserts that the power of separation without knowledge of its means and origins is to be at best a medium, and thus that which brings separation into the world, where separation becomes a power unto itself, that is, both a capacity and an ability to give plastic force, manifestation to what comes from beyond one's will yet which is marked by incomprehension, which presents knowledge without acknowledgement such that power becomes an *alien presence* to the human medium through which it would be exercised: whence, "says Bliss, I was in the middle and I was bringing forth results which I could not understand" (*Juneteenth*, 113). Bliss' next sentence begins, but does not end: "And those women, their sweat ...".

What for Bliss is nothing less than a living death and resurrection, for Hickman, the preacher-performer, Bliss is only a part, a figure in a drama as a means of conveying a lesson on the need for suffering, surrender and dying in order for redemption to be possible. Where the young Bliss, "on the night that changed it all" (*Juneteenth*, 141), finds himself terrified of being placed in a *coffin* where, with his Teddy and Easter Bunny, he will be held in darkness breathing through a tube (*Juneteenth*, 143), Hickman will firmly correct the listening Senator, "No, Bliss, I mean 'box'; it ain't actually a coffin till it holds a dead man ..." (*Juneteenth*, 160). What for Hickman is a performance is for Bliss an affective encounter always in the register of horror and death (Cf. *Juneteenth*, 142) and a dereliction in the absence of light: "Always the blackness. Inside everything became blackness, even the Bible and Teddy, even his white suit" (*Juneteenth*, 143). The *night on which it all changed* is the night in which Bliss symbolically dies – not for the first time – is resurrected and, what is new to the performance, reclaimed by another (this time white) mother, and feels the first frequency of abandonment. What for Hickman is a figure of resurrection is at the same time for the young Bliss both an experience profoundly enigmatic and a form of *re-birth* in a way that even Hickman does not quite grasp as the event escapes him in terms of its speed as well as its phenomenology as so much of it occurs outside any sense of time in conditions of near

immobility. The trauma to which Bliss already feels subjected in the coffin moves from his innerness and the inside of the coffin to the surface of interacting bodies outside watching him and becomes, to him, even more bewildering and incomprehensible, finding himself become the object of physical and nominal contestation. Now lying open, exposed in the coffin, suddenly out of no-where there is a radical change in the sacral movement, pitch and timbre of his accustomed sound-world, a scream, yes, but more than a scream: “It was of a different timbre” (*Juneteenth*, 154) and there it is, a pitch of possession and naming:

He’s mine, MINE! That’s Cudworth, my child. My baby. You gipsy niggers stole him, my baby. You robbed him of his birthright. (*Juneteenth*, 155)

The entry of this woman, her performance, its suddenness, is a phenomenon so unknown, yet so weighted, for this community that Hickman and all the men in the church are frozen by it and the young Bliss intuits that they are scared as though the new scansion of sounding gives off a vibration, a frequency of fear. It is the church women – the sisters – who are first to break out of immobility and into directed action – to move near – and in doing so they are prepared for death (cf. *Juneteenth*, 156–157); and all the while Bliss is held near, tight by *the white woman* (*Juneteenth*, 159) as the sisters of the church, like Corybantes, attack the usurper of their sacred space who has outraged their mediator, and it is here that the language of dismemberment is most telling as it simultaneously figures incipient separation:

Their faces, wet with wrath, loomed before him, seeming to enter where his breath had been, their dark, widespread hands beginning to tear at his body like the claws of great cats with human heads; lifting him screaming clear of earth and coffin and suspending him there between the redheaded woman who now held his head and the others who had seized possession of his legs, arms, and body. And again he felt, but could not hear, his own throat’s Aaaaaaaaaayee! (*Juneteenth*, 159)³⁵

35 And it may be asked if Ellison’s dramaturgy of sound as a threshold phenomenon, a prepredicative form, is not close to Richard Wright’s use of sound as opening of *Native Son*.

The ensuing contest over the boy-preacher is described by Hickman: “Talking about God and the Devil fighting over a man’s soul, that situation must make a child’s heart a battleground.” (*Juneteenth*, 161) More telling is the way in which Hickman’s commentary – all the time being spoken into the recumbent Senator, at times in such a way that Hickman’s speech is regulatively indistinguishable from Bliss’ imagination of events – historicizes the contestation over the mimetic object that is Bliss in terms of the language of division and separation. This contestation, we learn from Bliss, is

[a] fight between her kind of woman and ours [which] goes way back to the beginning. Back, I guess, to when women found that the only way they could turn over the responsibility of raising a child to another woman was to turn over some of the child’s love and affection along with it. They been battling ever since. One trying to figure out how to get out of the work without dividing up the affection, and the other trying to hold on to all that weight of care and those cords of emotion and love for which they figure no wages can ever pay. (*Juneteenth*, 160)

From the incipient dismemberment Lysurgus-like of the boy Bliss, the commentary then identifies the role of affective identification between the stand-in mothering-figures and the problem of separation as it will affect these same mother-figures who will not be allowed, for reasons of class, for reasons of proprietorship, to hold onto the “c[h]ords of emotion and love for which they figure no wages can pay.” In other words, for these *our women*, there is a need for, a problem of, weaning every bit as much as there is for a child: “They have got to be weaned – our women, I mean, the nursemaids,” says Hickman to Bliss:

So there this poor woman comes moving out of her territory and bursting into theirs. Mad, Bliss, mad! That night all those years of aggravation was multiplied against her seven times seven. Because down there her kind always wins the contest in the end – for the child, I mean – with ours being doomed to lose from the beginning and knowing it. They have got to be weaned – our women, I mean, the nursemaids. (*Juneteenth*, 161)

It is in this context that Hickman introduces another form of separation, namely, puberty, as the moment where the brutal rejection of the mother-figures takes place by the child in its newly eroticized agency. For Hickman

this separation is nothing less than the great crime, that is, the *killing of continuity* and the introduction of social law into the realm of continuity:

But the first step in their growing up is to learn how to *spurn* love. *They have to deny it by law*, boy. [...] They put on a mask, boy, and life's turned plumb upside down.

Though for Hickman it seems clear that this world emergent from the separation with and the repression of the world of childhood is a denatured world, a cruel world that has refused the relation between childhood and the foundation of the world – “Tell me then where's the foundation of the world?” (*Juneteenth*, 162) and, “They cut the ties between the child and the foundation of his love” (*Juneteenth*, 163) – as though in the language of St Matthew (13,35) he speaks of things hidden since the foundation of the world, nevertheless, it is equally clear that the Symbolic order of this world is built upon the cutting of the links with childhood, a cutting, refusal and separation that once occurred recurs again and again, as a form of primal repression whose focus is simultaneously the child and the mother-figure once in mutual adoration, hence Hickman, developing the imagery of the cutting of the (symbolic umbilical) cord between childhood and nurturing:

Oh, sure, Bliss; you can cut that cord and zoom off like a balloon and rise high [...] but the cord don't shrivel and die like a navel cord beneath the first party dress or the first long suit of clothes. [...] it snarls up the mind. It won't die and there's no sun inside to set so it can stop its snakish wiggling. It bores reckless excursions between the brain and the heart and kills and kills again unkillable continuity. (*Juneteenth*, 166)

Not only is the killing and death repeated as the new founding act of another symbolization, it may also be said that we are witness to the sacrifice that founds this Symbolic order on the death of the child. This is shown in the way in which the figure of incipient proleptic dismemberment gives way, in being repeated, to something that is nothing less than a scene of midwifery, a new birth, albeit with phantastical midwives. I quote the scene *in extenso*:

And that white woman is holding on to you for dear life, Bliss; with her head snubbed back, way back, like a net full of red snappers and flounders being wound up on a ship's winch. And this big amazon of a woman [Sister Bearmasher], who could've

easily set horses with a Missouri mule, starts then to preaching her own sermon. Saying, 'If this Revern-Bliss-the-Preacher is her child then all the yellow bastards in the nation has got to be hers. So when, I say, so when's she going to testify to all that? You sisters let her go now; just let me have her. Y'all just take that child and y'all love that child. So I take that child out of this foolish woman's sacrilegious hands. TAKE HIM, I SAY! And if this be the time then this is the time. If it's the time to die, then I'm dead. If it's the time to bleed, then I'm bleeding – but take that child. 'Cause whatever time it is, this is one kind of foolishness that's got to be stopped before it gets any further under way!'

Well, sir, there you were, Bliss, with the white woman still got holt of you but with her head snubbed back now and her head bucking like a frightened mare's, screaming, 'He's mine, he's mine.' *Claiming* you, boy, claiming you right out of our hands. At least out of those women's hands. Because us men were petrified, thrown out of action by that white woman's nerve. And that big, strong Bearmasher woman threatening to snatch her scalp clean from her head. (*Juneteenth*, 168)

This is *the night on which it all changed* – the other night, then, when Bliss would be conceived as the Senator-to-come, and the past (here figured as the realm of continuity) would be disavowed, that is, simultaneously repressed, denied and maintained, hence still at work in negative, and hence, in this language, transcendent because still operant though without knowledge of its being-there. This is the primal scene of the death and birth of the child and the world – the symbolization – built upon it. The expulsion and exile from *Paradise up high* (*Juneteenth*, 156).

The night of this primal scene will be recovered, re-lived through the listening-speaking bond of Hickman and the Senator, and so both will re-live the conditions of separation of the *other night*: for Hickman, in the attempt if not to un-do or limit the hurt affections whose after-life continue to be felt, then at the least to *comprehend*, and it is here that one grasps the analogy, the symbolization of Hickman alongside Bliss-in-the-Senator, for the question of genre implicit in the work of the voice in Ellison's oeuvre, finds itself in most concentrated form here. The listening – for both Hickman and the Senator – would be therapeutic, would be theological, too, for there is always for Hickman a question of *seamless continuity*, his characterization of transcendence, but underlying it all is the tense and active relation between forgetfulness and fiction: how strong, what is the force

of, the Senator's repression of "Bliss"? Can it be so strong, so effective that Hickman's presence is not only required to permit him to hold on to life, but to (re)-implant memories into the unconscious of (the Senator? Bliss?) and thereby making of the relation a dramatization of dying, forgetfulness and the work of absence? Bliss *is* the death of the child, *again*, in its resistance to the thought of Hickman who must *now, this time*, live the death of Bliss since on the night it all changed he was frozen, immobile in fear and could not be said to have experienced the event, hence his struggle to comprehend. This condition has been, with characteristic simplicity, described by Blanchot in a commentary inspired by Leclaire's *On tue un enfant* (a child is being killed): "It's natural. Thought cannot accept what it carries in itself and which carries it, unless it forgets it."³⁶ What Blanchot characterizes as this prior death (*la mort antérieure*), a true death, is that through which resistance continues to be operant, to be effective, the resistance, that is, to thought, which then "naturally" authorizes fiction. Lacoue-Labarthe comments this moment, this transition in Blanchot and implicitly in Leclaire, as follows:

But one sees quite immediately what that means: fiction has no other origin – nor other function – than conceptual or therapeutic, philosophical or analytic work. In the same way, fiction draws upon, sublates, the negativity "at work." A same logic *organizes* literature, philosophy and psycho-analysis. This is *logic* itself.³⁷

Separations – possibly at certain moments, genres – are fictional strands of sensibility and affection born of the resistance to what is at work in thought, whence, then, logics of separation. Ellison's preferred form of this incarnation of logic itself is prose-poetry, the form taken in aesthetic modernity for the thinking of the work against genre, a work of separation and meditation on separation.³⁸ Always present in Ellison's thought

36 Maurice Blanchot, *L'Écriture du désastre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), 110.

37 Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "Agonie terminé, agonie interminable," in Christoph Bident and Pierre Vilar, eds, *Maurice Blanchot: Récits critiques* (Tours: Editions Farrago, Editions Léo Scheer, 2003), 445–446.

38 In a forthcoming review of Arnold Rampersad, *Ralph Ellison: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 2007), I develop what difference it makes to any understanding

– no less, it can be shown than in that of Césaire and Fanon, but also Du Bois and Cha – is the power of symbolization as protection against the indeterminate, whatever the medium of such indeterminacy – and this is seen in the essay on psychiatry in the black neighborhood called “Harlem is Nowhere,” but most powerfully so toward the close of *Invisible Man*: “And the mind that has conceived a plan of living *must never lose sight of the chaos against which that pattern was conceived.*”³⁹

Separation: *La transcendance finit/e dans la politique*

Such is the splendid orthography of Lacoue-Labarthe’s chapter on Martin Heidegger and the political in *L’imitations des modernes*. Throughout his thought Lacoue-Labarthe, with Jean-Luc Nancy, has consistently sought to work against any thinking that seeks to show the positive role of sacrifice in the founding of human culture (Freud) and the containment of violence (René Girard, following the anthropological aspects of Freud’s thought); likewise has Lacoue-Labarthe fought a related problem, namely transcendence. For Freud, sacrifice is an economy based upon a historically real event of murder which took place. In this he is followed by Girard. In the victimage hypothesis of Girard, sacrifice, driven by mimetic rivalry and desire, is an economy for the containment of guilt, a mechanism of sublimation, a mechanism, too, of disavowal, since something must be acknowledged without it being known, namely, that something or someone has been the victim for the resolution of otherwise contagious acts of mimetic rivalry. For Lacoue-Labarthe this is the phenomenon to be explained along with the language of transcendence as the vehicle for sacrifice. His title reads

of Ellison’s failure to produce the second novel if these questions are raised rather than the banal and somewhat vulgar questions of “firsterism” as it has been called – vulgar because inextricably marked by *ressentiment*.

39 Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 438. My emphasis.

simultaneously: *finite transcendence in politics*, and *transcendence finishes (ends) in politics*. For the thought of Lacoue-Labarthe this entails that the violence inherent to transcendence founds a politics of violence, makes of politics the sphere of violence. Thus he sees in Heidegger's fundamental ontology, that is, the recovery of the meaning of the question of being, not the destruction of metaphysics – as Heidegger would claim – but the restoration of the basic gesture of metaphysics in terms of which “The structure of transcendence is the very structure of mimesis, of the relation between physis and techne, retaken and reinterpreted from Aristotle and Kant.”⁴⁰

In this he shares common ground with Arendt, defending a classical position: the space of politics is not a space of the sacred, cannot co-exist with anything resembling transcendence, is indeed, incompatible with any form of transcendence. Arendt asserted this on many occasions – for example in a strong critique of the work of Jules Monnerot⁴¹ – as part of her refusal to accept any relationship between the political and the religious or the sacred, and her biographer, Elisabeth Young-Breuhl, at a conference in Paris on the work of Arendt, re-asserted this as an idea necessary to a post – 9/11 worldview. It would be all too easy to show in the terms of Arendt, Lacoue-Labarthe or Derrida that transcendence understood in this sense belongs to the structure of much that is anti-political in modern thought as a movement toward totalitarian forms. Even in work that is meant to subvert the totalitarian impulse such as we find in Sartre's *Critique de la raison dialectique* and Fanon's deployment of categories from Sartre's *Critique* can be shown to partake of the problematic of transcendence as mimesis, can be seen not to be exempt from the problem of mimetic contagion. In both Sartre and Fanon this is made especially clear in the development of the conception of groups in fusion around a common object become praxis in which there is a form of transference with the relation of the third,

40 Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, “La transcendance finit/e dans la politique,” *Limitations des modernes: Typographies (II)* (Paris: Galilee, 1986), 171.

41 Cf. Hannah Arendt, “Religion and Politics” (1953), in *Essays in Understanding, 1930–1954* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), 368–390; for Monnerot's reply cf. *Confluence*, vol. II, no. 3 (1953).

namely, the object, constructed in and through the activity of the group, what Sartre terms mediated reciprocity, whence Sartre: “What counts for us is therefore the relation of *the group action upon itself* with *the action of its members upon the object*. (*Critique*, 462)

Though Sartre is explicit in his rejection of the language of transcendence in the manner of Jaspers (cf. *Critique*, 21–22), it is all too evident that the group in fusion simply recovers the phenomenon of limit-situation described by Jaspers but without the role of inherent and radical discontinuity, pluralism and powerlessness which Sartre himself realizes is built into Jaspers’ phenomenological description. In one of the earliest and still most important reviews of Jaspers’ *Philosophie*,⁴² Gabriel Marcel on “Situation fondamentale et situations limites chez Karl Jaspers” used a stunning image to capture the kind of philosophy that was Jaspers, describing it as dealing with “an orogenesis of the interior life.”⁴³ In the philosophy of Jaspers, says Marcel, which is a philosophy of transcendence, “Quest, interrogation, *Frage* [question], *Fragwürdigkeit* [questionableness, doubtfulness], such are the words which without cease impose themselves upon us; it is that throughout we are in the presence of ruptures, of breaks which in a manner chip away at the supposed integrity of being.”⁴⁴ For being as *Dasein* cannot ever be marked by integrity: “In a world which is not capable of providing a representation which is simultaneously integral and true, but which is rather a world that appears all the more torn (*zerrissen*) [déchire] as it is seen in a more truthful manner, possible existence becomes realized by liberty struggling against resistances. The word rent [déchirure] is here characteristic. Elsewhere (volume II), Jaspers will say that existence, although assured by itself, finds itself as a temporal being in a state of being broken (*in einer Zerbrochenheit*) as if it has been preceded by a reality perfect but subsequently lost that would be sought after without ever being able to attain it.”⁴⁵

42 Karl Jaspers, *Philosophie*, 3 vols (Berlin: Springer, 1932).

43 Gabriel Marcel, “Situation fondamentale et situations limites chez Karl Jaspers,” *Recherches philosophiques*, vol. II (1932–1933), 317.

44 Marcel, “Situation fondamentale et situations limites chez Karl Jaspers,” 344.

45 Marcel, “Situation fondamentale et situations limites chez Karl Jaspers,” 347.

Transcendence in this mode of thought is the anthropological condition based upon the paradox of a (possibly sustaining) relation with that which is separated; being as temporal finds itself necessarily fractured, torn and broken which not only entails the impossibility of an integral representation of being or *Da-sein* – that is in part the sense of being thrown into the world – but also finds itself in a state of separation such that it is necessarily and unavoidably part of an awareness of being separated without it being articulable what it is from which separation is experienced, whence the language of nostalgia whether conceived in psycho-analytic, philosophical, theological or mystical terms. Transcendence, then, *is* the self-experience of expulsion called exile. Transcendence, thus, is not something that needs be conceived as displaced immanence, rather, transcendence is a function of exteriority, is that which puts the subject in question – whence the role of psychosis in phenomenological models of madness: the voices which come always from outside – or, in the interpretation of transcendence developed by Levinas (in part through Wahl), transcendence is that which, in its pure exteriority, puts philosophy in question, which is to say the experience of thinking, whence, since Descartes, the internal relation between philosophy and madness, or thought and exteriority.⁴⁶ One may go so far as to say that transcendence is a set of necessarily paradoxical linguistic and phenomenological processes which entail expulsion, separation *and the recovery of the condition of expulsion and separation* which is to say, the recovery of the condition of natality in which is *symbolized* the brokenness of time for the human subject,⁴⁷ that our awareness of separation is but an acknowledgement of our condition as beings begun in middlelessness.⁴⁸

46 Cf. Emmanuel Levinas, “Philosophie et transcendance,” in *Alterité et transcendance* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1995), 27–56.

47 Here, to be clear, it is to be understood that the study of Cha’s *Dictée*, for example, comes, finally, under the figure of natality, that this is the significance of the simple, limpid, “Pick me up, mom” that arrives toward the end of the journey and separations of *Dictée*; likewise, can Fanon’s politics be understood as an attempt to recover natality – look at all the imagery of birth and birthing and new skin prevalent in the work from beginning to end. Where, though, Cha’s working-through is therapeutic, Fanon’s remains ambivalent right to the end, caught by an aggressivity that it could not modulate even as it saw the sociogenetic cause of it.

48 Cf. Gillian Rose, “From the Middle in the Beginning,” Part I of *The Broken Middle* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992).

If politics are to be understood as concerned with the city, it will not be possible to avoid transcendence: as with infinity, there will be bad politics or good politics, but there could not be any politics available that is only of the good, since it is not conceivable that a being of finitude could expulse from itself what is inherent to its possibility of being. Shadowing the political with the fragile condition of natality would become a figure of the political as necessary middleness, as that from which no absolute separation is possible or conceivable – like the death of the child that must be relived, re-enacted for there to be symbolization, the political will require, too, the constant negotiation, the constant work of that which would be refused, of that which would remain repressed and so unspoken, ineffable. This is so because of language as the first exteriority, no less than because of symbolization as a process predicated upon a necessary and unrecuperable absence. This is not a mysticism of the ineffable but the function of negativity as developed, for example, in the late Gillian Rose's thinking of an anxiety of equivocation and middleness. Alphonse de Waelhens, phenomenologist and psychopathologist, had earlier expressed the Hegelian basis of this inescapable condition:

it is not thus a discourse which can tell me the whole [le tout], and even the whole cannot – still – be *said*. It is necessary, then, that feeling [sentiment] – as a view of totality – be substituted (the Hegelian will say provisionally) for discourse in order to reveal this totality. And as this totality is negativity, the feeling which will reveal it will be the feeling of negativity, that is to say, anguish. *Which amounts to saying, quite simply, that man is an anguished being because he is being which speaks.*⁴⁹

Does transcendence finish in politics? Yes, it does, but it also depends upon what form of transcendence. Can politics avoid transcendence? No, it cannot, but it will also depend upon the conception of the political at work. (Will we therefore abolish politics? The political version of this question was once that of the one-party state; today, it is the reduction of politics to bureaucracy.) On Rose's terms, the anxiety of middleness, the experience of the necessarily broken middle, what she terms, following Hegel, *diremption*, is the basis for a set of determining relations whose role

49 Alphonse de Waelhens, "Notes sur l'angoisse," *Existence et signification* (Louvain and Paris: Nauwelaerts, 1958), 175–176.

is to permit the *configuration* of the condition of this very middle from which no absolute separation is possible.⁵⁰ Much in this set of studies is concerned with the ways in which this configuration takes place, a process at once formal, rhetorical, ethical and political.

We may no longer be able to say with the ease of the late Nathan A. Scott, that the deprivation of the Transcendent in modern literature “may itself bring us into fresh proximity to its Mystery,”⁵¹ for the evidence would seem overwhelming that the increasing absence of the language of transcendence will on its own achieve what no amount of “deconstruction” could achieve – and let us credit deconstruction as a deeply historical sensibility in the history of European thought – namely, the fading into irrelevancy of the terms of such language. The language of transcendence is, though, once more a part of academic concerns, probably for the first time since the death-of-God theology and its companion in post-Holocaust theology.⁵² What this book proposes, however, is not a demonstration but an exploration – a work of interpretation – of the inescapability of the language of transcendence as example of a guiding idea, an idea to be found in Hegel, in modern linguistics (Chomskyan and otherwise), and in modernist art and avant-garde thought begun with the Young Hegelians after the failure of the various revolutions of 1848 in Europe.

50 Cf. Hegel, “In Being (determinate there and then), the determinateness is one with Being; yet at the same time, when explicitly made a negation, it is a *Limit*, a Barrier. Hence the otherness is not something indifferent and outside it, but a function proper to it.” *The Logic of Hegel*, trans. from *The Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* by William Wallace (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1892; rpt. 1931), 172.

51 Nathan A. Scott, “Poetry and Prayer,” in *Negative Capability: Studies in the New Literature and the Religious Situation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969), III.

52 Cf. Richard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966) and Herbert W. Richardson and Donald R. Cutler, eds, *Transcendence* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1969) containing Emil Fackenheim, “Transcendence in Contemporary Culture: Philosophical Reflections and Jewish Theology”; and, more recently, Regina Schwartz, ed., *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology Approach the Beyond* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004).

Hegel introduces into the philosophy of modernity as experience the following aesthetic, namely, that thought as spirit is thought which recovers itself, turns back upon its path to be aware of its movement and development. Expressed in terms of his philosophy of religion: "In its concept, religion is the relation of the subject, of the subjective consciousness to God who is spirit. In its concept regarded speculatively, it is therefore spirit conscious of its own essence, conscious of its own self" (Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*). The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is the book which dramatizes the necessity of this reflexive activity of consciousness and *aisthesis* as the activity of thought. Modern linguistics – which here does not mean the partial use of Saussure's lectures – has developed a form of this thought as recursivity, namely, the ability of language-use to refer to itself as a precondition for higher-order thought, abstraction, temporality and, crucially, markers of identification. Such recursivity is a precondition of symbolization which is nothing less than *thinking in absence*. An ontologically rich language, then, would not only be the result of recursivity, but certain kinds of complex thought – of oneness, unity, zero, the whole range of mathematical fictions from the square root of -1 to possible universes – may be no more than projective possibilities of the recursive properties of language such that the richness of the properties makes possible conception and discovery, or conception and possibility without independent means of verification since the entities are not "real" in any empirical sense – though consequences of their assumption there are – they are entities of imagination. It requires an exceptionally rich language for there to be talk of God, transcendence, modal logic, possible universes, but it may be impossible to say whether such entities are only a function of the language mesh available or whether it is the rich language which makes possible the discovery of such processes and entities. The claim of this book is simply that modern art and poetry – aesthetic modernity – is such that having since the Enlightenment lost the sustainable belief in a transcendent God or transcendent realm – even without a God – the language of transcendence has nevertheless at all points re-asserted itself for transcendence is an effect of processes of separation inherent to language and mind where separation leaves a broken architecture of traces which assume an autonomy relative to the self in subjection. Separation effects difference.